

Northern Mockingbird

Mimus polyglottos



Now found from southern Canada south through most of Mexico, the Northern Mockingbird was considered rare even in southern New England prior to the middle of the twentieth century (Forbush 1929, Stiles 1982). Its expansion northward since then has been noted by many writers (e.g. Bull 1974, Kibbe 1985). Northern populations are arguably migratory, staging at least short-distance seasonal movements to areas with better cover and food supplies, as not all territories include preferred attributes for both wintering and breeding.

The mockingbird is an accomplished mimic of other birds and incorporates a myriad of sounds into its song (Wilson 1828, Dickey 1922). In Vermont, birds begin staking out a breeding territory in late April, and by May most birds are paired and beginning to nest. Nesting habitat may include forest edge, but dense shrubbery in abandoned fields and residential areas are more frequently used. Multiflora rose is often an important habitat component, providing nesting substrate and food. Mockingbirds avoid unbroken forestland. Only two nest-building efforts were noted during the atlas, on 18 June and 9 July. Nesting starts well ahead of this; fledglings were noted as early as 7 June. In southern areas, Northern Mockingbirds may raise up to four broods a year (Derrickson and Breitwisch 1992) but, at our latitude, a maximum of two broods seems likely. A nest with young was noted on 22 July and a nest with eggs was reported as late as 5 August in the first atlas (Kibbe 1985). Northern Mockingbirds are relatively easy to detect because of their incessant singing, very noticeable “flight display” (Breitwisch and Whitesides 1987), and vigorous nest defense.

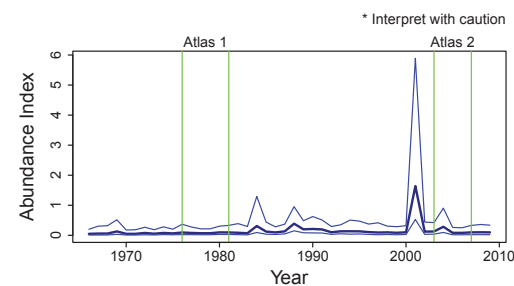
The Northern Mockingbird continues to be a localized breeder throughout Vermont. Since 1966 the species has been found on 9 of the state’s 25 Breeding Bird Survey routes (Sauer et al. 2011). It is more frequently found at lower elevations in the Connecticut and Champlain valleys, but there are also records from the Green Mountains and Northeastern Highlands. The mockingbird was present on approximately 26 percent fewer blocks during the second atlas, with declines in every biophysical region

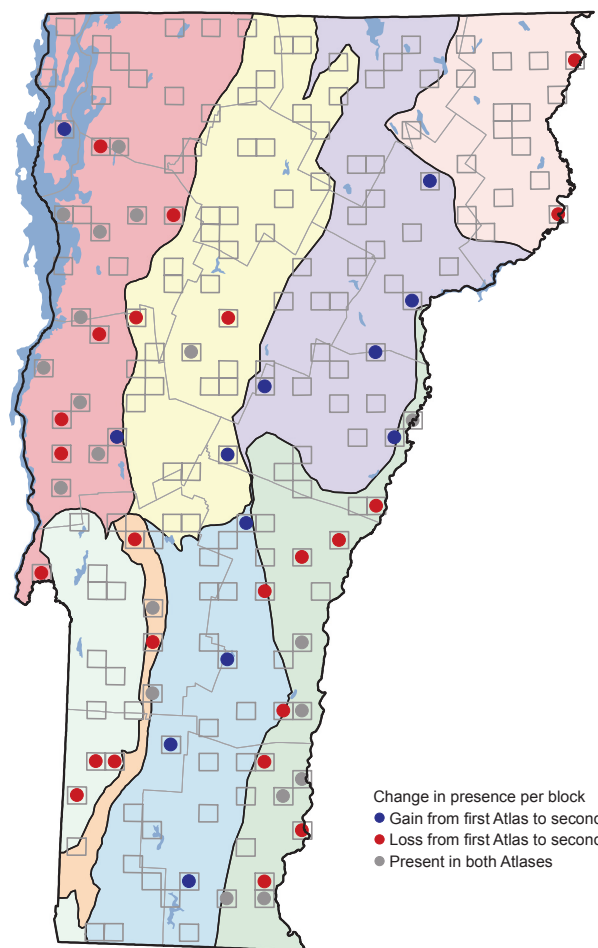
except the Northern Vermont Piedmont and Southern Green Mountains.

Statewide, populations of Northern Mockingbird appear to have been stable since the first atlas (Sauer et al. 2011). New York’s second atlas found a 10 percent increase in abundance, a change driven by increases in long-established, relatively large populations in the southern and central portions of the state. There was a decrease, however, in several other regions, including the region bordering Lake Champlain and Vermont (McGowan 2008). Pennsylvania found 20 percent more blocks occupied in its second atlas (Wilson et al. 2012). In Ontario, the species doubled in probability of observation between atlases, and it appears to be well established in the urban areas along the north shores of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario (Smith and Poon 2007). Breeding Bird Survey data from the Atlantic Northern Forest (Bird Conservation Region 14) showed a significant, annual 2.3 increase from 1982 to 2007, while the New England / Mid-Atlantic Coast (Bird Conservation Region 30) showed significant declines (Sauer et al. 2011).

The Northern Mockingbird appears to have established itself as a permanent, albeit limited, component of our breeding avifauna. Its distribution in Vermont is limited by the availability of shrubby habitat, a vegetation

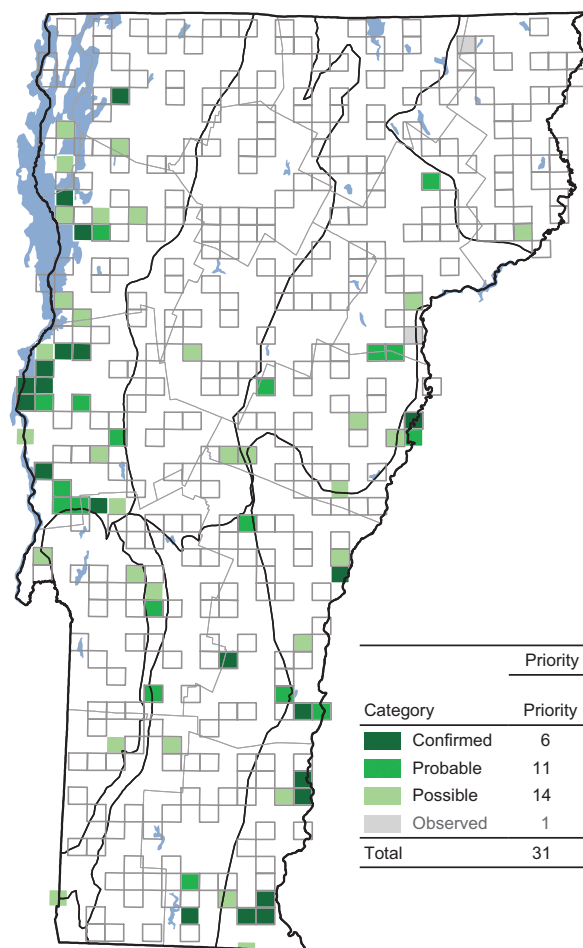
RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	15	11	- 4	- 27
Northeastern Highlands	2	0	- 2	- 100
Northern Green Mountains	3	2	- 1	- 33
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	5	+ 5	+ 500
Southern Green Mountains	3	5	+ 2	+ 67
Southern Vermont Piedmont	13	7	- 6	- 46
Taconic Mountains	3	0	- 3	- 100
Vermont Valley	3	1	- 2	- 67
Totals	42	31	- 11	- 26



Category	Priority Block Count	
	Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	6	14
Probable	11	17
Possible	14	21
Observed	1	2
Total	31	52

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	28	40
Northeastern Highlands	2	2
Northern Green Mountains	3	4
Northern Vermont Piedmont	10	13
Southern Green Mountains	10	12
Southern Vermont Piedmont	32	25
Taconic Mountains	4	2
Vermont Valley	12	2

community type that was abundant in the 1900s when abandoned farmland began to revert to forest. Since the first atlas, fallow pasturelands with junipers and multi-flora rose have succeeded into forestland with little understory, and this change has at least in part contributed to the species' decline in some regions of Vermont. If this trend continues, the mockingbird may find most areas of Vermont too densely forested for its liking. It seems probable that this flashy-winged mimic will be found primarily in association with suburban development, where lawns and decorative ornamental shrubs can pro-

vide suitable habitat. Climate-change models predict increases in the northern third of the species' range, associated with increasing January temperatures (Mathews et al. 2007), but availability of preferred habitat may limit future increases in Vermont.

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