

Loggerhead Shrike

Lanius ludovicianus

The Loggerhead Shrike is a songbird with raptorial habits, capable of preying on small rodents, reptiles, songbirds, and large arthropods. It breeds throughout most of the United States and the prairie provinces of Canada, but is rare in the Northeast and has never been more than a marginal breeder in Vermont (Yosef 1996). The population in the state may have peaked in the early 1900s when abandoned farms reverted to a mosaic of weedy fields and early-successional shrubland. Between 1870 and 1981, there were only 23 verified nests and 25 potential nesting records in Vermont (Milburn 1981). By the time of the first atlas, the population had already declined, apparently past the point of no return.

In the Champlain Valley, the Loggerhead Shrike formerly occupied pastures with hedgerows, isolated trees or shrubs, and scattered juniper stands (D. Kibbe pers. obs.). Migrant populations in the Northeast returned early in the spring and began nesting by late April. The nest is placed in a dense, often thorny tree or shrub (Yosef 1996). The purpose of thorns is twofold: to protect the nest from predators, and as a site to either eat or cache prey. Vermont clutch dates ranged from 4 May to 29 May (Kibbe 1985). Incubation takes 10 to 17 days, and nestlings remain in the nest for up to three weeks. Fledged young, still dependent on their parents, have been recorded as early as 21 June. Although their nests are well hidden, Loggerhead Shrikes themselves are conspicuous, hunting open areas from perches atop low trees.

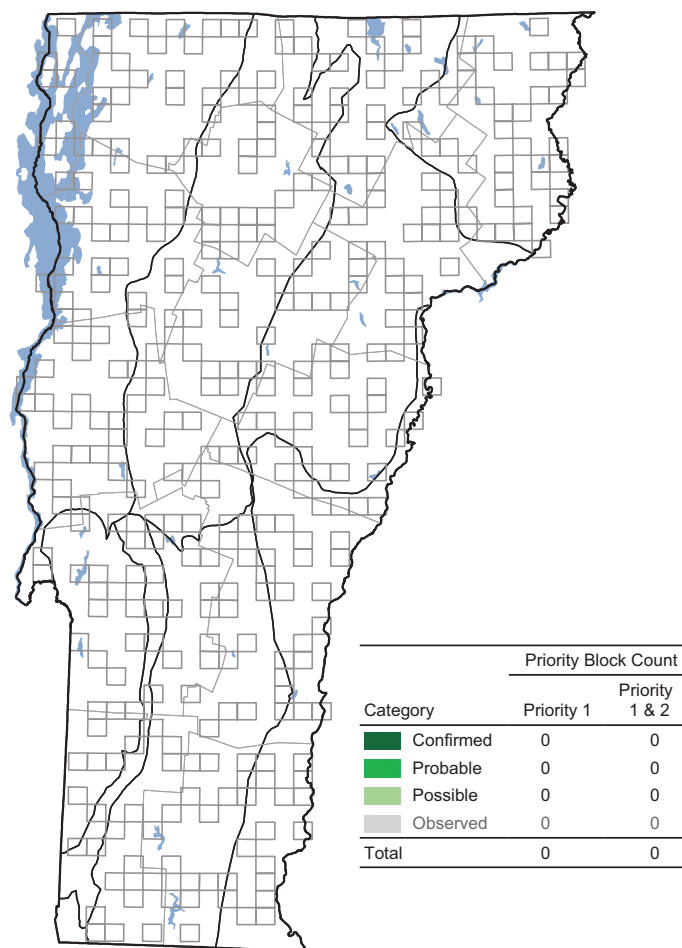
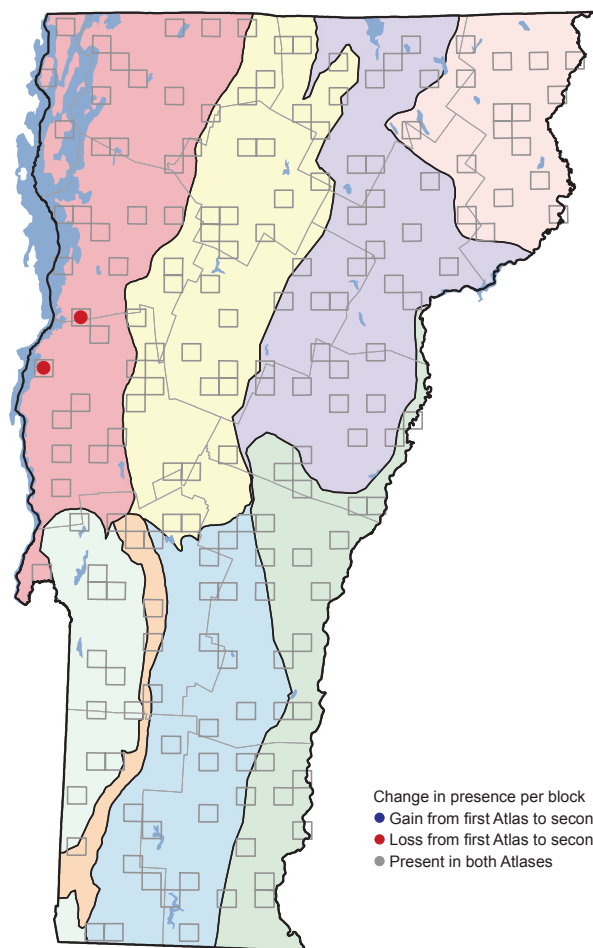
The first atlas yielded only two CO records in the Champlain Valley—one in the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area, the other in Ferrisburg—and four PO records. Since 1983, the species has been reported fewer than a dozen times in the state, all but two (both in the fall) coming from the Champlain Valley. The most recent sighting was 8 March 2002 at Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area, not far from the location of a 1977 nest. No records were reported during the second atlas. The intense coverage at Dead Creek leaves little room for any speculation that nesting has gone undiscovered. The absence of records in the intervening years since the first



Vermont atlas is reflective of the species' disappearance throughout the entire Northeast.

The rapidity of the Loggerhead Shrike's decline has greatly exceeded the transformation of its early successional shrubland habitat into forest; the species has vanished from numerous areas in the Northeast where apparently suitable habitat remains. There were 4 PO records during the second New York atlas, down from 24 records in the first atlas, 11 of which were confirmed (McGowan and Corwin 2008). Loggerhead Shrike occupancy during the second Pennsylvania atlas dropped from 6 blocks to none (Wilson et al. 2012). Likewise, the second Maryland atlas recorded a 77 percent decrease in occupancy, from 13 blocks to 3 blocks (Ellison 2010). Recent records from New England appear to be of transient birds. Two small, isolated populations still breed in the Lake Simcoe-Rideau region, north of Lake Ontario. Already in decline at the time of the first Ontario atlas, the Loggerhead Shrike's probability of observation decreased by 63 percent in the second atlas (Chabot 2007), and the species is listed as endangered in the province. Range-wide, the species declined significantly by 2.8 percent per year from 1982 to 2007 (Sauer et al. 2011).

Efforts to attract and retain Loggerhead Shrikes include habitat manipulation (Pruitt 2000). In New York and Ontario, grassland protection has failed to establish local breeding populations. Factors potentially responsible for the bird's disappearance include habitat loss due



CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	2	0	-2	-100
Northeastern Highlands	0	0	+0	+0
Northern Green Mountains	0	0	+0	+0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+0	+0
Southern Green Mountains	0	0	+0	+0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+0	+0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	+0	+0
Vermont Valley	0	0	+0	+0
Totals	2	0	-2	-100

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

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

to succession, exposure to pesticides on the wintering grounds, and competition from raptors that are more tolerant of the changing northeastern landscape (Yosef 1996). Unless a dramatic reversal of this species' decline in the eastern United States occurs, Loggerhead Shrikes are likely to be forever lost from Vermont's breeding avifauna.

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