

Baltimore Oriole

Icterus galbula

The brilliant orange plumage of the adult male Baltimore Oriole—combined with the species' conspicuous, pendulous nests—make this bird one of the most familiar of all Nearctic-Neotropical migrants. Wide-ranging across the eastern two-thirds of North America, the species is found from extreme western British Columbia, southeast to eastern Texas and central Georgia, and north to New Brunswick. Northeast of the Great Lakes, the Baltimore Oriole is restricted to southern Quebec and Ontario, which places Vermont toward the northeastern fringe of the species' breeding range. Once considered conspecific with the Bullock's Oriole, the two closely related species were split based on their narrow but stable zone of hybridization (Rising 1996). Recent genetic research has shown that the species are indeed members of two different lineages within the genus *Icterus* (Freeman and Zink 1995).

Baltimore Orioles return to Vermont from wintering sites in Mexico, Central America and northern South America in late April and early May. Typical habitat includes open woodlands, riparian zones, and forest edges with scattered, tall deciduous trees. Females weave their nests high in trees near the extremities of branches (Rising and Flood 1998). During the second atlas, nest building was documented from 14 May to 11 July (N = 61). Egg dates ranged from 2 June to 18 July (N = 5), nestlings from 28 May to 6 July (N = 34), and fledglings from 3 June to 13 August (N = 76). Because Baltimore Orioles are single-brooded (Rising and Flood 1998), late summer nesting dates likely represent renesting attempts after failure of a first nest. About two-thirds of the blocks in which the species was detected included observations of confirmed breeding, which suggests that the data portray an accurate picture of its distribution in the state.

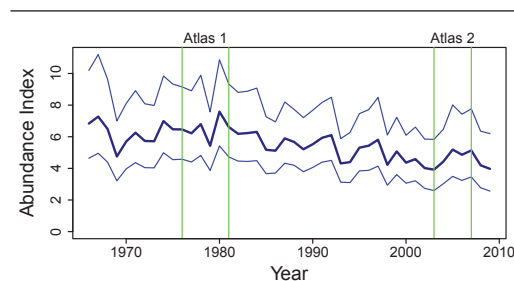
With a North American population estimated at roughly 6 million birds, the Baltimore Oriole is a relatively common icterid (Rich et al. 2004). The species is widely distributed in Vermont, with the exception of the Northeastern Highlands; across the state's biophysical regions, occupancy rates in priority blocks ranged from 81 to 100 percent. Because of land clearing for agriculture

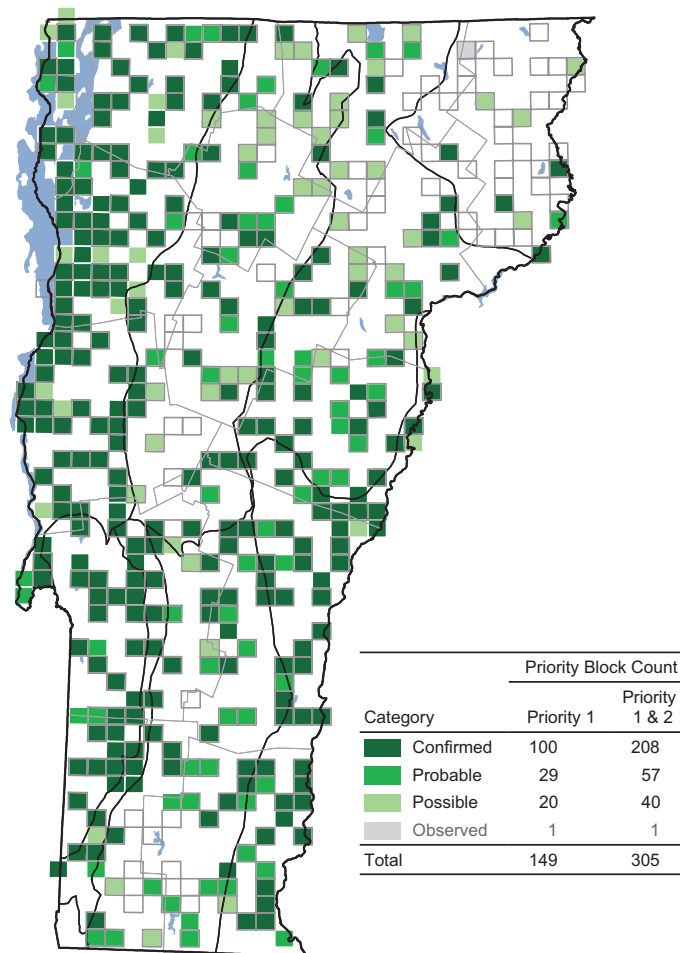
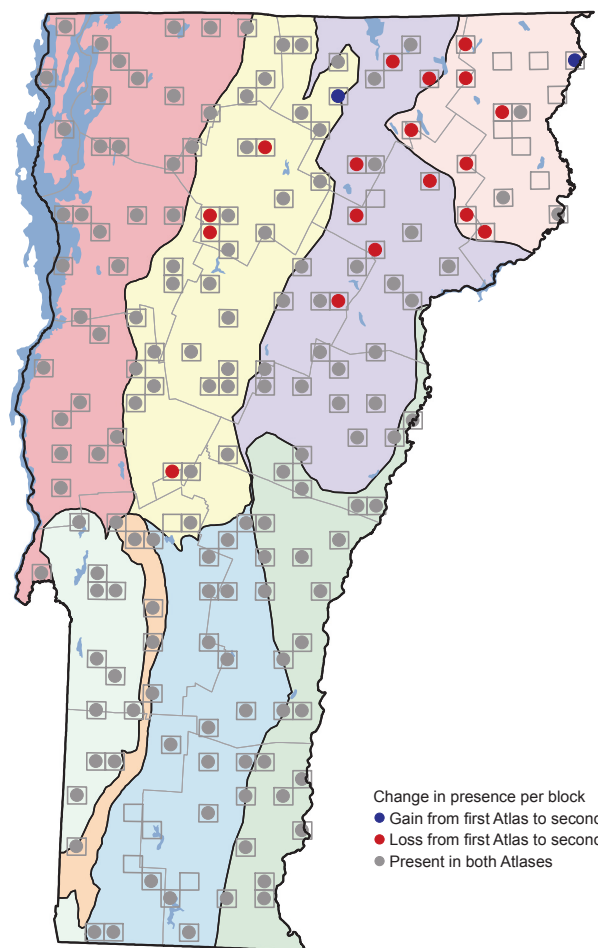


and urban/suburban development, the species is likely far more abundant now than prior to European colonization. Historically, Baltimore Orioles were probably restricted to naturally occurring forest openings such as riparian groves, beaver meadows, and woodlands recovering from wind, fire, or insect damage.

Statewide, the species' block occupancy declined by 10 percent between the first and second atlases. The declines in heavily forested regions of the state (the Northeastern Highlands, Northern Green Mountains, and Northern Vermont Piedmont) suggest that forest maturation may be affecting the species' distribution. In the rest of the state, the Baltimore Oriole's range remained relatively stable. Breeding Bird Survey data for Vermont suggest a generally stable population, though they show a non-significant decline from a population peak in the early 1980s (Sauer et al. 2011). Other states and provinces that have completed a second atlas found mixed trends: New York documented a 3 percent decrease (McGowan and Corwin 2008) and Ontario a 20 percent decrease (Cadman et al. 2007), while Maryland found no change (Ellison 2010) and Pennsylvania a 7 percent increase (Wil-

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	10	4	- 6	- 60
Northern Green Mountains	33	30	- 3	- 9
Northern Vermont Piedmont	29	22	- 7	- 24
Southern Green Mountains	23	23	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	21	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	165	149	- 16	- 10

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	100	24
Northeastern Highlands	24	3
Northern Green Mountains	81	17
Northern Vermont Piedmont	83	18
Southern Green Mountains	83	15
Southern Vermont Piedmont	100	13
Taconic Mountains	100	7
Vermont Valley	100	3

son et al. 2012). In Vermont, declines in Baltimore Oriole populations are likely more related to forest maturation and changes in land use patterns than to development per se. The blocks from which Baltimore Orioles disappeared between the first and second atlases were concentrated in the central and northern parts of the state, generally away from areas with heavy development pressure. Current declines in agriculture and a steady trend of forest succession suggest that contraction of the Baltimore Oriole's range in Vermont will continue.

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