

Black-capped Chickadee

Poecile atricapillus



The Black-capped Chickadee could be the poster bird of New England, but its range actually extends north to the tree line in Canada, as far south as Tennessee in the Appalachians, and west to Alaska (Foote et al. 2010). This species is common throughout its range. Resourceful and hardy, chickadees have mastered the knack of enduring northeastern winters. Along the southern edge of their range, the Black-capped Chickadee is known to hybridize with the slightly smaller, duller Carolina Chickadee (Bronson et al. 2005, Reudink et al. 2007). In Vermont and north into Canada, its range overlaps with that of the Boreal Chickadee. The Boreal Chickadee is likely to be found in spruce bogs in northeastern Vermont, whereas the Black-capped Chickadee is distributed over a broad range of deciduous and coniferous habitat types. Cheerful and unafraid, this small, spirited songbird is well known to hikers, hunters, and backyard birders.

As widely recognized as it is, the Black-capped Chickadee, like many Vermonters, keeps its personal affairs under wraps. Breeding pairs nest in hollow trees and stumps, often enlarging a cavity in a well-decayed snag, 0.5 to 10 meters (2 to 30 feet) off the ground. Nest boxes may also be used but are more readily accepted if filled with wood shavings, which the pair removes until the cavity is large enough to accept a nest. Martin (1985) reported nest building in Vermont between early April and early July, citing birch and aspen trees as the most common natural substrate. In the second atlas, nest building (N = 62) spanned four months, from 14 April to 15 August. Records of nests with eggs (N = 13) were reported from 6 May to 3 July, though Martin (1985) reported a wider window of late April through mid-July. Late nestings may be second efforts after a first nest fails; typically only one brood is raised per year (Foote et al. 2010). Once the clutch is complete, the eggs are incubated for up to two weeks. The nestlings leave the cavity in 16 days but remain with their parents for a month or more thereafter.

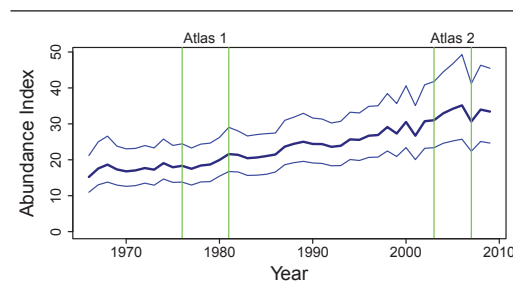
The Black-capped Chickadee was found in nearly every priority block in the state during the second atlas. There is no evidence that their populations have dimin-

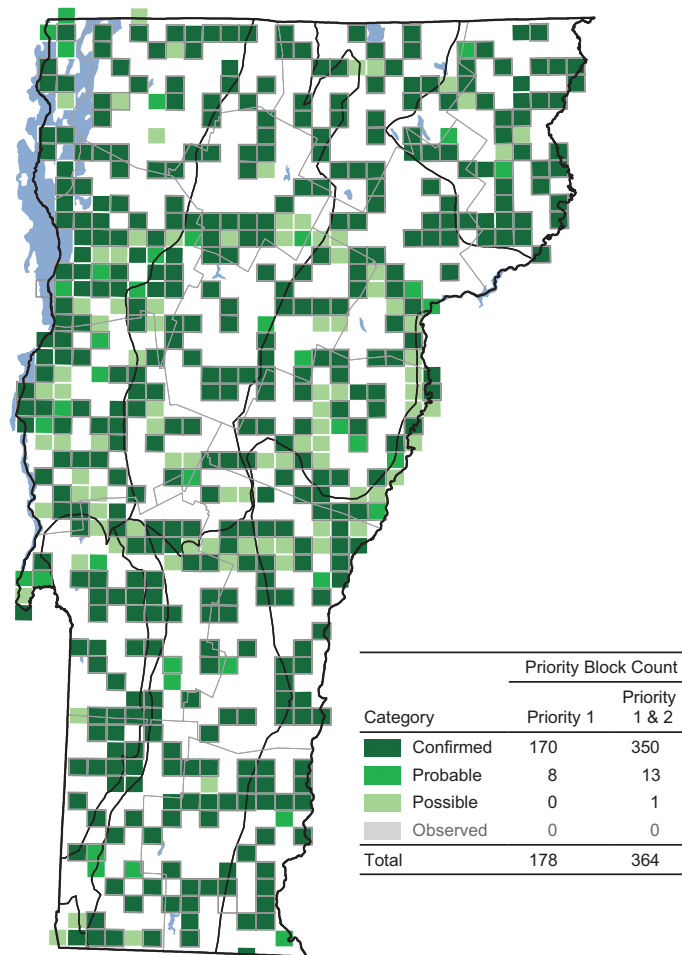
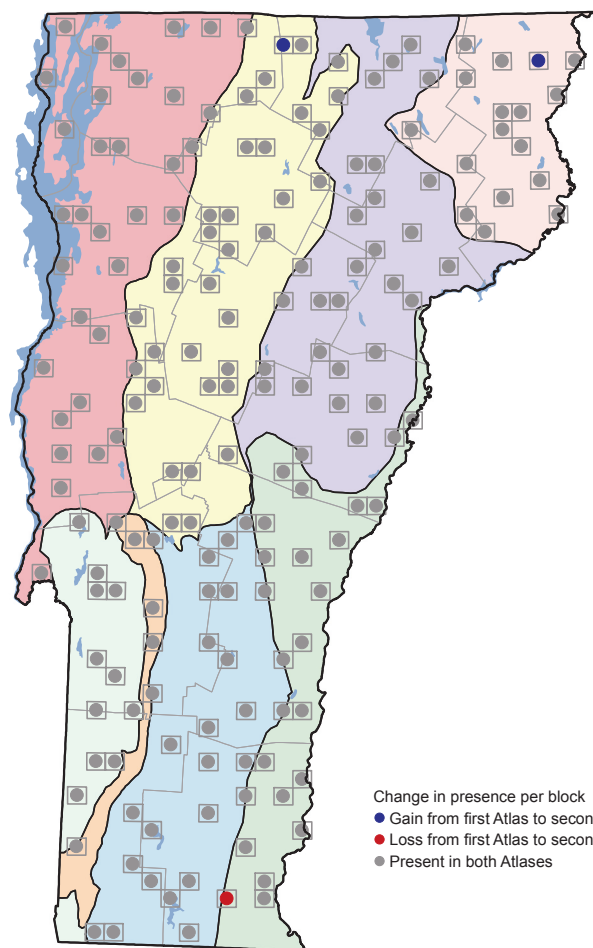
ished in the Northeast over the past several decades. The Breeding Bird Survey shows continental increases in the Black-capped Chickadee population (Sauer et al. 2011) that override occasional local fluctuations related to food, West Nile virus, or other perturbations (Bonter and Hochachka 2003). Data from nearby states also indicate that chickadees are common. In New York, the Black-capped Chickadee was the fifth most commonly reported species and showed a 1 percent increase in occurrence (McGowan and Corwin 2008). In Pennsylvania a decline of 1 percent in Black-capped Chickadee occurrence was reported (Wilson et al. 2012). In Ontario's second atlas, Black-capped Chickadee populations increased or remained constant across the province (Cadman et al. 2007).

The Black-capped Chickadee is among the handful of species that happily co-exists with humans. Its tameness, perky attitude, and ready acceptance of bird feeders have endeared it to generations of casual birdwatchers. The species' use of bird feeders, although not a necessity for survival, has probably benefited its population as a whole. Supplemental feeding has been shown to enhance overwinter survival, hasten the onset of breeding, and increase clutch size and survival in parids and other species (Robb et al. 2008).

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RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	33	33	+ 0	+ 0
Northeastern Highlands	16	17	+ 1	+ 6
Northern Green Mountains	34	35	+ 1	+ 3
Northern Vermont Piedmont	30	30	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	27	27	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	20	- 1	- 5
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	177	178	+ 1	+ 1

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	100	20
Northeastern Highlands	100	10
Northern Green Mountains	100	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	100	18
Southern Green Mountains	100	15
Southern Vermont Piedmont	97	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	100	2