

Great Crested Flycatcher

Myiarchus crinitus



The Great Crested Flycatcher has unique features that set it apart from other flycatchers in eastern North America. It is our only cavity-nesting flycatcher and often incorporates a shed snake-skin into its nest, although shiny plastic, cellophane, and birch bark have proven to be equally acceptable. Like most members of its genus, the Great Crested Flycatcher is a raucous bird, usually located by its loud *wheep* call before it is spotted in the forest canopy, where it forages for insects. This flycatcher breeds in eastern North America into southern Canada but is most abundant in the southeastern United States (Sauer et al. 2008). Coniferous woodlands are avoided, and the species reaches its northern limits just to our north, where deciduous forest gives way to spruce and fir.

The Great Crested Flycatcher is one of few forest-dwelling birds in the eastern United States to benefit from forest fragmentation, as it prefers to breed and forage in open forest edge (Lanyon 1997). It winters in Central America and returns to Vermont's deciduous and mixed woodlands in early May. Within 2 to 3 weeks, birds have paired, selected a nest site, and initiated nest construction. A knothole in the trunk or major branch of a tree is the most common nest site. Woodpecker cavities are often used, as well as an array of artificial sites, including fence posts, bluebird boxes, and duck boxes (D. Kibbe pers. obs.). Most natural nest sites are more than 3 meters (10 feet) off the ground. By late May, pairs have started their clutch (usually 4 to 6 eggs). The two-week incubation period occupies the first half of June. Nestlings normally remain in the cavity for 14 days. Vermont's earliest fledgling date is 17 June, but the majority of fledglings are sighted in July.

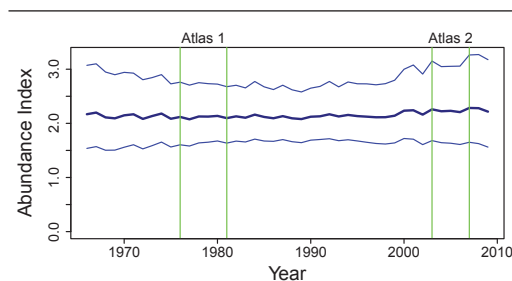
The Champlain Valley is Vermont's stronghold for the species, where they were found in all priority blocks. Portions of the Green Mountains and the northeastern part of the state dominated by spruce-fir forest have fewer Great Crested Flycatchers (Norse and Ellison 1985), and it was in these areas where substantial losses were incurred since the first atlas. Forest maturation and a decrease in logging have likely reduced edge habitat. As boreal forest

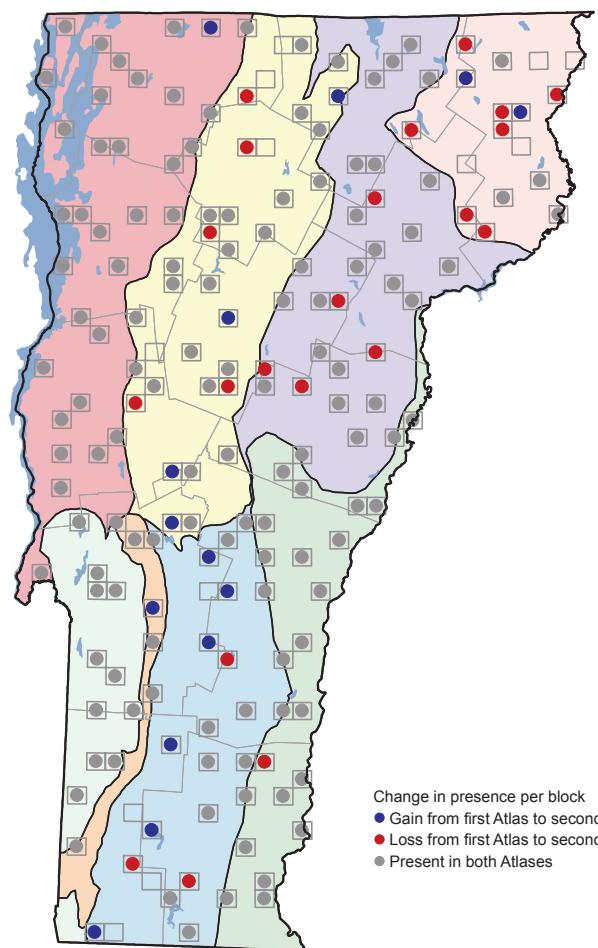
—which predominates in these regions—is a marginal habitat for the species, it would be expected to be the first to be abandoned when populations decline.

Data from the Breeding Bird Survey indicate no significant changes in Great Crested Flycatcher abundance from 1982 to 2007 in Vermont or New England, and slight but significant increases in the Eastern Region (Sauer et al. 2011). Data from other atlases in the region show patterns similar to that of the Vermont atlas. The New York atlas found a decrease of 3 percent in the number of blocks occupied, with the greatest losses in heavily forested areas, while occurrences in New York's portion of the Champlain Valley increased (McGowan 2008). The Ontario atlas found an 8 percent decrease (Cadman et al. 2007). Farther south, Pennsylvania and Maryland both exhibited a slight increase in block occurrence (Wilson et al. 2012, Ellison 2010).

Selective cutting that leaves an open understory is beneficial to Great Crested Flycatcher as long as sufficient snags for nesting are left in place. Large, over-mature de-

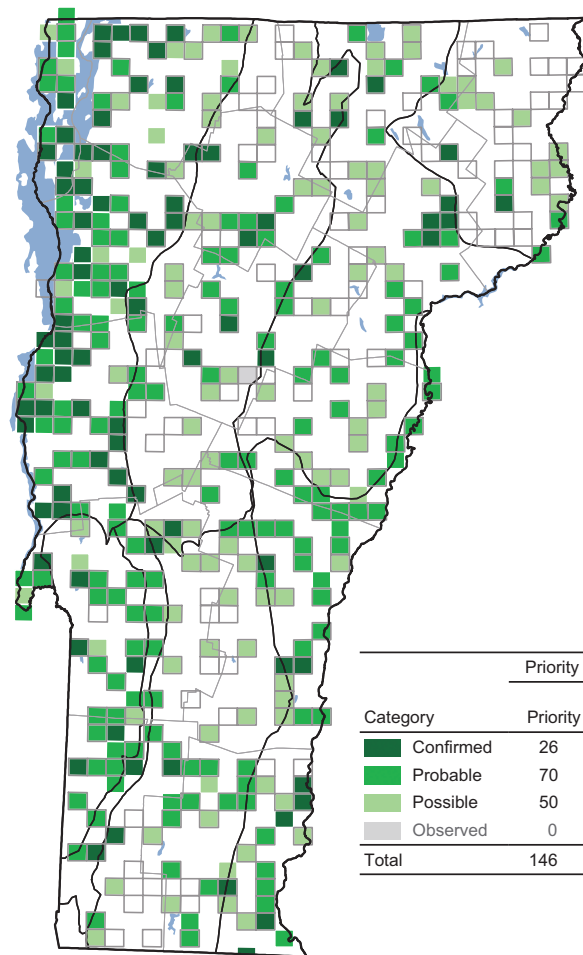
RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	32	33	+ 1	+ 3
Northeastern Highlands	11	6	- 5	- 45
Northern Green Mountains	27	26	- 1	- 4
Northern Vermont Piedmont	30	25	- 5	- 17
Southern Green Mountains	17	20	+ 3	+ 18
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	20	- 1	- 5
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	4	5	+ 1	+ 25
Totals	153	146	- 7	- 5



DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	100	25
Northeastern Highlands	40	5
Northern Green Mountains	73	16
Northern Vermont Piedmont	75	17
Southern Green Mountains	73	14
Southern Vermont Piedmont	95	13
Taconic Mountains	95	7
Vermont Valley	100	3

ciduous trees filled with natural cavities in which to nest are a necessity. Removal of snags under the guise of clean forestry, however, is a detriment to this species. Though Great Crested Flycatchers may successfully nest in buildings and homes, Morrison (1988) determined that the species is more likely to accept a small nest box—15 x 15 x 20 centimeters (6 x 6 x 8 inches)—with a 5-centimeter (2-inch) entrance, hung at least 3 meters (10 feet) above the ground. Squirrels and European Starlings, both potential competitors for cavities, were deterred by this design. Using such boxes, homeowners may be able to lure

Great Crested Flycatchers to their yards even if the existing canopy trees are too young to provide cavities, or if existing cavities are overrun with squirrels.

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