

Blue Jay

Cyanocitta cristata

The Blue Jay is one of several of Vermont's breeding bird species that has shown an ability to thrive in the face of increasing human encroachment on their original woodland habitat. Found throughout eastern North America, the adaptable Blue Jay has extended its range in recent decades west to British Columbia, Montana, and Colorado (Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999).

The conspicuous Blue Jay is an opportunistic feeder with a varied diet including mast, insects, berries, seeds, and eggs and nestlings of other bird species. It breeds in many habitats, including suburban environments, orchards, and coniferous plantations, and probably reaches its highest abundance in deciduous oak and beech forests (Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999). Often thought of as a permanent resident throughout the Vermont countryside, the Blue Jay may be seen in large numbers each fall, departing the state for points farther south. Hordes of Blue Jays, both residents and Canadian breeders, remain through the winter, pillaging bird feeders and amusing birdwatchers by their antics. Not only do feeders likely enhance winter survival, but the birds may enter the breeding season in better condition. Supplemental feeding has been shown in many species to result in earlier breeding, larger clutches, and greater survival of the young (Robb et al. 2008). Blue Jays, like many other feeder visitors, commonly carry off and cache far more food than they consume at the feeder. This habit is extended to natural foods, and Blue Jays may be responsible for planting thousands of acorns or beechnuts each year (Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999).

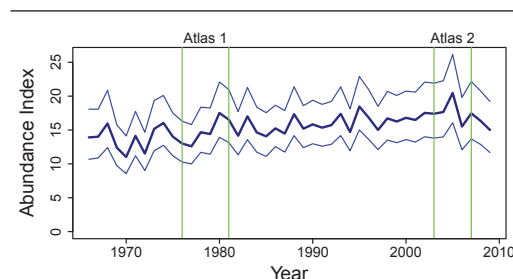
Vermont's migrant jays return to nest in May, after resident jays have begun their breeding activities. Both sexes participate in building the nest, a deep bowl of small twigs lined with softer materials and placed in the crotch of a tree or on branches 3 to 4.5 meters (10 to 15 feet) off the ground. Both coniferous and deciduous trees are commonly used (Norse and Kibbe 1985). Vermont nest building dates (N = 37) extend from 20 April to 13 August. The pair becomes secretive about the nest, the male feeding the female as she incubates for 16 to 18 days. Dates for

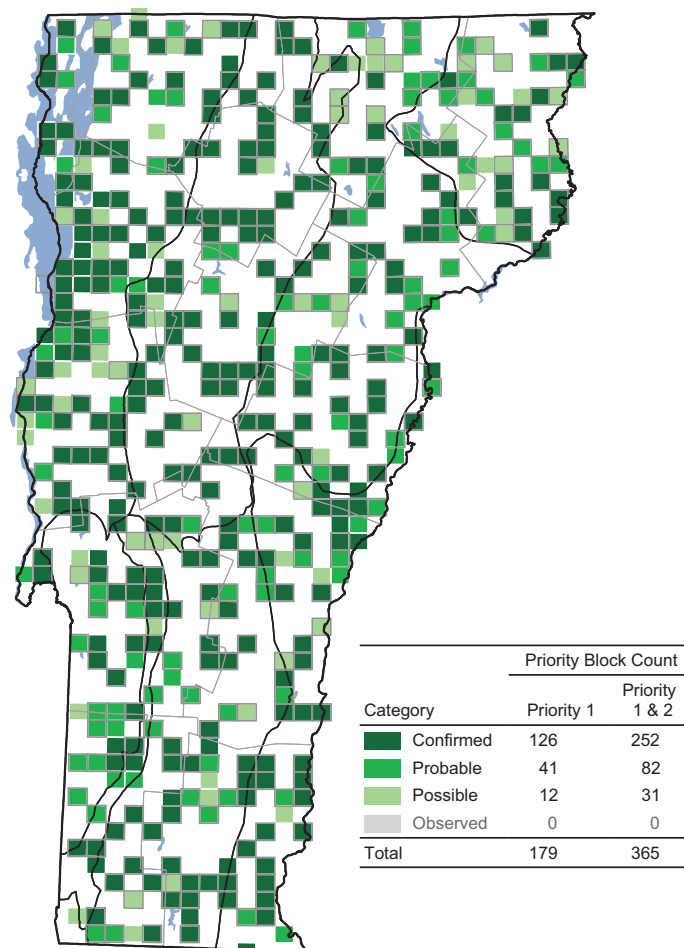
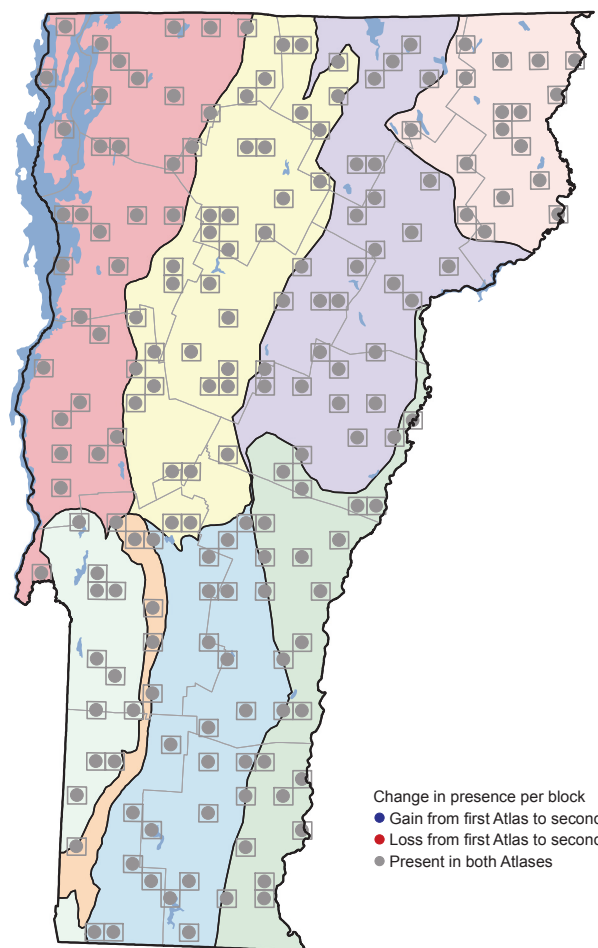


nests with eggs (N = 7) were 7 May through 28 June. Nestlings were reported (N = 14) from 20 May to 8 July. The nestlings are tended by both parents for up to three weeks in the nest, and boisterous family groups remain together for some time after leaving the nest. Fledglings were seen (N = 197) from 20 May to 20 August and accounted for more than three-quarters of the breeding confirmations.

The Blue Jay continues to be one of Vermont's most common bird species. As in the first atlas, it was found in every Priority 1 block. In the second atlas, it was found in all Priority 2 blocks as well, and confirmed in nearly 70 percent of all priority blocks. Breeding Bird Survey data for Vermont show stable populations from 1982 to 2007 (Sauer et al. 2008). In New York the Blue Jay ranked fourth in block occupancy among all of the bird species breeding in the state, and was found in 97 percent of atlas blocks (McGowan 2008). In the second atlases of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Ontario, block occupancy was over 90 percent, and there were no changes in distribution since the first atlases (Cadman et al. 2007, Ellison 2010, Wilson et al. 2012).

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	17	17	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	35	35	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	30	30	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	27	27	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	21	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	179	179	+ 0	+ 0

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	100	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	100	2

The Blue Jay has not only mastered the knack of coping with—and even capitalizing on—human-altered environments, it has also benefited from the food that bird enthusiasts provide. All indications suggest that Blue Jays will continue to thrive in Vermont’s landscape for decades to come.

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