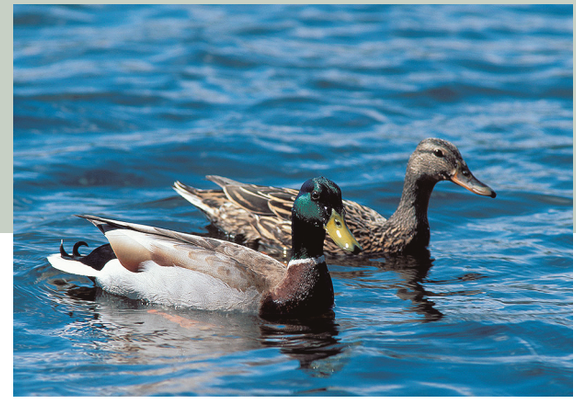
Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos



The Mallard is the most ubiquitous, the most abundant, and perhaps the most adaptable species of waterfowl in North America. Adaptable enough to nest in grassy strips along the Burlington waterfront, farm ponds in the Connecticut Valley, and remote boreal bogs, Mallards are tolerant of both human disturbance and cold weather. The Mallard's North American population, estimated at 7.7 million, is roughly one-third larger than that of the Canada Goose (USFWS 2008). Because of this duck's abundance and popularity as a game species, Mallard population dynamics are perhaps better understood than that of any other North American bird species. Historically a bird of central and western North America, their range expanded eastward during the 1900s. Mallards breed from the island chains off Alaska southward to northern Baja California and eastward across Canada and the United States to Nova Scotia and South Carolina (Drilling et al. 2002).

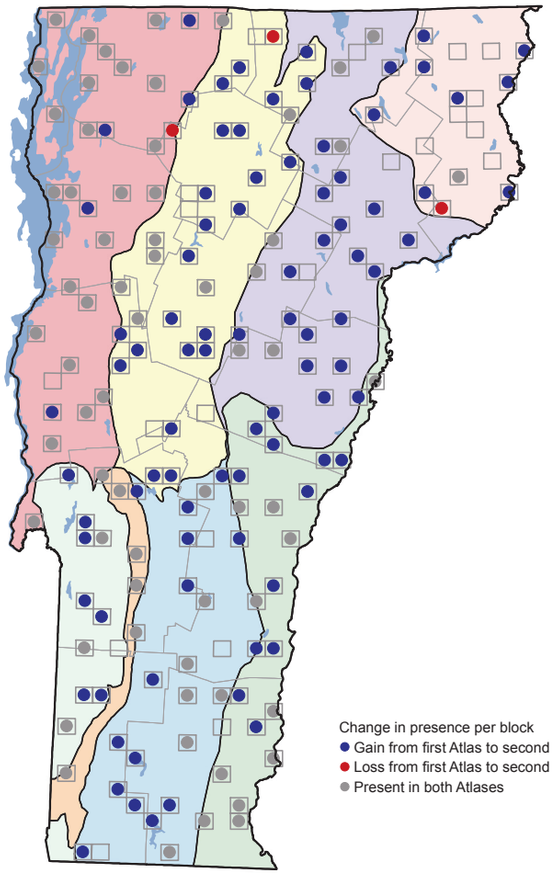
Mallard distribution in Vermont is similarly widespread. Their diverse diet and habitat-use patterns allow them to thrive in a wide variety of habitats, as long as they feature uplands, generally in close proximity to water. The species was found in more than 70 percent of priority blocks in all regions of the state except the Northeastern Highlands, where it occurred in 59 percent of such blocks. Atlas observers confirmed breeding in nearly two-thirds of the priority blocks in which the Mallard was detected; more than 80 percent of those confirmations were females with broods. A nest with eggs was found on 1 May and a female with young on 6 May, which suggests that some clutches may be completed in early April, allowing sufficient time for renesting if the first nest fails.

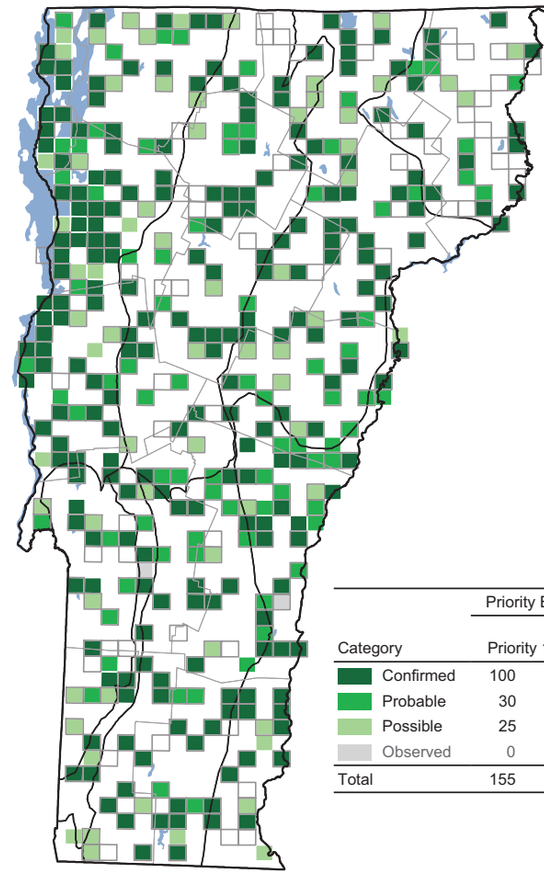
Well-established in the Vermont and Champlain valleys during the first atlas, the Mallard has expanded into all regions of the state, increasing by 121 percent statewide. A more than two-fold increase was documented in the Northeastern Highlands, Northern Green Mountains, Taconic Mountains, and the Northern Vermont Piedmont.

Like most species of dabbling ducks, the continent-wide Mallard population closely tracks conditions in the Prairie Pothole Region of the United States and Canada. The 1985 North American Waterfowl Management Plan set a target population level for Mallards at 8.2 million (USFWS and Canadian Fish and Wildlife Service 1986). The population increased from a low of 5 million in 1985 to 10.8 million by 1999 (USFWS 2008). Since then, Mallard numbers have been lower, but variable from year to year. During the atlas period, the North American population averaged approximately 7.5 million, about 7 percent below the target level. The USFWS eastern survey area (eastern Ontario, southern Quebec, New Brunswick, Labrador, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Maine) supports about 6 percent of the continental population. Numbers have been more stable in this region, increasing from 340,000 in 1990 to 400,000 in 2007, with an average population estimate of approximately 440,000 during the second atlas period (USFWS 2008).

Increases in Mallard populations have also been documented in other states and provinces that have completed their second atlases: Maryland, 14 percent (Ellison 2010); Ontario, 16 percent (Cadman et al. 2007); New York, 27 percent (McGowan and Corwin 2008). There was little change in Pennsylvania (Wilson et al. 2012). Beginning in the early 1900s, many eastern states began releasing Mallards to provide waterfowl hunting opportunities (Heusmann 1991). The clearing of land for agriculture—which provided habitat—combined with releases and supplemental feeding (Heusmann and Burrell 1984), allowed breeding populations in the eastern United States to flourish. Whether there is sufficient habitat for the Mallard to continue to expand its distribution in Vermont will be determined in the third atlas.

ALLAN STRONG





Category	Priority Block Count: Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	100	195
Probable	30	65
Possible	25	50
Observed	0	1
Total	155	310

CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	27	31	+ 4	+ 15
Northeastern Highlands	2	9	+ 7	+ 350
Northern Green Mountains	7	29	+ 22	+ 314
Northern Vermont Piedmont	7	27	+ 20	+ 286
Southern Green Mountains	8	23	+ 15	+ 188
Southern Vermont Piedmont	11	21	+ 10	+ 91
Taconic Mountains	3	10	+ 7	+ 233
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	70	155	+ 85	+ 121

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	95	23
Northeastern Highlands	59	7
Northern Green Mountains	78	16
Northern Vermont Piedmont	90	19
Southern Green Mountains	87	16
Southern Vermont Piedmont	90	12
Taconic Mountains	71	5
Vermont Valley	100	3