

Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Archilochus colubris



The smallest bird breeding in eastern North America, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird commands center stage as one of Vermont's most popular and most entertaining summer residents. The male's looping courtship flight and its iridescent gorget or bib is among the most breathtaking displays of spring. Increasing popularity of hummingbird feeders has afforded rural and suburban residents frequent close encounters with this woodland sprite. The only hummingbird to breed in eastern North America, the ruby-throat is a bird of the deciduous forest, ranging throughout the eastern half of the United States and southern Canada, westward to central Alberta and eastern North Dakota, wherever broadleaf trees predominate (Robinson et al. 1996).

Many Ruby-throated Hummingbirds migrate 500 miles nonstop over the Gulf of Mexico, to and from their wintering grounds in Central America. Prior to migration they double their weight to 6 or 7 grams (Robinson et al. 1996). Males migrate 7 to 10 days before the females, and start to arrive in Vermont in mid-April (Murin and Pfeiffer 2002). In Vermont, the ruby-throated nests in mixed and deciduous forests, orchards, suburban gardens, and along the edges of clearings. The hummingbird builds a tiny stub-like nest of plant down interwoven with spider webbing, with lichen adorning the outside. Nests are saddled to a branch of a deciduous tree and are difficult to find. Two were reported during the atlas: one with eggs on 31 July, the other with young on 7 July. The Ruby-throated Hummingbird may raise two broods in a season, which has yielded a wide range of fledgling dates. During the atlas, young birds were reported from 2 July to 23 August (N = 37), representing more than 81 percent of the CO records. Despite their size, hummingbirds are aggressive and maintain watch over their territory from elevated perches, which makes them relatively easy to spot. Territorial behavior is the most frequently used breeding criterion for this species.

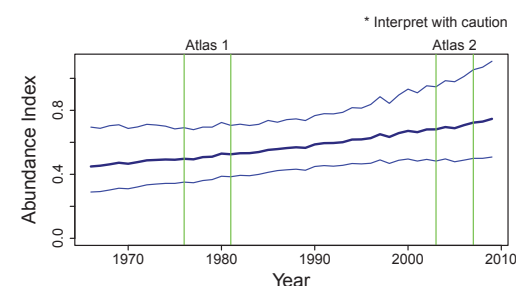
Ruby-throated Hummingbirds nest throughout Vermont, even in areas where coniferous forests predom-

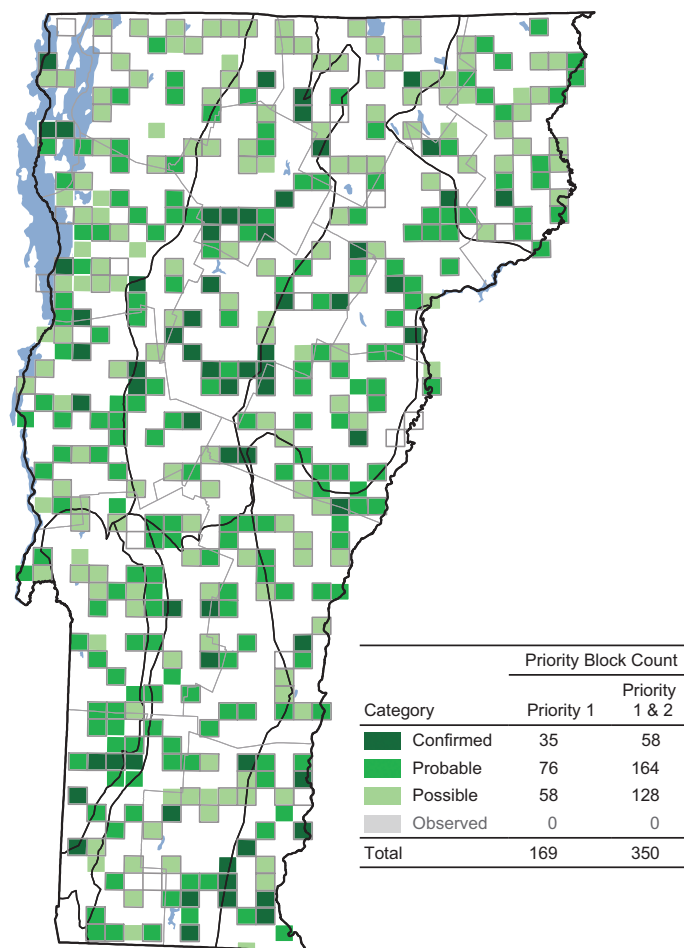
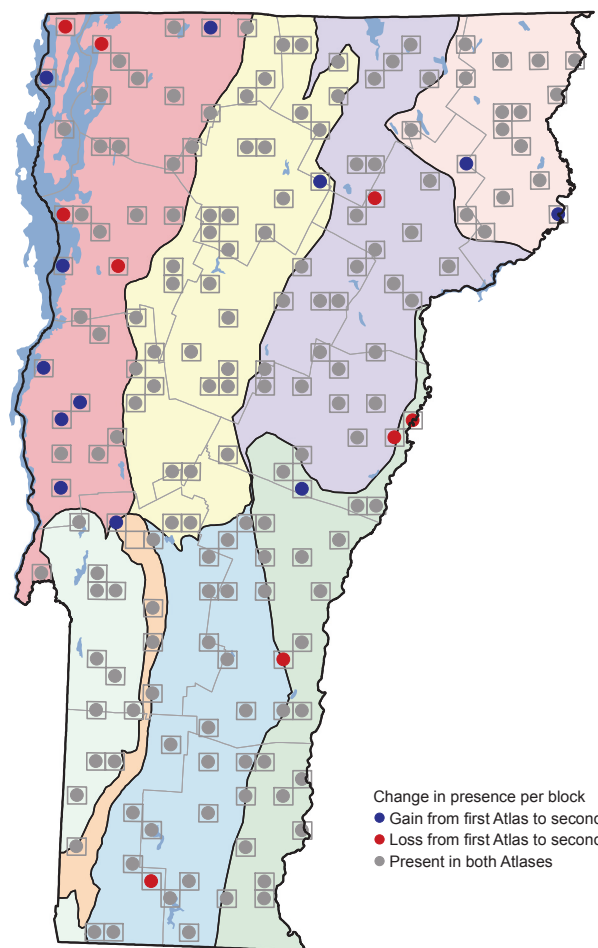
inate. Early migrants depend on sap wells drilled by Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers to supplement their diet until spring flowers unfurl (D. Kibbe pers. obs., Robinson et al. 1996). The hummingbird guards a sapsucker's wells from other birds, particularly other hummingbirds. Insects attracted to the sap flow also are eaten. Sap is, in fact, a source of energy for incubating females (Robinson et al. 1996). When tubular flowers bloom, hummingbirds become important pollinators.

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird was reported in 96 percent of all survey blocks, increasing by 2 percent statewide since the first atlas survey. Atlases and Breeding Bird Survey abundance data both suggest population increases in the region. The eastern BBS region showed a significant annual increase of 2.2 percent for this period (Sauer et al. 2011). In New York, block occupancy of Ruby-throated Hummingbird increased by 21 percent during the second atlas (McGowan and Corwin 2008) and in Pennsylvania by 11 percent (Wilson et al. 2012). The second Ontario atlas also documented an increase of approximately 20 percent across the province (Cadman et al. 2007).

The popularity of hummingbird feeders and the planting of hummingbird gardens, coupled with the continued growth of Vermont's woodlands, bodes well for the

RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	26	29	+ 3	+ 12
Northeastern Highlands	15	17	+ 2	+ 13
Northern Green Mountains	34	35	+ 1	+ 3
Northern Vermont Piedmont	30	28	- 2	- 7
Southern Green Mountains	27	26	- 1	- 4
Southern Vermont Piedmont	20	19	- 1	- 5
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	3	4	+ 1	+ 33
Totals	166	169	+ 3	+ 2

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	93	19
Northeastern Highlands	97	10
Northern Green Mountains	98	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	95	18
Southern Green Mountains	98	16
Southern Vermont Piedmont	92	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	87	2

Ruby-throated Hummingbird's future in the state. A less direct means to support hummingbirds is to purchase coffee discerningly; on their wintering grounds in Central America, shade-grown coffee plantations support higher numbers of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds than sun coffee plantations (Greenberg et al. 1997).

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