

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Accipiter striatus

The bipolar nature of the Sharp-shinned Hawk—secretive breeder and bold, fearless hunter of songbirds—make it simultaneously a difficult breeding bird to document and an exciting predator to watch. The smallest of three accipiter species that breed in Vermont, the Sharp-shinned Hawk exhibits the greatest degree of sexual dimorphism of any North American raptor (Snyder and Wiley 1976) and is the last to return and commence breeding (Bildstein and Meyer 2000). They have an expansive breeding range: in the East, from Alaska to Newfoundland and southward to Arkansas and northern portions of the Gulf states; in the Mountain West to the Pacific Coast and southward to Nicaragua; and also in the Greater Antilles and South America to northern Argentina (Bildstein and Meyer 2000). Canadian and northern New England breeders winter as far south as Central America.

A highly efficient predator of songbirds, the Sharp-shinned Hawk returns to Vermont to breed in early May, its peak foraging needs coinciding with the fledging of many of their prey. All forest types are used, and nest sites often are below the canopy and against the trunk of a conifer in dense forest. Nests with eggs have been found as early as 15 May (Nichols 1985). Accipiters add material to their nests throughout the nesting cycle, and the only observation of a Sharp-shinned Hawk carrying nest material, on 12 June, cannot be assumed to indicate nest building. Incubation of the clutch of 4 to 5 eggs takes nearly 5 weeks, but the young develop quickly and may leave the nest after a little more than 3 weeks. Nests with young have been reported from 17 June through 22 July (N = 4). Fledglings, who remain with the parents for 3 to 4 weeks, were reported from 19 June through 31 July (N = 6). Fledglings are noisy. By late August, migrants have begun to move through the state (D. Kibbe pers. obs.).

Sharp-shinned Hawks were documented in 45 percent of Priority 1 blocks, a substantial two-thirds increase in the number of blocks occupied since the first atlas. This change was evident throughout the state, with the exception of the Northeastern Highlands. Most areas of Ver-

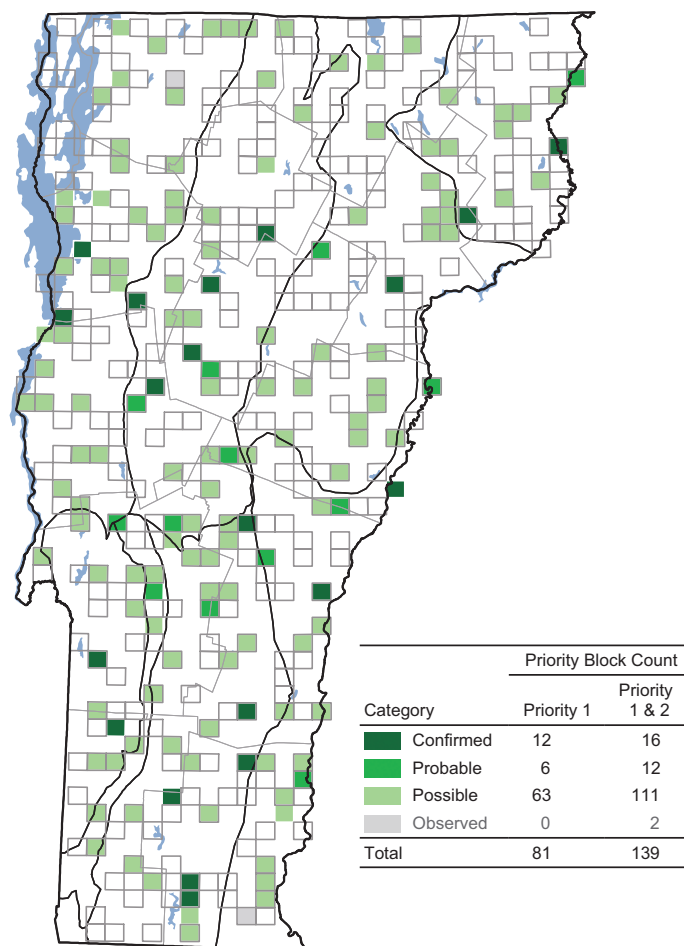
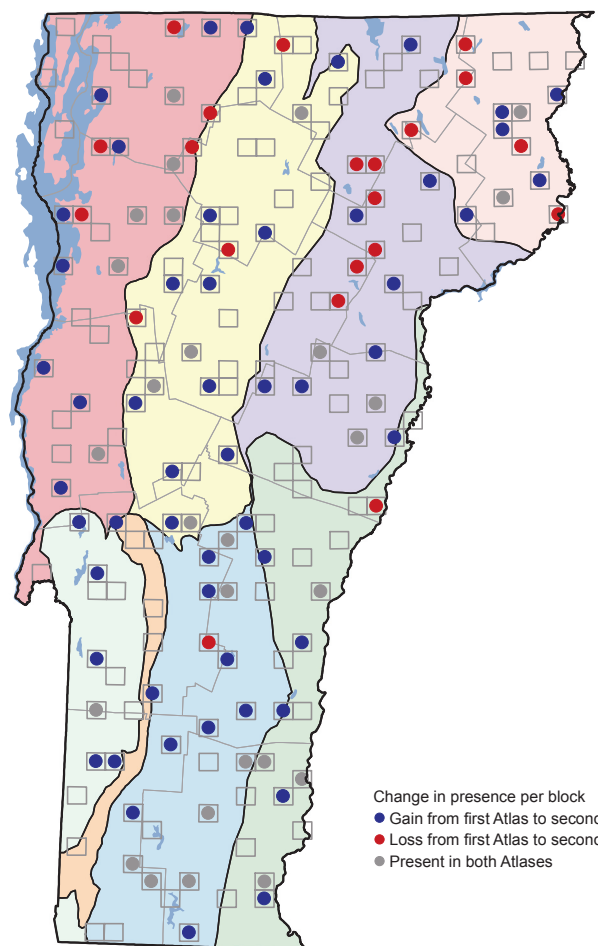


mont offer the forest patches needed for nesting by this species.

Sharp-shinned Hawk populations have rebounded since the mid-1900s, when persecution and DDT depressed their numbers. Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a steady, range-wide increase of 2.2 percent annually from 1982 to 2007 (Sauer et al. 2011). In New York the increase in blocks occupied in the second atlas (68 percent) was virtually identical to that of Vermont (McGowan and Corwin 2008). Maryland found a 50 percent increase in block occupancy in their second atlas (Ellison 2010). In Ontario, an increase of 68 percent in the probability of observation was found in a southern sector of the province, but overall did not change (Cadman et al. 2007). In Pennsylvania, presence in blocks dropped by 18 percent in the second atlas (Wilson et al. 2012). Counts from eastern hawk watches are highly variable, but indicate an overall decreasing trend since the early 1980s (Farmer et al. 2008).

Despite the sizable increase in blocks where the species was detected, New York has conservatively retained the Sharp-shinned Hawk on their list of Species of Special Concern. Massachusetts and Connecticut also list the Sharp-shinned Hawk as a Species of Special Concern. Vermont's population, once small enough to earn the Sharp-shinned Hawk a place on the state's endangered list, seems to be continuing to increase. Continued protection from shooting, banning of some pesticides, and well-stocked feeders may have all contributed to this species' success. Windows, however, are a potential threat to this and other raptors that have learned to take advantage of the concentration of birds at feeders.

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CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	11	15	+ 4	+ 36
Northeastern Highlands	7	7	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	7	15	+ 8	+ 114
Northern Vermont Piedmont	9	11	+ 2	+ 22
Southern Green Mountains	8	18	+ 10	+ 125
Southern Vermont Piedmont	5	8	+ 3	+ 60
Taconic Mountains	1	6	+ 5	+ 500
Vermont Valley	0	1	+ 1	+ 100
Totals	48	81	+ 33	+ 69

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	38	20
Northeastern Highlands	32	9
Northern Green Mountains	35	17
Northern Vermont Piedmont	33	16
Southern Green Mountains	44	18
Southern Vermont Piedmont	40	12
Taconic Mountains	42	6
Vermont Valley	50	3