

Brown Creeper

Certhia americana

The Brown Creeper is a shy, quiet recluse. As it works its way around and around a tree trunk, moving ever higher, its brown plumage blends in with the bark. Once it reaches the top, it flutters off to the base of another tree, where it resolutely renews its explorations. Brown Creepers breed across much of North America, their range extending south along the mountains into Mexico and north along the coast to Alaska. They are absent only from the treeless areas of the West. During the winter, northern populations move south and may be found throughout the lower forty-eight states (Hejl et al. 2002). The species is present in Vermont year round, but Ellison (1985) indicates there is some migratory movement within our breeding population.

Brown Creepers return north relatively early, and territorial songs may be heard in February; it is not known whether birds sing during northward migration. Perhaps not surprisingly, given their cryptic color and habit of freezing in the presence of intruders, Brown Creepers hide their nests behind the loose bark of dead trees, a fact that eluded naturalists through most of the nineteenth century (Hejl et al. 2002). Mature stands of coniferous or deciduous trees are preferred habitat, but nesting birds may be found in any area containing dead trees with loose bark, included flooded impoundments and burned areas.

Atlas data reveal that nest building occurred in Vermont as early as 30 April, but most records were from May into mid-June (N = 7). All Vermont egg dates (N = 4) are from June (Ellison 1985). Incubation takes 15 days, during which time the male may feed the female on the nest. Because most nests are not visible, this behavior can be easily mistaken for feeding young. Based on data from both atlases, nestlings have been reported as early as 28 May and as late as 18 July. Fledglings have been sighted from 11 June through the end of July (N = 32). Nestlings fledge after 15 to 20 days in the nest but remain dependent on the adults for up to three weeks in the vicinity of the nest (Davis 1978). Although vocal early in their breeding season, Brown Creepers have largely ceased sing-

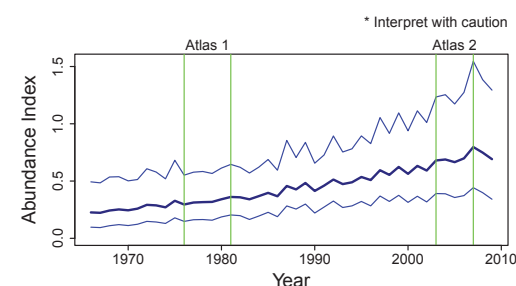


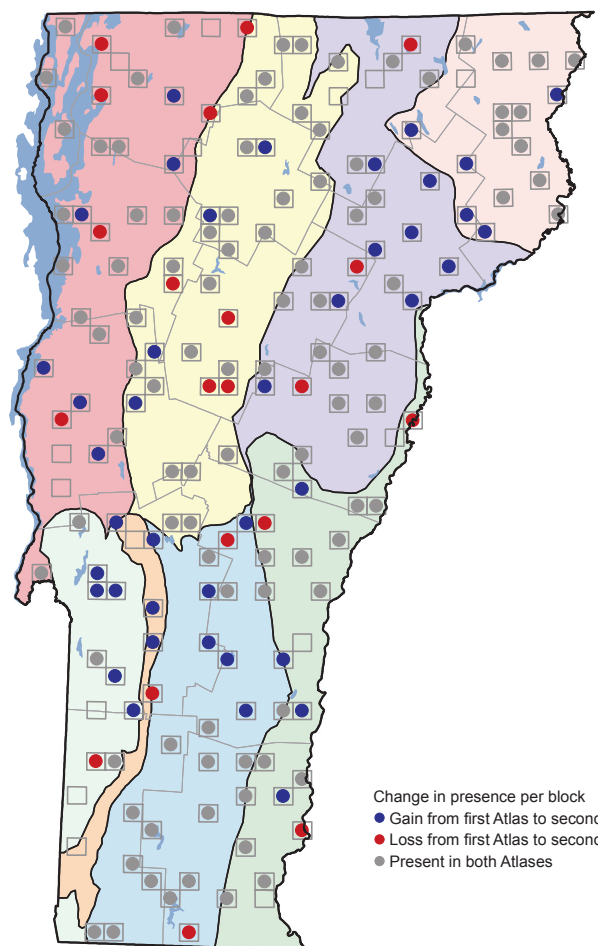
ing by June and July (Hejl et al. 2002), when most atlas work was carried out. Their habitat requirements are so general that it is difficult to target the species when surveying. Consequently, encounters by atlasers may be dependent on spending adequate time in a block.

Brown Creepers are found throughout Vermont. As during the first atlas, they were less common in portions of the Champlain and Vermont valleys where agriculture or suburban development limit the availability of potential nesting sites. Overall there was a gain of 21 blocks (17 percent), though there is no clear spatial pattern to block gains and losses. Populations in the state increased significantly by 3.1 percent per year from 1982 to 2007 according to Breeding Bird Survey data (Sauer et al. 2011).

New York's second atlas found a 5 percent increase in blocks occupied by Brown Creepers statewide; increases occurred largely in upstate regions, with a 72 percent decrease in coastal lowlands (McGowan 2008). Atlas data

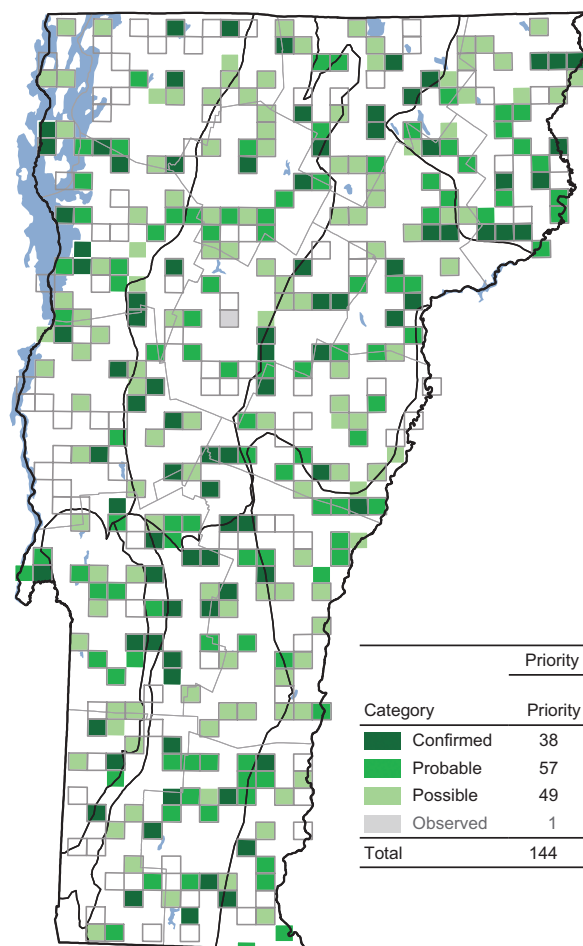
RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	22	22	+ 0	+ 0
Northeastern Highlands	11	16	+ 5	+ 45
Northern Green Mountains	30	30	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	20	25	+ 5	+ 25
Southern Green Mountains	21	24	+ 3	+ 14
Southern Vermont Piedmont	15	16	+ 1	+ 7
Taconic Mountains	4	8	+ 4	+ 100
Vermont Valley	0	3	+ 3	+ 300
Totals	123	144	+ 21	+ 17



Category	Priority Block Count	
	Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	38	79
Probable	57	94
Possible	49	105
Observed	1	1
Total	144	278

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	58	15
Northeastern Highlands	83	11
Northern Green Mountains	83	19
Northern Vermont Piedmont	83	19
Southern Green Mountains	80	16
Southern Vermont Piedmont	72	10
Taconic Mountains	80	6
Vermont Valley	62	2

from Pennsylvania noted a drop of 4 percent (Wilson et al. 2012). In Ontario, no apparent change was noted in the south, where the species is uncommon, but northern areas appeared to have substantially more Brown Creepers than previously recorded (McLaren 2007).

Forest management practices that maintain old-growth and mature forestlands in large tracts are vital to the health of this species. Western populations have shown declines in areas where logging is prevalent (Hejl et al. 2002). In contrast, the Brown Creeper appears to have a firm hold in Vermont's maturing forests; these

woodlands now provide quality habitat where the species was formerly rare (Ellison 1985).

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