

Barred Owl

Strix varia

As in the first Vermont atlas, the Barred Owl remains the most common owl in the state. Although its numbers doubtless rose and fell with the decline and recovery of forestland during the past two centuries, the species appears to be both durable and adaptable. This dark-eyed, vocal owl is known as the “eight-hooter,” and its distinctive *who-cooks-for-you, who-cooks-for-you-all* echoes through Vermont’s woodlands and swamps. The male’s voice is deeper, despite his smaller size; Barred Owls often duet during their nighttime hunts and frequently call during the day. Both sexes have a variety of strange calls, grunts, and yowls, topped only by the piercing *wreeeeep* of the hungry young.

Considered a sedentary species, the Barred Owl is a widespread year-round resident of the woodlands of eastern North America. In the last century it expanded its range north and west through the boreal forests of Canada to southeast Alaska and southward to northern California (Mazur and James 2000). In North America, none of 158 band recoveries occurred more than 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) from the point of banding (Johnson 1987), although a Barred Owl banded in Woodstock was recovered five years later approximately 40 kilometers (25 miles) away.

In the East, the species resides year round in forests, woodlands, and wooded swamps. Mature forests are favored as large hollow trees are a preferred nesting location; beeches are sometimes used (S. B. Laughlin pers. obs.), as are the old nests of raptors and crows.

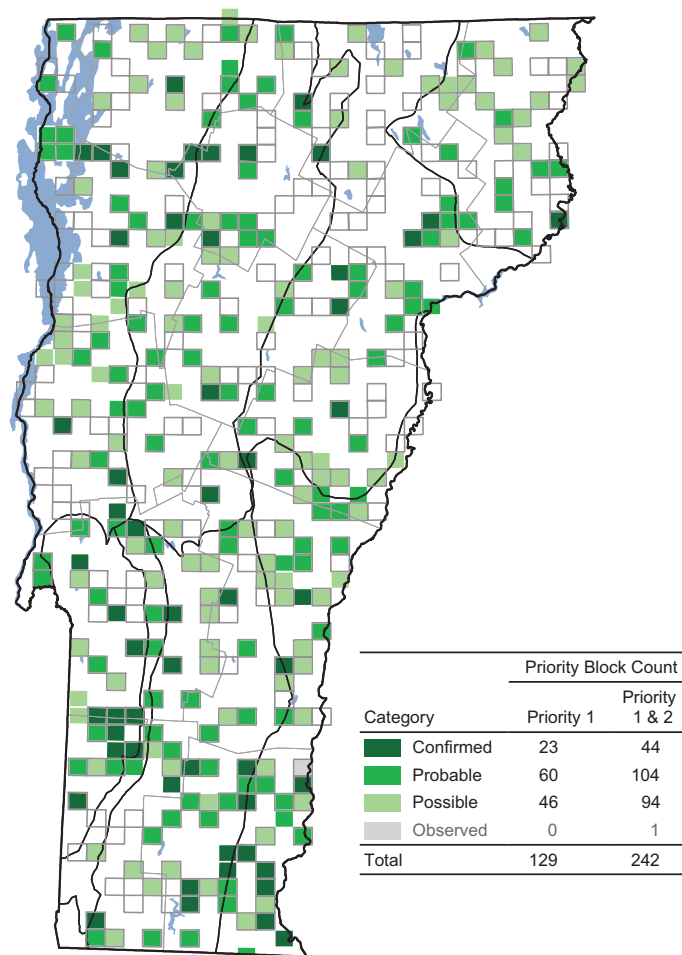
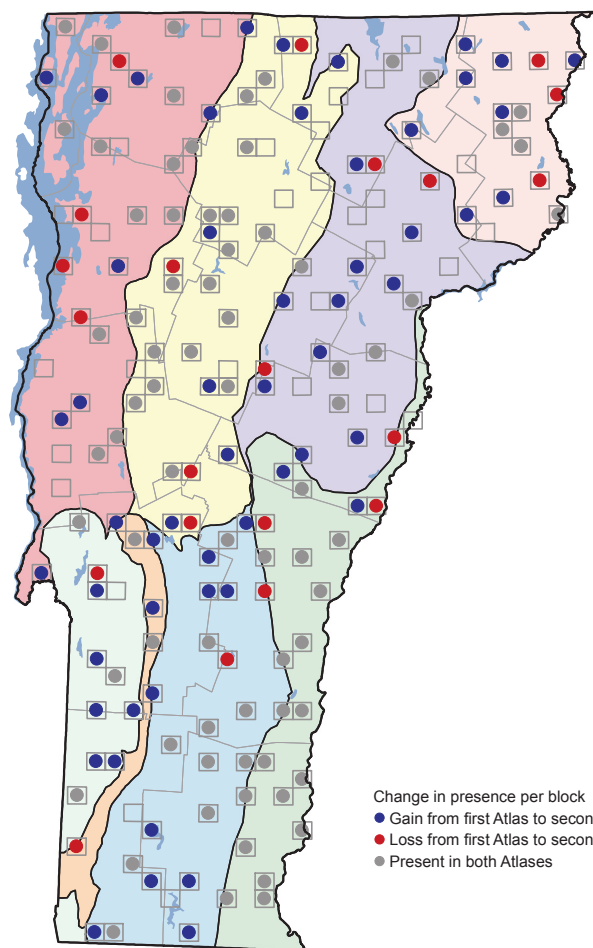
Not surprisingly, the Vermont atlas found Barred Owl to be most common in heavily forested areas, particularly in the southern portion of the state. Relatively fewer observations (50 to 60 percent of blocks) were recorded in the Northern Vermont Piedmont and in the Champlain Valley. Statewide, the proportion of blocks occupied by Barred Owl has risen since the first atlas, when the species was recorded in 53 percent of Priority 1 blocks; in the second atlas, 73 percent of such blocks were occupied. As forests have matured in Vermont, more nesting habitat has likely become available. Differences in survey



effort do not appear to be the reason behind this increase; both atlases used vocal recordings to elicit responses, and this was the only owl species found to increase in the second atlas.

Other recent atlases corroborate findings in Vermont. The second New York atlas found a 43 percent increase in occurrence (McGowan and Corwin 2008), as did the second Ontario atlas, which found a substantial increase in numbers across the province (Cadman et al. 2007). Availability of mature forest habitat is considered a limiting factor (Mazur and James 2000). Forest clearing in the eastern parts of its range (Maritimes, Ontario, Iowa, Tennessee) is believed to have resulted in population declines (Cadman et al. 1987, Erskine 1992, Jackson et al. 1996, Nicholson 1997). Forest management that benefits Barred Owls includes lengthening of timber rotations, maintenance of natural forest-age structures, and retention of snags and mature trees (Mazur and James 2000). The continued presence of Barred Owl throughout Vermont seems assured as long as mature forests continue to be available.

SARAH B. LAUGHLIN & ROBERT E. BUDLIGER



CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	17	22	+ 5	+ 29
Northeastern Highlands	7	12	+ 5	+ 71
Northern Green Mountains	21	24	+ 3	+ 14
Northern Vermont Piedmont	11	17	+ 6	+ 55
Southern Green Mountains	14	23	+ 9	+ 64
Southern Vermont Piedmont	18	18	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	4	9	+ 5	+ 125
Vermont Valley	3	4	+ 1	+ 33
Totals	95	129	+ 34	+ 36

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	60	18
Northeastern Highlands	62	10
Northern Green Mountains	63	17
Northern Vermont Piedmont	50	14
Southern Green Mountains	82	19
Southern Vermont Piedmont	82	14
Taconic Mountains	76	7
Vermont Valley	75	2