

Common Raven

Corvus corax

The status of few native Vermont birds has vacillated as much as that of the Common Raven. Absent from Vermont for decades, the raven has only reappeared and recolonized Vermont in the past 20 years. This recovery continues, and the Common Raven is fairly prevalent over most of the state where cliffs provide favorable nest sites.

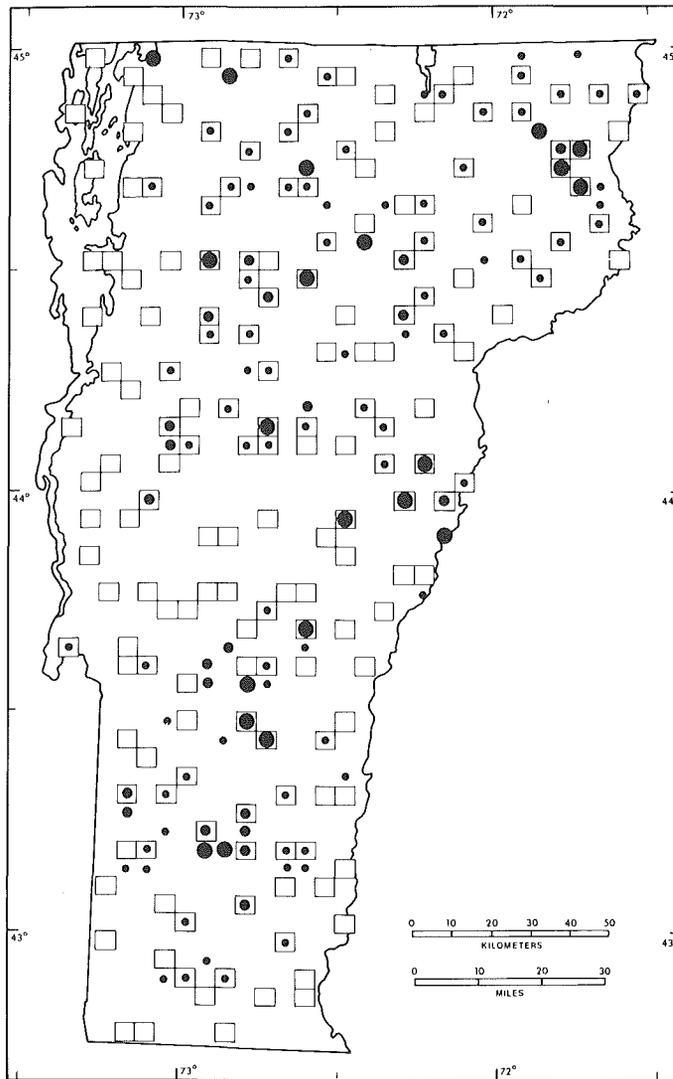
In the eastern U.S. at the time of European settlement, the raven was found over most of New England and New York (Bull 1974). The raven "soon became known as a killer of sickly sheep and new-born lambs, and the settlers waged a relentless warfare upon it" (Forbush 1927). Little information is available on its status through the 1700s, but by the beginning of the nineteenth century the raven was virtually extirpated from most of New England, including Vermont. Thompson (1842) wrote: "It has for several years been less frequently seen in Vermont than formerly, and it is always a rare bird here compared to the Crow." Samuels, in his more careful 1872 work, said that "this bird is an extremely rare resident of New England. I have never heard of its breeding here." A few ravens were reported in Vermont during the first 12 years of the twentieth century (Perkins and Howe 1901; Fortner et al. 1933), but those birds may have been wanderers from the Adirondack Mountains of New York, where ravens were probably not extirpated until the end of the 1920s (Bishop 1980). There is only one Vermont report of the raven between 1912 and 1961, at Westmore on June 30, 1938 (Morgan 1938).

During the period of its lowest population in Vermont, the raven was observed along the coast of Maine (Palmer 1949); Vermont's repopulation may have begun with a westward expansion of those Maine ravens. The current raven recovery dates from 1961, when a group of 8 to 10 ravens were seen on June 29 in Peacham (J. D. Stewart, pers. comm.). There are three to four other rec-



ords from the Northeast Highlands from 1962 to 1965, and at least a few ravens were breeding there by the mid-1960s. On May 28, 1965 a young raven that fell from a nest containing three young (near Sutton) was brought to the Fairbanks Museum in St. Johnsbury. Ravens were reported as resident and breeding in numbers up to 12 in the Newport-Morgan-Westmore area by 1969 (Eldred, Field notes). From the Northeast Highlands the raven population has steadily increased and spread over most of the state; the most dramatic increases have occurred since 1972.

Though Common Ravens utilize open areas for scavenging, they require shaded and undisturbed forest retreats for nesting. Vermont's forest acreage shrank from approximately 82% of the state's area in 1790 to a low of about 36% around 1880 (Garland 1977). At that time, when forest land was limited, what remained was extensively utilized—factors which would have eliminated the undisturbed nesting sites that the species requires (Bishop 1980). White-tailed deer were also virtually wiped out in Vermont during the period of heaviest forest exploitation (Garland 1977). The reforestation of the state and the resurgence of the deer herd during the mid-twentieth century, with the consequent increase in winter die-off of deer (creating carrion for the raven to eat) no doubt contributed to the raven's reestablishment in Vermont.



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 85 (48%)

Possible breeding: 59 (69.5% of total)
 Probable breeding: 14 (16.5% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 12 (14.0% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	7	23	8
Green Mountains	33	61	39
North Central	12	63	14
Northeast Highlands	13	81	15
East Central	9	47	11
Taconic Mountains	4	25	5
Eastern Foothills	7	29	8

The raven is an omnivore, and “almost any kind of animal food it can catch, kill or find is grist to its mill” (Bent 1946). Ravens sometimes follow plows in spring to catch exposed insects, and often eat berries in fall.

Pairs mate for life. The nest is a large mass of sticks lined with various soft materials. Nests may be used for many years; they may be 0.6–0.9 m (2–3 ft) across and up to 1.2 m (4 ft) deep. Cliff nests are normally placed in a dark, well-shaded area with a rock overhang to protect the nest from above and with a vertical cliff face below. The much scarcer tree nests are usually in tall emergent trees 14–30 m (45–100 ft) high. Pairs normally nest several miles apart. Nest

building has been observed in Vermont from March 24 until April 24. The one record in the state of a nest containing eggs is for April 30; nests containing young have been reported from April 29 to June 16, and fledged young have been seen on June 17.

Three to 7 (usually 4 to 6) eggs are laid. Incubation is by the female, and takes 18 to 20 days (Bishop 1980; Terres 1980). The male feeds the female on the nest, and both parents feed the young and bring them water in their throats. The young fly 35 to 42 days after hatching (Terres 1980). Only one brood is produced in a season, though pairs may renest if the first attempt fails.

G. FRANK OATMAN