

Northern Goshawk

Accipiter gentilis

The Northern Goshawk is the largest and most aggressive of the North American accipiters. It breeds from coast to coast across Canada and Eurasia. In the Old World, falconers have prized the species for its hunting skills for 2000 years (Squires and Reynolds 1997). In the eastern United States it breeds southward to Pennsylvania and rarely into West Virginia, while in the West, the goshawk is found in mountainous areas south into central Mexico (Squires and Reynolds 1997). Northern populations migrate a short distance south only when triggered by periodic shortages of their principal prey, snowshoe hare and grouse.

In the East, Northern Goshawks prefer to nest below the canopy in large tracts of mature beech-birch-maple hardwood forest, but avoid nesting in conifers. They also use small forest stands or nest near openings such as woodland trails (Squires and Reynolds 1997, Speiser and Bosakowski 1987, Ellison 1985). Breeding activity in Vermont starts by April. The six egg dates for the state range from 16 April to 21 May (Ellison 1985). A report of nest building on 14 June in the second atlas probably was a bird adding material to an active nest. Greenery may be added through the nestling stage, and up to eight alternate nests may be built by a pair (Squires and Reynolds 1997). Nestlings (N = 4) were reported from 5 June to 4 July. Fledglings have been reported from 29 June to 15 August. Although Northern Goshawks are aggressive in defense of their nests and young, both the male and female may become secretive during the incubation period (Speiser and Bosakowski 1991). More than a third of all atlas records in Vermont, New York, and Ontario were confirmations, a substantially higher rate than was found for other woodland raptors.

The Northern Goshawk is absent from the Taconic Mountains and Vermont Valley and rare in the Champlain Valley. There were few reports from the northeastern sector of the state. Although the goshawk was reported in over 60 blocks during the second atlas, this was a 21 percent decline from the first atlas. The species was absent or markedly decreased in the Taconic Moun-

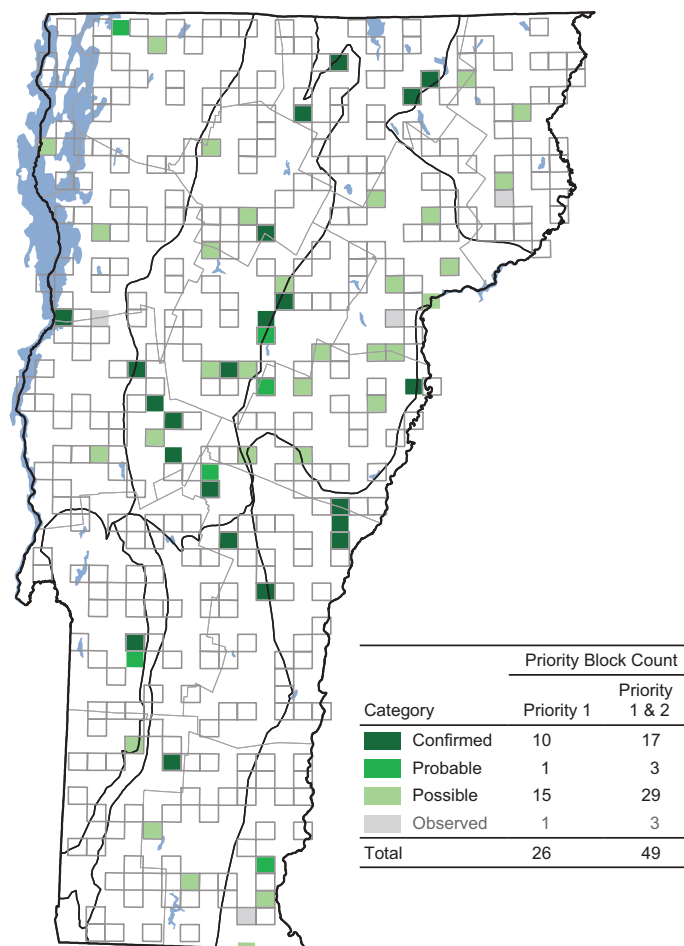
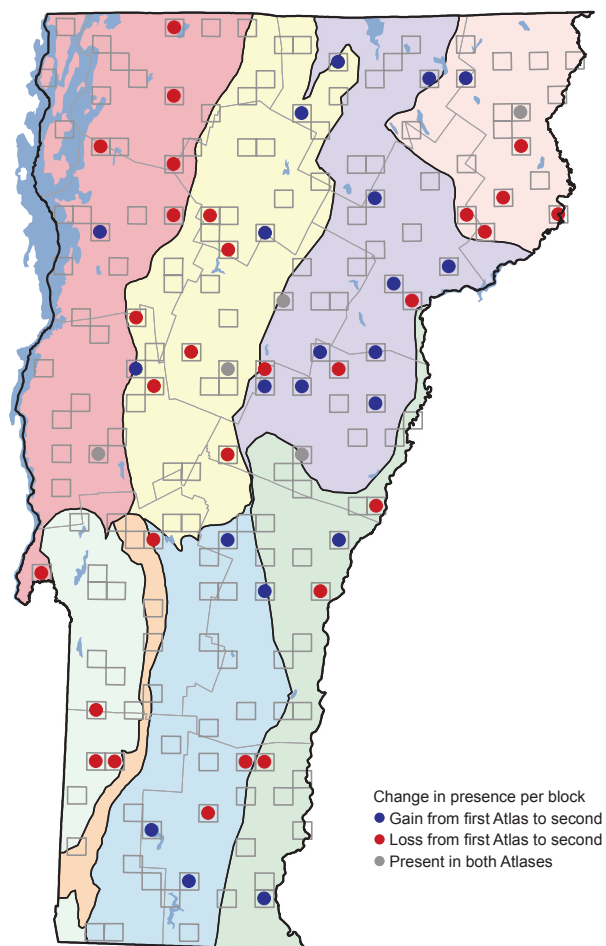


ains, Champlain Valley, and Northeastern Highlands. In contrast, the number of Priority 1 blocks with Northern Goshawk records more than doubled in the Northeast Piedmont. Goshawks continued to occur in forested mountains and, surprisingly, a PO record was reported on 21 April 2005 in Grand Isle.

New York's second atlas found a decline of 20 percent statewide (McGowan and Corwin 2008), nearly identical to Vermont's change. In Pennsylvania, at the southern edge of the species' range, the decrease was even more substantial (27 percent). Ontario found a decline of about 40 percent (Bush 2007). Specific protocols have been developed to survey this species using taped callbacks (Woodbridge and Hargis 2006, Hargis and Woodbridge 2006), which could achieve better population estimates.

The Northern Goshawk, sensitive to habitat fragmentation and human disturbance, is considered a medium-priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Vermont. It is a Species of Special Concern in New York and New Hampshire. The population of Northern Goshawks in the Northeast is likely to remain low because the prey base is Ruffed Grouse and snowshoe hares, species whose populations have declined in much of the region (CPRU 2010, Dessecker et al. 2006). Management recommendations include protection of existing nest sites (because they are generally reused) and maintenance of large tracts of forestland (Crocker-Bedford 1990, Bosakowski and Speiser 1994).

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CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	7	2	- 5	- 71
Northeastern Highlands	6	2	- 4	- 67
Northern Green Mountains	7	5	- 2	- 29
Northern Vermont Piedmont	5	11	+ 6	+ 120
Southern Green Mountains	3	4	+ 1	+ 33
Southern Vermont Piedmont	3	2	- 1	- 33
Taconic Mountains	3	0	- 3	- 100
Vermont Valley	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	34	26	- 8	- 24

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	6	10
Northeastern Highlands	8	6
Northern Green Mountains	21	29
Northern Vermont Piedmont	23	31
Southern Green Mountains	8	10
Southern Vermont Piedmont	12	10
Taconic Mountains	9	4
Vermont Valley	0	0