

American Redstart

Setophaga ruticilla

Loud and persistent singers, American Redstarts make themselves all the more conspicuous with their fly-catching habits. Individuals frequently “flash” their wing and tail spots, a behavior believed to flush prey from hiding (Sherry and Holmes 1997). This warbler has an extensive breeding range that stretches from Newfoundland to southern Mississippi and Alabama in the East, and northwest across much of Canada to southeastern Alaska (Sherry and Holmes 1997). The American Redstart winters on Caribbean islands, and from southern Mexico to northern South America, where males tend to occupy higher-quality lowland forest, while females and young occur in drier shrub habitat (Ornat and Greenberg 1990, Sherry and Holmes 1996).

Throughout its breeding range, the American Redstart is found in bottomland hardwoods, secondary forest, deciduous forest openings, woodland edges, orchards, and alder swamps. Mature stands are avoided, and although coniferous forest is not completely avoided, males found in that habitat are more likely to be young, inexperienced breeders (Ficken and Ficken 1967). Redstarts return to Vermont breeding grounds in early May, with adult males arriving first (Ficken and Ficken 1967, Francis and Cooke 1986). Nests are constructed by the female and are located in the subcanopy. The average height for 640 redstart nests in New Hampshire was over 8 meters (26 feet) with a range from 1 to 28 meters (3 to 90 feet; Sherry and Holmes 1997). Renesting females may utilize nests constructed by other species (Yezerinac 1993). Atlasers noted nest building from 19 May to 28 June ($N = 21$), but more than 50 percent of the activity occurred during the first week of June. Nests with eggs were recorded 25 May to 2 July ($N = 10$). Males may establish a new territory and/or take another mate once the female starts incubating, which takes 11 to 12 days (Sherry and Holmes 1997). Nestlings are fed by both parents for the 9 days they remain in the nest, and for up to 21 days after fledging. Nestling dates for Vermont ($N = 9$) occurred from 4 June to 9 July. Dependent fledglings ($N = 84$) were noted from 10 June to 4 August. Threats to the nest or dependent fledglings may

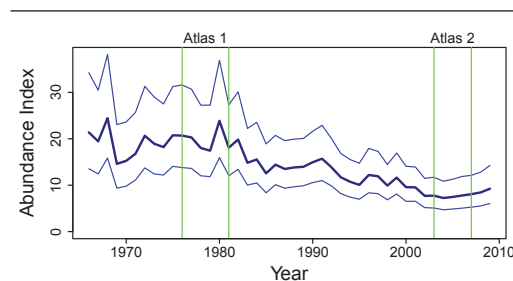


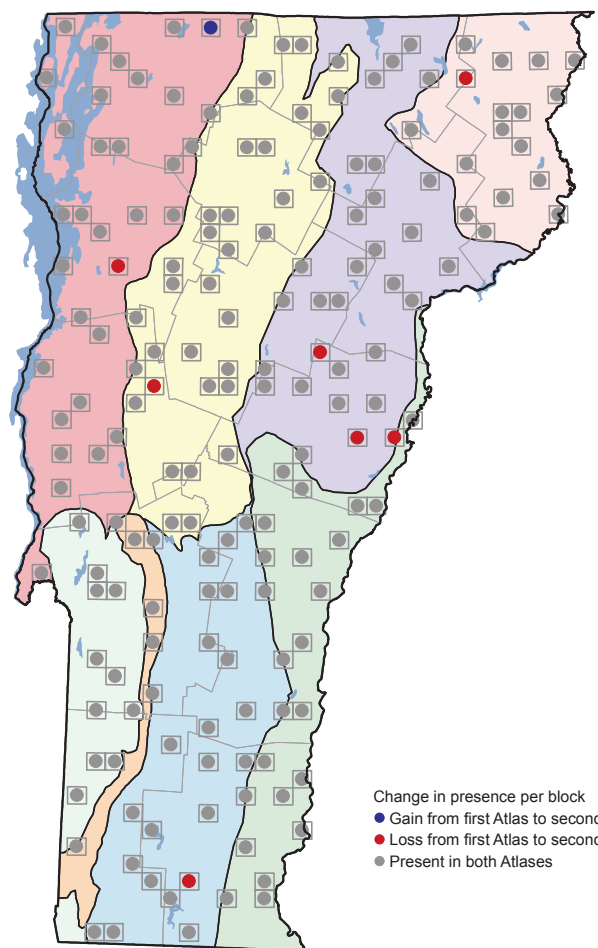
elicit distraction displays (Ficken 1962). Redstarts are aggressive defenders of their breeding territories, and may extend their hostility to flycatchers, other warblers, and even the occasional Eastern Screech-Owl or Northern Saw-whet Owl (Sherry and Holmes 1997).

American Redstart distribution in Vermont changed little between atlases. Ellison (1985) considered the species one of Vermont's most common warblers; the first atlas documented it in 99 percent of Priority 1 blocks. The second atlas revealed the species in at least 92 percent of Priority 1 blocks in most biophysical regions, with only the Vermont Valley and the Northern Vermont Piedmont falling slightly below 90 percent.

Breeding Bird Survey data, however, indicate a significant 3.3 percent annual decline in Vermont from 1982 to 2007 (Sauer et al. 2011). During the same period, declines have been significant in New Hampshire, Maine, and New York (3.2, 4.4, and 1.9 percent per year, respectively). Forest Bird Monitoring Program data show a non-significant annual 7.1 percent decline from 1989 to 2006.

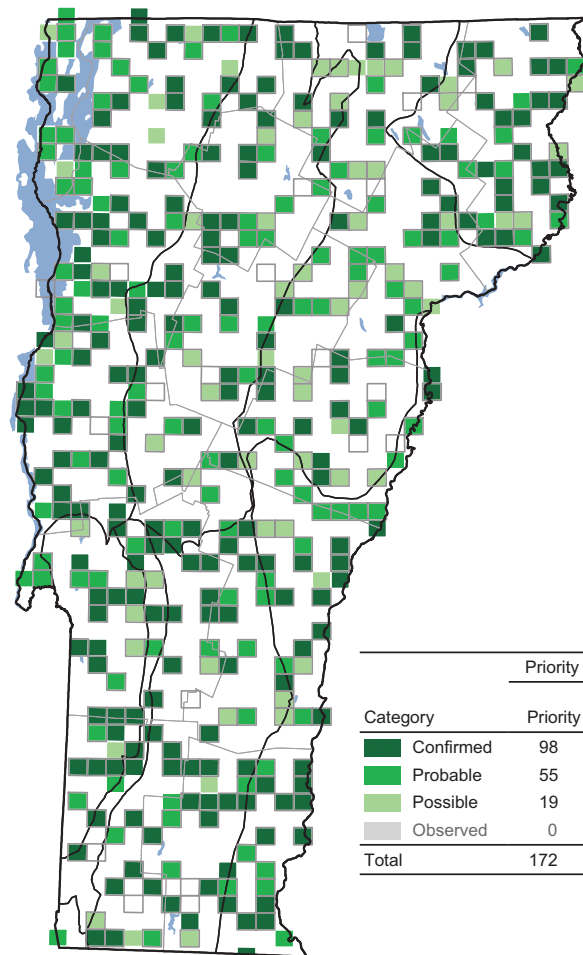
RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	32	32	+ 0	+ 0
Northeastern Highlands	17	16	- 1	- 6
Northern Green Mountains	35	34	- 1	- 3
Northern Vermont Piedmont	30	27	- 3	- 10
Southern Green Mountains	27	26	- 1	- 4
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	21	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	178	172	- 6	- 3



Category	Priority Block Count	
	Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	98	192
Probable	55	106
Possible	19	48
Observed	0	0
Total	172	346

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	97	21
Northeastern Highlands	97	10
Northern Green Mountains	93	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	89	17
Southern Green Mountains	92	15
Southern Vermont Piedmont	100	12
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	87	2

New York's second atlas (McGowan and Corwin 2008) found a slight increase in the number of blocks occupied by American Redstart, and the Pennsylvania atlas documented a 24 percent increase (Wilson et al. 2012).

Declines in species abundance in northern New England are at least in part due to a loss of early successional habitat (Hunt 1998). Forest harvesting that perpetuates early successional habitat is compatible with this species' breeding habitat needs. In addition, loss of quality wintering habitat has been suggested as a possible contributor to population declines, and effects from climate change,

particularly drought in the Caribbean Basin, represent a potential threat to the species (Sherry and Holmes 1997). Barring dramatic changes in land use or land cover, the American Redstart will likely remain one of Vermont's more common warblers.

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