

Orchard Oriole

Icterus spurius

The smallest of North America's orioles—and one of the most widespread—the Orchard Oriole breeds from the foothills of the Rockies eastward to Florida and northward to southern Ontario and Saskatchewan (Scharf and Kren 1996). Relatively common throughout much of the Mississippi River watershed, the Orchard Oriole is most abundant in the Carolinas (Sauer et al. 2008). Vermont is barely within the species' range (Scharf and Kren 1996), with only sporadic breeding documented in the state since the late 1800s (Ellison 1985). The breeding plumage of the yearling male is greenish with a black bib, readily distinguishable from the after-second-year male, which has a black head and back that contrast with the brick red/chestnut body.

Orchard Orioles return to their breeding grounds from Central America in mid to late May (Ellison 1985). They prefer broken forests, hedgerows, orchards, and riparian woodlands. Suburban parks and residential areas with fruit-laden trees and shrubs are also utilized. This oriole nests semi-colonially in some parts of its range (Scharf and Kren 1996), although at the low densities found in Vermont such behavior has yet to be noted. Nests are usually placed lower and in smaller trees than those of the more common Northern Oriole. There is little breeding data specific to Vermont. During the atlas, nestlings were found on 22 June and fledglings were reported on 23 June and 9 July. Orchard Oriole song is easily mistaken for other species by observers who are not familiar with it (nor expecting it).

Only one record of Orchard Oriole was reported during the first atlas, a confirmed breeding in Windsor County. During the second atlas, there were 19 records, 4 of which were in Priority 1 blocks. Other observers have reported the species at dozens of Vermont sites since the first atlas (eBird 2010). Although most Vermont records are from the Connecticut River and Champlain valleys, a number came from interior locations as far north as Plainfield, all from farmlands and suburbs.

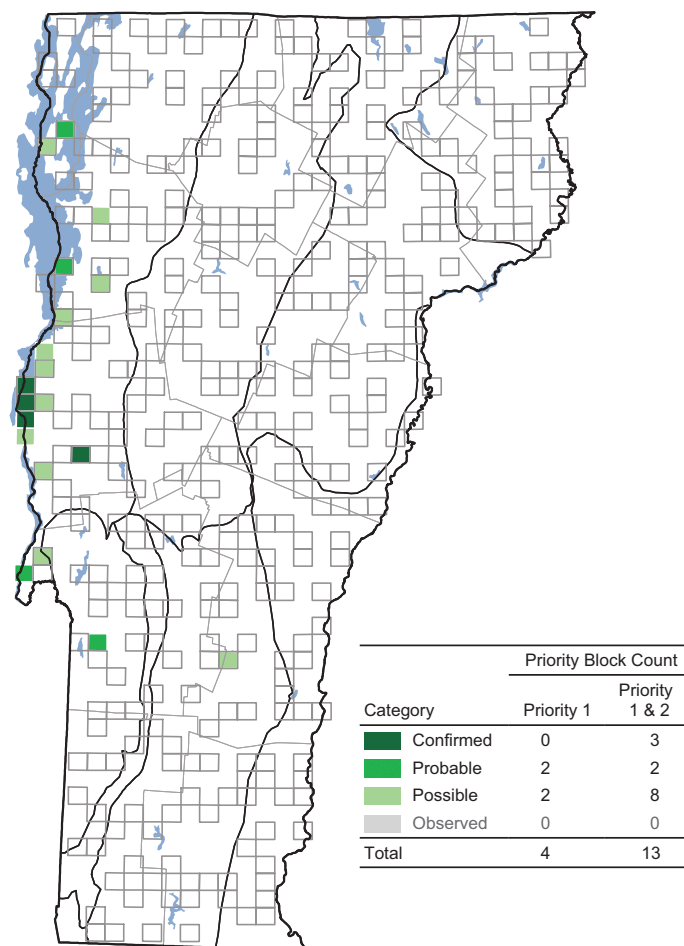
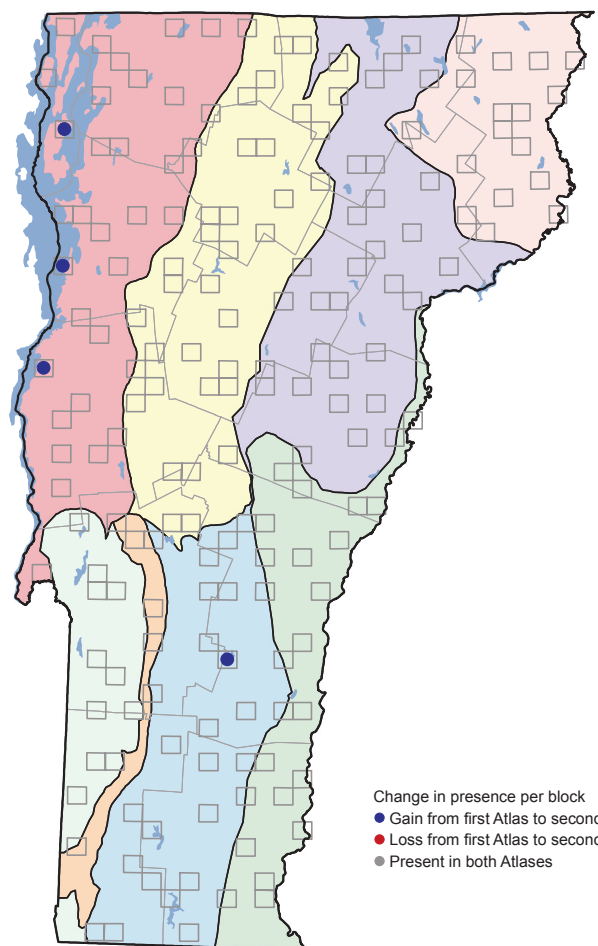
The species' increase in block occupancy from the first to the second atlas is impressive, rising from 1 breed-



ing record (0 Priority 1 blocks) to 19 records (4 Priority 1 blocks). Although the Brattleboro area provided the first breeding record in the state around the turn of the century (Davenport 1907), over sixty years passed before breeding was again confirmed. Surprisingly, the burst of recent records comes at a time when Vermont's forests are maturing and farm landscapes being reduced, a situation in which suitable habitat for this species would be expected to decline. Instead, the Orchard Oriole appears to have established a toehold on the state and, as Ellison (1985) predicted, continued to increase as suburban development and, to some extent, early successional shrubland have replaced farmland.

Between 1982 and 2007, Orchard Oriole was reported from at least 20 sites in southeastern New Hampshire (eBird 2010). Block occurrence of the species increased by 96 percent in Pennsylvania's second atlas (Wilson et al. 2012) and 74 percent in New York (McGowan 2008). Two of the New York records (both PO) were from the Champlain Valley (McGowan 2008). Ontario had an even greater increase in block occurrence, mostly on the Great Lakes Plain (Cadman et al. 2007).

The Orchard Oriole is likely to continue its northward expansion in Vermont even though the forest cover exceeds the bird's preferred level in many areas. Climate-change models predict substantial increases in Orchard Oriole abundance in the Northeast as its distribution shifts northward (Matthews et al. 2007). Orchard Ori-



CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	0	3	+ 3	+ 300
Northeastern Highlands	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	0	1	+ 1	+ 100
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	0	4	+ 4	+ 400

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	16	92
Northeastern Highlands	0	0
Northern Green Mountains	0	0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	0
Southern Green Mountains	1	8
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	0
Taconic Mountains	0	0
Vermont Valley	0	0

oles find suburbs and low-intensity agriculture to be fully compatible with their needs. It seems likely, therefore, that most of this species' future expansion in our region will be in close proximity to humans.

DOUGLAS P. KIBBE