

Fish Crow

Corvus ossifragus



The Fish Crow is typically found near rivers and lakes, although it may forage miles from water. Historically this crow was considered to be a coastal species, found along the southeastern U.S. coast north to New Jersey. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the Fish Crow began expanding its range north to Maine and up major river systems (Wells and McGowan 1991). Expansion along rivers and into inland areas appears to involve leaps in the range rather than gradual outgrowth of local populations (Kibbe 1987, Wells and McGowan 1991). The earliest unconfirmed record in Vermont came from the Connecticut River Valley, although the current breeding population on Lake Champlain is probably an extension of the Hudson River population, which was spreading north by the early 1970s (Bull 1974).

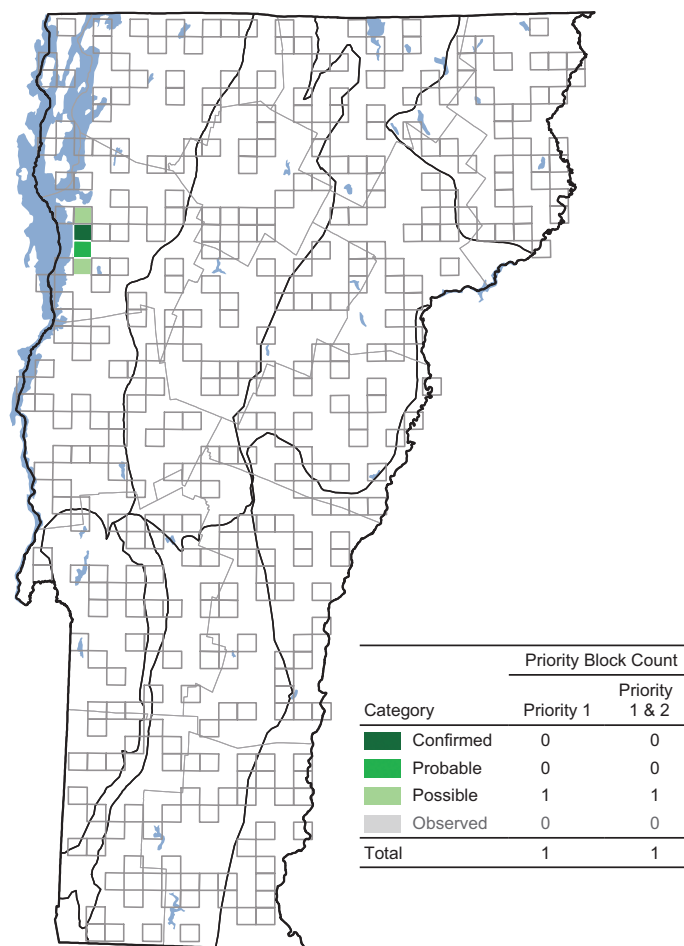
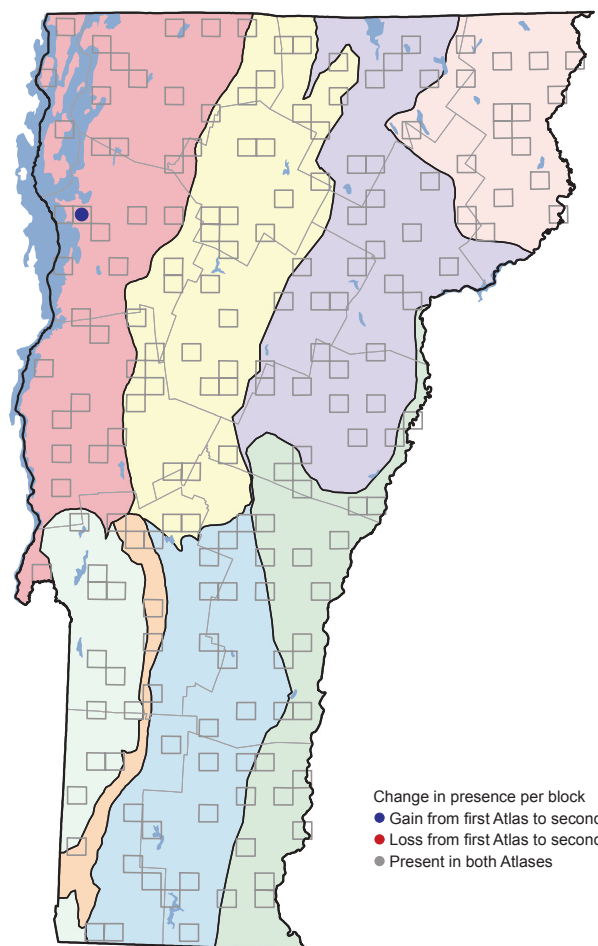
The Fish Crow frequently nests near water, often in residential suburbs. Conifers, typically pines, are twice as likely to be used as deciduous trees. Several nests may be initiated in April before one is lined, and 2 to 6 eggs are laid. The male feeds the female during the 17- to 19-day incubation, and assists during the 32- to 40-day nestling period. The young remain dependent upon the parents for a month or more after fledging (McGowan 2001). The Fish Crow is a difficult species to distinguish from the more common and widespread American Crow. Although the two differ slightly in size and habits, the only reliable method of identifying the Fish Crow in the field is by its call—a unique, nasal, double-note *uh, uh* (Wells and McGowan 1991). Unfortunately, other Fish Crow sounds resemble the single-note, nasal calls of begging female and young American Crows, making such vocalizations less than reliable for identification in the spring and early summer.

The Fish Crow was unreported during the first Vermont atlas, but nested at Red Rocks Park in South Burlington in 1998. A pair has been reported in the greater Burlington area annually since 1998 (T. Murin pers. comm.) and successfully nested during the atlas. Fish Crows are short-distance, diurnal migrants (McGowan 2001). Colonies appear likely to show vagrancy and leap-

frogging in their expansion pattern (Wells and McGowan 1991). The first members of new colonies may be migratory, but birds soon become permanent residents if the colony is successful. The Lake Champlain birds have not been documented in the winter, but may go overlooked because winter foraging areas may not overlap the breeding area, and vocalizations are reduced during the non-breeding season (McGowan 2001). The species may be expected to begin breeding along the Connecticut River, particularly in the vicinity of larger urban centers; it is not surprising that all 4 records from the second atlas are from a suburban section of the Champlain Valley.

New York's second atlas found a 54 percent increase in block occupancy, with most of this expansion occurring in the upstate regions as birds moved north and west from the lower Hudson Valley (McGowan 2008). Fish Crows now occur on Lake Ontario, in the Hudson drainage north to the Champlain canal, and on the west side of Lake Champlain. Pennsylvania showed an even greater increase (90 percent) in the blocks where Fish Crows occur (Wilson et al. 2012). The Fish Crow has not been reported in either of Ontario's two atlases. In Vermont, the population seems destined to grow and would perhaps benefit if American Crow populations were to decline from West Nile virus, to which the Fish Crow is more resistant (Komar et al. 2003).

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CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	0	1	+ 1	+ 100
Northeastern Highlands	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	0	1	+ 1	+ 100

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	1	100
Northeastern Highlands	0	0
Northern Green Mountains	0	0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	0
Southern Green Mountains	0	0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	0
Taconic Mountains	0	0
Vermont Valley	0	0