

Palm Warbler

Dendroica palmarum

As is the case for many northern warblers, the Palm Warbler was first encountered on its wintering grounds in Hispaniola, and was named accordingly. Had early ornithologists encountered this species on its breeding grounds, perhaps it would be known as the “Bog Warbler” or “Muskeg Warbler.” The Palm Warbler is truly a species of the far north, breeding farther into northern Canada than any warbler save the Blackpoll (Wilson 1996). Specifically, its range extends from the Yukon eastward to Newfoundland, and southward to central Alberta, northern Wisconsin, and northern New England. There are two subspecies; the one breeding in Vermont is the Yellow Palm Warbler, which nests east of Lake Superior (Wilson 1996). The western subspecies is a regular fall migrant through New England (Galbraith et al. 2010).

Palm Warblers breed primarily in bogs and fens where, unlike other members of the genus, they build their nests directly on the ground, under the boughs of small conifers. They seem to prefer semi-open habitats, and have been recorded breeding in open forest and barrens, including regenerating clear-cuts (Wilson 1996). They are among the earliest warblers to arrive in Vermont each spring, often by the middle of April. Data for breeding phenology are limited, but adults have been seen carrying food as early as 24 May in the Northeastern Highlands (VCE unpubl. data). Most CO records were of fledglings, reported from 27 June to 17 July (N = 5).

The Palm Warbler is expanding its range southward in the Northeast. It was not confirmed breeding in the state until June 1993, when adults carrying food were observed at Yellow Bogs, a remote section of the Nulhegan River watershed in northern Essex County (VCE unpubl. data), and went unrecorded during the first atlas. During the second atlas, the Palm Warbler was recorded in 7 blocks and confirmed in 4; all but 1 were in the Northeastern Highlands. The exception was a PR record near Wilmington, in the Southern Green Mountains.

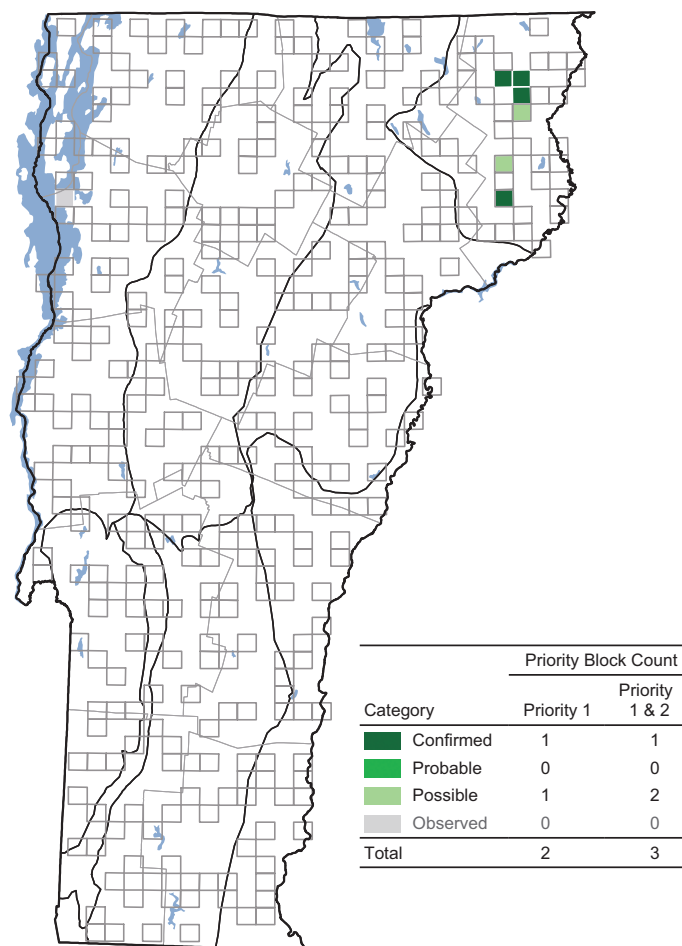
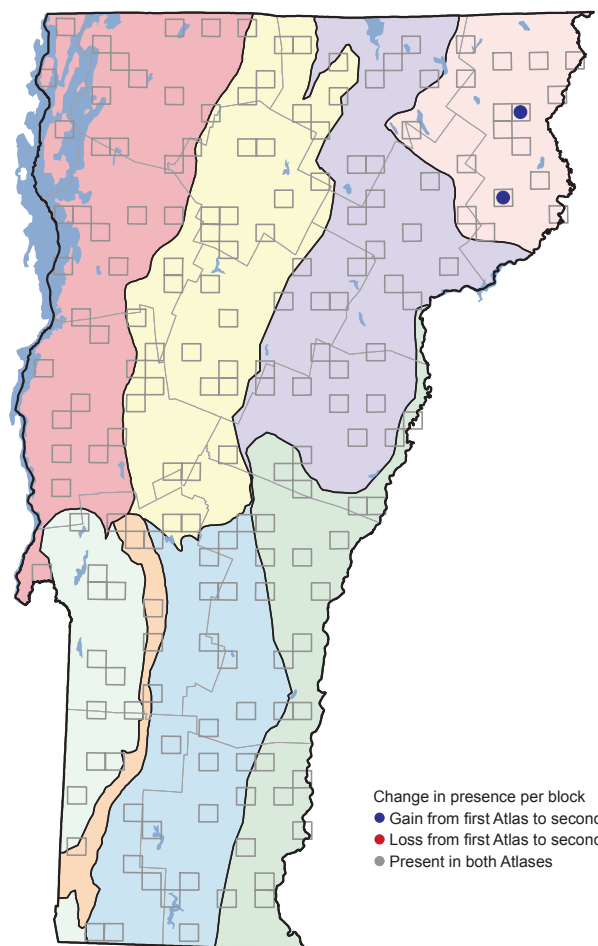
This southward expansion has also been documented



elsewhere along the southern edge of the species' range. In Ontario the Palm Warbler increased by 74 percent between atlases (Cadman et al. 2007), while in New York, the number of occupied blocks went from 1 to 43 (McGowan and Corwin 2008). In New Hampshire the Palm Warbler was known to breed in the far northern portion of the state as far back as 1957, a distribution that remained unchanged through most of the twentieth century (Richards 1994). Then, in the 1990s and 2000s, Palm Warblers were documented from the White Mountains and points well to the south in the western highlands of New Hampshire, a pattern similar to what was observed in Vermont. Despite the potential to confuse the Palm Warbler with similar-sounding species, Breeding Bird Survey data from the southern fringe of its range show increases in most regions (Sauer et al. 2011), complementing the range expansions documented by atlases.

It is unknown why populations of this northern denizen are creeping southward. Its colonization of northern Vermont and New York over the past twenty-five years would seem to contradict the predicted northward shifts of boreal species in response to climate change. Extensive timber harvesting in northern Maine could have allowed populations there to increase, with dispersing individuals moving into new areas to the west. Pervasive increases as far west as Ontario (Cadman et al. 2007) and Minnesota (Sauer et al. 2011), however, indicate that it is likely that other, yet unknown, factors are at play.

Given its slow but steady march southward through the Northeast, the Palm Warbler is not a species that warrants a high level of conservation concern. At the same time, there is little information on the species' habitat



CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northeastern Highlands	0	2	+ 2	+ 200
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	0	2	+ 2	+ 200

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	0	0
Northeastern Highlands	8	100
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

requirements (but see Wilson et al. 1998), and even less on its reproductive success; more data about both topics may be of value in the event that climate change does begin to affect the isolated bogs where it often occurs.

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