

Long-eared Owl

Asio otus

Although almost certainly an annual breeder in Vermont, the Long-eared Owl remains an enigma, poorly known, and seldom seen even by the most active observers. Widely distributed across portions of North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia, the Long-eared Owl breeds across northern and montane forests of North America from the Yukon to the Maritime Provinces, southward to Baja and Pennsylvania, and sporadically to the Blue Ridge of Virginia (Marks et al. 1994). Vermont is near the species' southern breeding limit in the East (Marks et al. 1994).

The habits of this mostly nocturnal species remain poorly understood. The Long-eared Owl is a migrant, staging in areas in response to prey availability (Bent 1938, Korpimäki 1992, Houston 2005). Long-eared Owls are most frequently observed in communal winter roosts where rodents are abundant; these sites may be the next summer's nesting location (D. Kibbe pers. obs., Houston 2005). Vermont hosts both wintering and migrant Long-eared Owls. Because nest sites are often within the same habitat that harbors wintering birds, prey abundance is assumed to induce wintering birds to stay and breed (Village 1981). High prey abundance has resulted in double broods being raised in a single year (Marks and Perkins 1999).

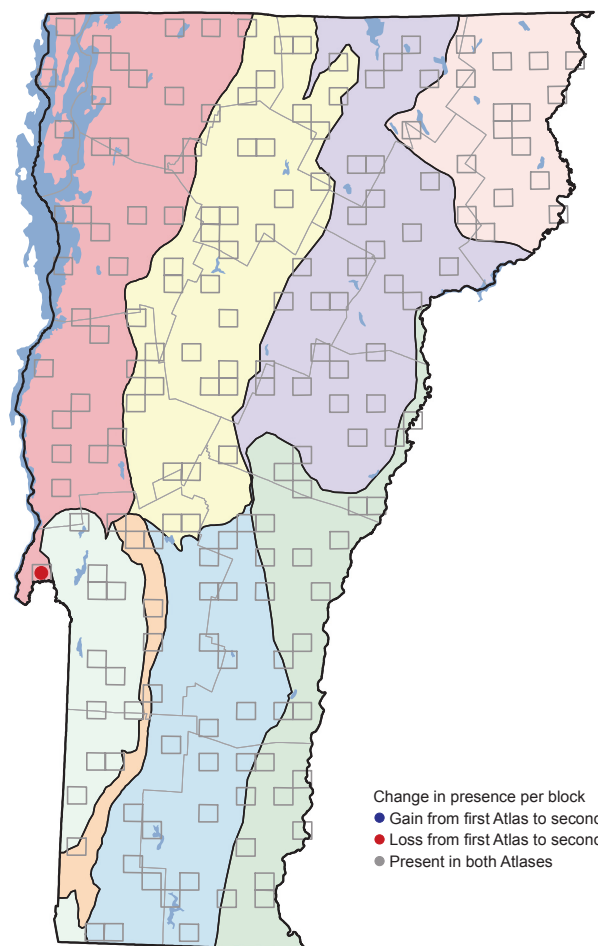
Long-eared Owls migrate north in March, the same month in which breeding usually begins. The species nests and roosts in open forest and dense cover adjacent to open ground, where it forages mostly for small mammals. Its superb hearing and long wings make it an effective predator, exploiting the same prey base as Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers. Long-eared Owls may utilize abandoned crow, squirrel, or other raptor nests and, less frequently, cavities in trees or cliffs (Marks et al. 1994). There is a dearth of breeding data from Vermont (Pistorius 1985); the single CO record during the atlas consisted of two fledglings reported on 8 June (M. Medler pers. comm.). Incubation begins with the laying of the first egg, and young hatch asynchronously four weeks later. Young leave the nest in as little as three weeks. Fledglings with vestiges of natal down may remain near the nest site for a month or more (Marks et al. 1994).



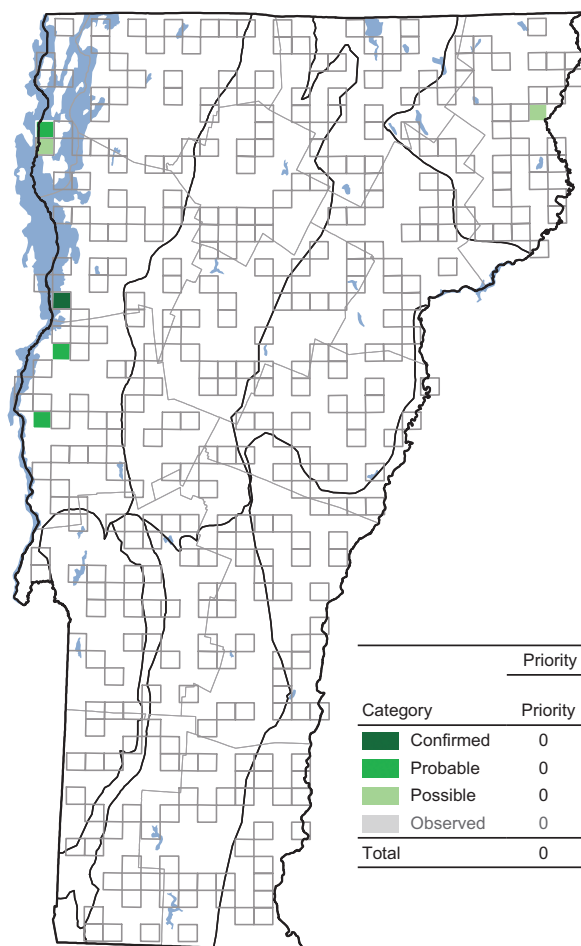
The Long-eared Owl is most frequently reported in the Champlain Valley, where open grasslands provide the species' preferred hunting grounds. About a quarter of the historic summer records for the state, however, are from higher elevations, suggesting that breeding may occur wherever suitable foraging habitat, a robust prey base, and nest cover coincide. Because only 6 breeding records were reported during the second atlas (compared to 5 during the first atlas), any assumptions about changes in abundance or distribution would be wildly speculative. It is likely that few atlasers have field experience with the calls of Long-eared Owls, although it was one of several species on the playback tapes that were distributed to atlasers. Although the begging calls of the young can carry for some distance, adult vocalizations around the nest are at best subdued.

In New York, a decrease of 41 percent was noted during the second atlas; true to their itinerant nature, birds occupied only 2 of the same blocks in both atlases, out of 127 blocks where the bird was found in either atlas (McGowan and Corwin 2008). Ontario atlasers also found a high turnover in block occurrence, with only 6 percent showing repeat occupancy during the second atlas (Konze 2007). Pennsylvania found a decrease of 17 percent during the second atlas (Wilson et al. 2012).

Neighboring New England states include the Long-eared Owl on their respective endangered species lists. Succession of pasture and fallow land into forest may



Change in presence per block
 ● Gain from first Atlas to second
 ● Loss from first Atlas to second
 ● Present in both Atlases



Category	Priority Block Count	
	Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	0	1
Probable	0	0
Possible	0	1
Observed	0	0
Total	0	2

CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	1	0	-1	-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	1	0	-1	-100

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	2	100
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

have reduced potential foraging areas, and provision of clearings could benefit this species. However, managing for a nomadic raptor that responds to the boom and bust of rodent outbreaks (Korpimäki 1992, Korpimäki and Norrdahl 1991)—and seldom nests in the same area on a repeated basis—may have only a small chance of success.

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