

Ovenbird

Seiurus aurocapilla

Named for its domed, well-camouflaged nest, which is shaped like an old-fashioned oven, the Ovenbird is immortalized in the work of New England's most famous poet, Robert Frost. This warbler ranges across the continent from Newfoundland to northern British Columbia, southward to South Carolina and Georgia and westward to Colorado. Although Vermont lies near the center of the bird's range in the Northeast, the species' center of abundance is in the western Great Lakes states (Sauer et al. 2008). Ovenbirds winter from Florida southward through the Caribbean and return to Vermont in early May (Ellison 1985).

The Ovenbird prefers large tracts (greater than 100 hectares [247 acres]) of mature deciduous or mixed deciduous forest with a relatively closed canopy (60 to 90 percent) and an open understory. Although smaller patches of forest in fragmented landscapes may be occupied, productivity is lower in smaller forest blocks (Van Horn and Donovan 1994). Ovenbirds are also found in the pole-size hardwood forests that grow when old fields are left uncut. The Ovenbird is a ground nester, and is commonly encountered defending a nearby nest or brood. During the Vermont atlas, females were observed nest building from 19 May to 30 June (N = 11). Because Ovenbirds are single-brooded (Van Horn and Donovan 1994), late dates probably represent renesting. Although most warblers lay 4 eggs, clutches of 5 eggs are typical in this species. Despite their concealed nature, 21 nests were found between 20 May and 15 July, 8 of which contained nestlings. The young usually leave the nest 8 days after hatching, before they are capable of sustained flight. Fledglings remain dependent on adults for up to a month (Van Horn and Donovan 1994) and comprised 71 percent of CO records.

The Ovenbird is found throughout Vermont, though it is slightly less common in the Champlain Valley, where agricultural fields dominate much of the landscape. Even there, however, most woodlots support the species. There has been little change in the statewide status of the Ovenbird since the first atlas, when the species was found in 98 percent of survey blocks. During the second atlas,

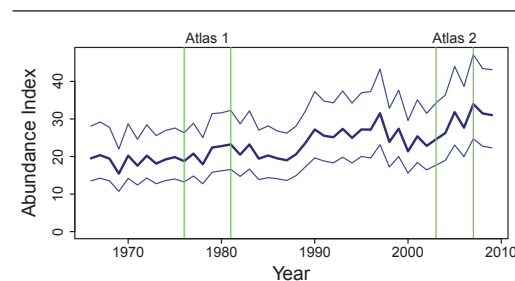


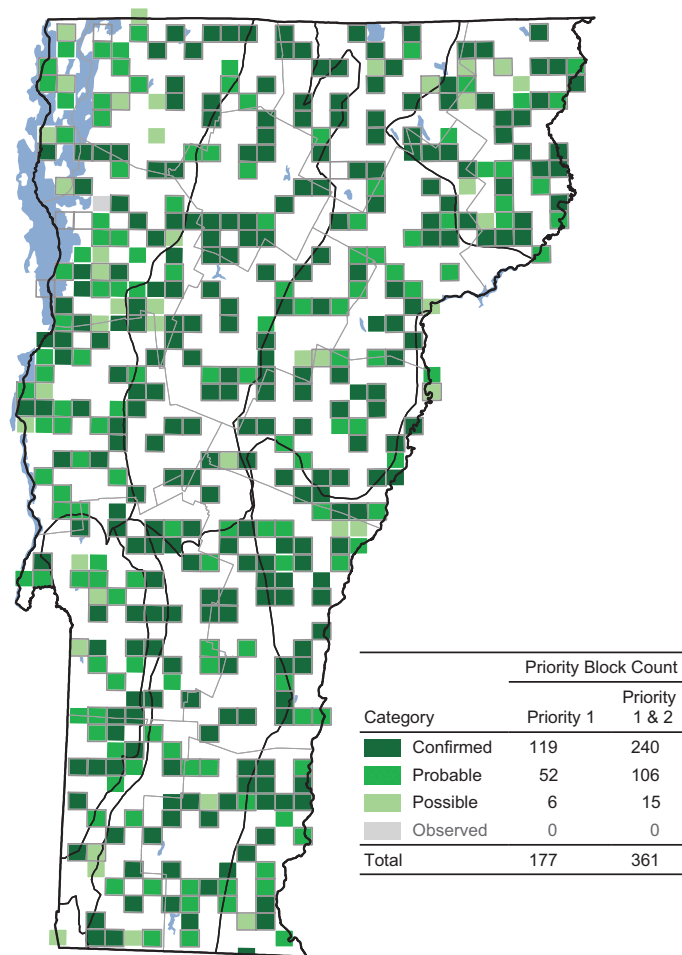
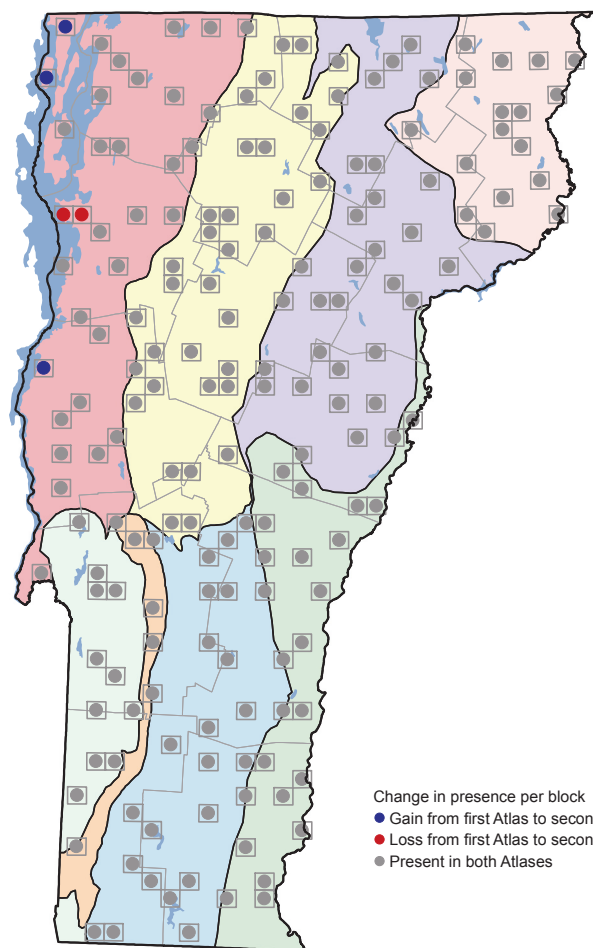
Ovenbirds were reported in 99 percent of priority blocks. Records came from 2 new blocks in Grand Isle, twenty-five years after Ellison (1985) remarked on the bird's absence there because of the broad expanse of open land; forests have likely reclaimed some former farmlands in the Champlain Islands. Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a significant annual increase of 1.9 percent from 1982 to 2007 for the Ovenbird in Vermont (Sauer et al. 2011).

Second atlases in New York and Pennsylvania documented increases in block occupancy of 9 and 14 percent, respectively (McGowan and Corwin 2008, Wilson et al. 2012). Ontario's second atlas found a 22 percent decrease in the southern portion of the province, where forest fragmentation has been most pronounced (Burke 2007). Breeding Bird Survey data indicate that populations have been stable regionally and range-wide (Sauer et al. 2011).

The Ovenbird population in Vermont appears secure for the foreseeable future. The species is distributed throughout the state and the mature forestland it prefers is still increasing. Large contiguous forest patches, or smaller patches within landscapes that are at least one-

RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	30	31	+ 1	+ 3
Northeastern Highlands	17	17	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	35	35	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	30	30	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	27	27	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	21	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	176	177	+ 1	+ 1

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	95	19
Northeastern Highlands	100	10
Northern Green Mountains	100	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	98	18
Southern Green Mountains	100	16
Southern Vermont Piedmont	100	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	100	2

third forested, provide suitable habitat for maintaining viable local populations, although there are numerous potential threats, such as habitat loss, on their wintering grounds (Van Horn and Donovan 1994, Faaborg et al. 2010).

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