

Blue-headed Vireo

Vireo solitarius



The former “Solitary Vireo” is now considered to represent three species: the Blue-headed, Cassin’s, and Plumbeous vireos. The latter two are western birds, however, and are unlikely to be encountered in the Northeast. The Blue-headed Vireo is the only member of the genus that makes extensive use of our coniferous forests. Its breeding range is predominantly Canadian, extending from Saskatchewan to Nova Scotia. In the United States, it breeds around the Great Lakes eastward through New England and southward along the Appalachian Mountains to Georgia (James 1998).

The Blue-headed Vireo is the hardiest member of our vireos by far, arriving in late April and lingering until mid-October. They establish large territories, often along mountain ravines where eastern hemlock is plentiful. Their habitat niche is wide, however, ranging from moist hardwood forests and northern boreal forests to homogeneous spruce plantations. Nests are placed in coniferous saplings or near the top center of shrubs (James 1998). Nest building was observed from 9 May to 9 July, accounting for 31 percent of the confirmations. Nests with eggs, observed 24 May to 29 July, or young, observed 4 June through 18 July, made up 22 percent of the confirmations. Young remain dependent on adults after fledging for up to a month (James 1998) and fledglings, reported from 31 May to 3 August, were the most common confirmation code, accounting for about 46 percent of the records. Second broods are rare at Vermont’s latitude, but renesting after failure is common and probably results in the wide range of egg and fledgling dates.

The Blue-headed Vireo is found throughout Vermont, occurring in more than 82 percent of priority blocks, but is substantially more common at higher elevations outside the Champlain Valley and in the northeastern section of the state. Although parts of the Champlain Valley still support relatively fewer Blue-headed Vireos, this region showed the greatest percentage increase in occurrence since the first atlas.

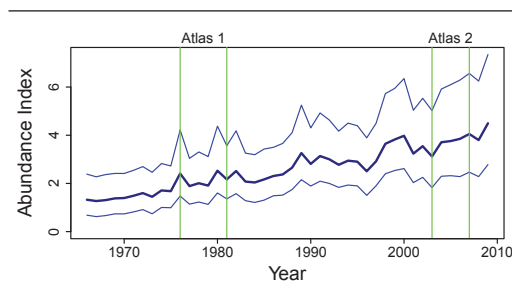
An increase of 10 percent in occurrence statewide was documented during the second atlas. Prior to the first

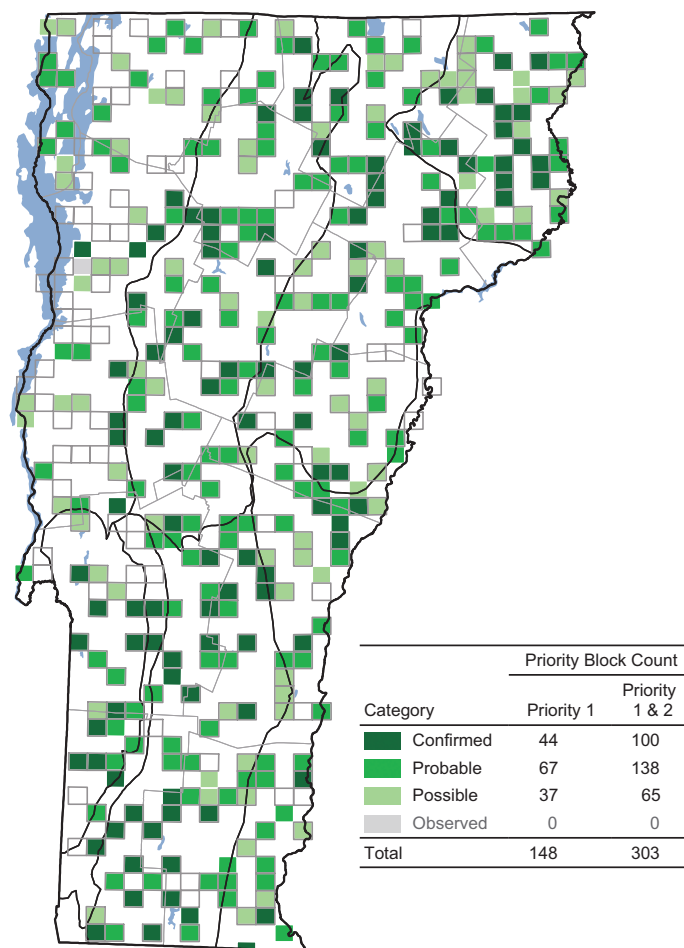
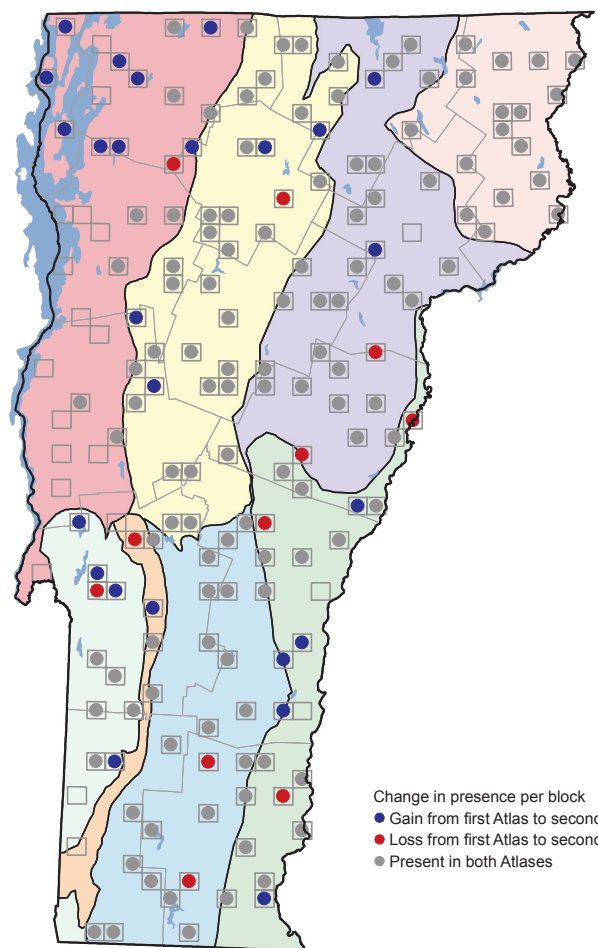
atlas, the nesting status of the Blue-headed Vireo was considered uncertain (Spear 1976). Despite the overall increase, the Blue-headed Vireo was missed in 8 percent of the blocks where it had previously been recorded—blocks that continue to have suitable habitat for the species.

New York’s second atlas found an increase of 39 percent in the occurrence rate of the Blue-headed Vireo (McGowan and Corwin 2008), while in Pennsylvania the increase was 59 percent (Wilson et al. 2012). The second Ontario atlas showed an 85 percent increase in the species since the first atlas (Cadman et al. 2007). Only in areas dominated by agriculture, where the Blue-headed Vireo is less abundant, was the population relatively static. Range-wide, Blue-headed Vireo abundance has steadily and significantly increased by 3.5 percent annually from 1982 to 2007 (Sauer et al. 2011).

Maturation of early successional forestland, particularly in formerly agricultural areas of the Champlain Valley, probably has contributed to the species’ success. The volume of balsam fir, white pine, and hemlock in Vermont increased more than 30 percent from 1983 to 1997 (Wildmann 2001). Vermont’s forests provide quality habitat for the Blue-headed Vireo, and the species is in no

RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	10	18	+ 8	+ 80
Northeastern Highlands	17	17	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	31	34	+ 3	+ 10
Northern Vermont Piedmont	27	27	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	26	25	- 1	- 4
Southern Vermont Piedmont	15	16	+ 1	+ 7
Taconic Mountains	6	9	+ 3	+ 50
Vermont Valley	2	2	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	134	148	+ 14	+ 10

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	52	13
Northeastern Highlands	100	12
Northern Green Mountains	95	20
Northern Vermont Piedmont	90	19
Southern Green Mountains	92	17
Southern Vermont Piedmont	82	11
Taconic Mountains	85	6
Vermont Valley	50	1

danger of undergoing a decline in abundance. Further expansion into the Champlain Valley may occur if forested land continues to replace agricultural land.

DOUGLAS P. KIBBE