

Killdeer

Charadrius vociferus



The distinctive double breast band and the ringing *kill-dee, kill-dee* call, often given in flight, contribute to the Killdeer's status as one of Vermont's most easily recognizable birds. Its choice of nest sites, including gardens, parking lots, golf courses, gravel rooftops, athletic fields, farms, and lakesides also places the Killdeer in close proximity to people (Jackson and Jackson 2000). The Killdeer's breeding range, one of the geographically widest of all North American birds, stretches from coast to coast and north to south from eastern Alaska and Newfoundland to the Florida Keys and southern Mexico (Jackson and Jackson 2000).

Killdeer winter from the southern United States to Central America. They return to Vermont in April (Murin and Pfeiffer 2002) and immediately set up territories in areas with sparse or no vegetation within fairly open surroundings. The female lays a clutch of four cryptic eggs in a shallow scrape on the ground, and the chicks hatch after a 25- to 28-day incubation period (Jackson and Jackson 2000). Immediately after hatching the precocial chicks leave the nest and feed themselves. The parents provide defense against predators and brood their young during cold or rainy weather. The chicks can fly 21 to 30 days after hatching, but may remain with their parents for several more weeks.

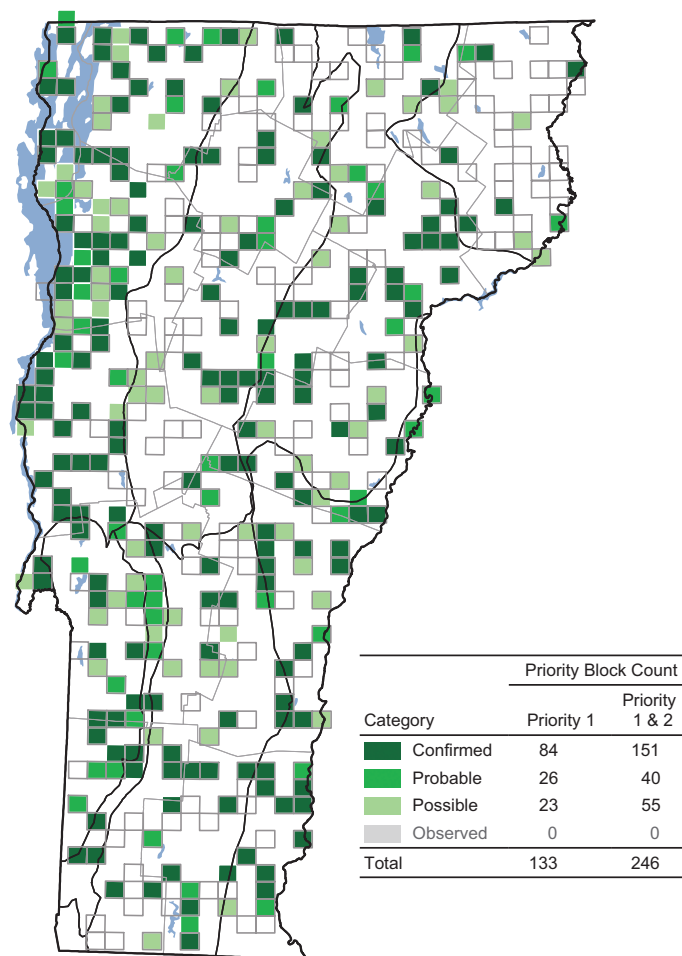
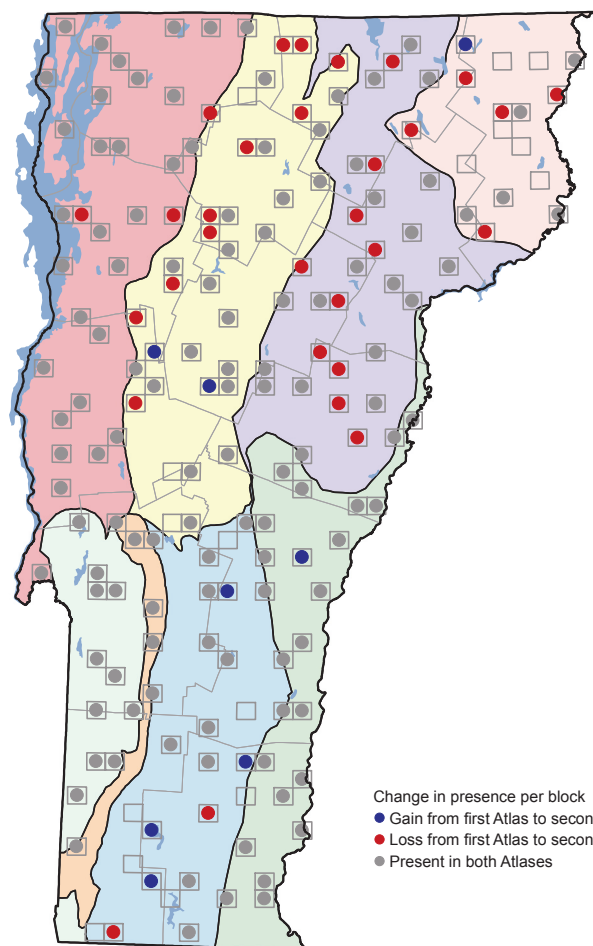
During the second Vermont atlas, Killdeer were recorded in 67 percent of priority blocks. They were mainly found in lowland areas in the Champlain and Connecticut valleys, where urban and agricultural nesting habitats are abundant. Statewide, the number of blocks occupied by Killdeer decreased by 14 percent between the first and second atlases. The decrease was greatest in north-central and northeastern Vermont, where 31 percent fewer blocks were occupied. The southern part of the state had a 6 percent increase in occupied blocks, while the Champlain Valley had a 9 percent decrease.

Between 1982 and 2007, Killdeer counts on Breeding Bird Survey routes in Vermont decreased significantly by 2.5 percent per year. The BBS reported a significant decrease of 0.8 percent annually throughout North Amer-

ica during this period as well (Sauer et al. 2011). The second Ontario atlas reported a 16 percent reduction in the probability of observation for the Killdeer, with the most precipitous drops occurring in the Northern and Southern shields (36 and 29 percent, respectively; Cadman et al. 2007). In contrast, New York's second atlas shows this bird to be widespread outside of high elevation areas, and with little change in distribution over the last twenty years (McGowan 2008).

Abandonment and reforestation of relatively marginal agricultural land may be the most important factor contributing to the Killdeer's decline in Vermont, especially in the northeastern part of the state, where the proportion of agricultural lands lost may have been greatest. Additionally, some agricultural practices (such as plowing, harvest, and chemical applications) along with other human-related disturbance may negatively impact Killdeer productivity (Lokemoen and Beiser 1997, Boutin et al. 1999). Still, the adaptability of this species and its ability to use a wide variety of habitats in coexistence with humans should ensure its continued presence here well into the future.

HECTOR GALBRAITH



CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	33	30	- 3	- 9
Northeastern Highlands	10	6	- 4	- 40
Northern Green Mountains	30	22	- 8	- 27
Northern Vermont Piedmont	30	20	- 10	- 33
Southern Green Mountains	16	18	+ 2	+ 13
Southern Vermont Piedmont	20	21	+ 1	+ 5
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	155	133	- 22	- 14

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	90	27
Northeastern Highlands	29	4
Northern Green Mountains	55	15
Northern Vermont Piedmont	66	17
Southern Green Mountains	57	13
Southern Vermont Piedmont	82	13
Taconic Mountains	80	7
Vermont Valley	100	3