

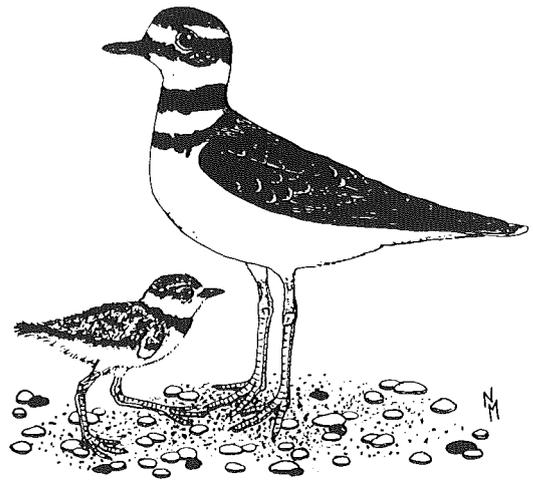
Killdeer

Charadrius vociferus

The Killdeer breeds in a variety of open habitats with low or sparse vegetation. The species takes readily to areas disturbed by human activities, such as lawns, fairgrounds, parking lots, dumps, newly planted fields, pastureland, athletic fields, and golf courses. Within the last century, Killdeer have begun nesting on the large, low, flat-roofed buildings that characterize modern shopping malls (Pickwell 1925; Fisk 1978); such nesting has been noted in Burlington, Vermont (W. G. Ellison, pers. observ.). In a life history of Killdeer, Mace (1978) noted that the lowest breeding densities of Killdeer in his Minnesota study area occurred in cultivated fields having plants more than 15 cm (6 in) high. However, Lenington (1980) noted that parents in the same study area led the precocial young to coarsely vegetated sites that provided hiding spots.

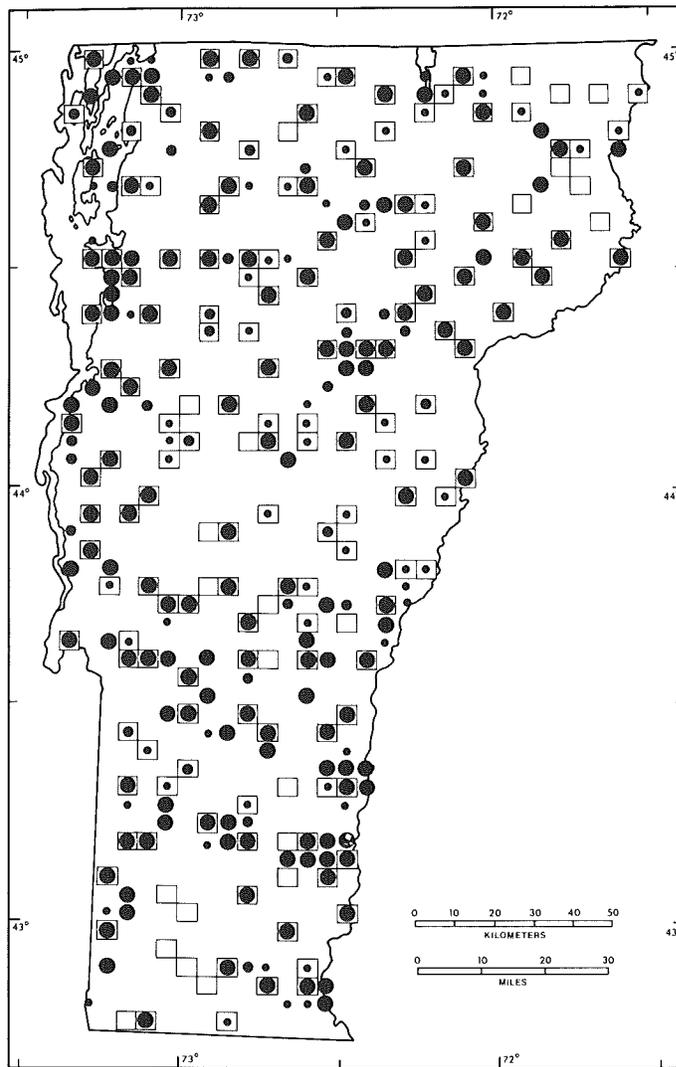
The Killdeer is a conspicuous and noisy shorebird, whose clear, piercing calls are readily elicited by intruders into its breeding territories. Confirmation is relatively easy, as the Atlas Project's 65% confirmation rate for the species indicates. Nests may be located by searching areas occupied by the birds in May. Nests containing eggs provided 20% of Atlas Project confirmations. The Killdeer is well known for its array of distraction behaviors, which accounted for 26% of confirmations. The young, which are relatively easy to observe, provided by far the largest number (52%) of confirmations in Vermont.

The Killdeer is among the earliest migratory birds to return to Vermont in the spring. The first arrivals are generally seen in mid March, rarely as early as late February. Nesting commences in April. The nest, a shallow scrape in the earth, is usually decorated with a scattering of light-colored objects. Eggs usually number 4, and are buff with dark brown or blackish blotches and spots. Egg dates for 17 Vermont nests range from April 26 to June 18; early dates for downy young indicate that incubation starts



as early as the first week of April. The incubation period is 24 to 26 days (Nickell 1943). The young are precocial and leave the nest within a day; this is also true for roof-nesting birds, whose chicks must leap to the ground to accompany their parents to the feeding territory (Demaree 1975). The young fledge at 29 to 34 days and remain with their parents for only 3 to 4 days afterward (Lenington 1980). Dates for downy young in Vermont range from April 24 to August 2 (12 records). Killdeer are occasionally double-brooded, and may nest up to four times in a single breeding season if forced to by previous nest failures (Nickell 1943). The autumn migration in Vermont commences in late July and continues until late October, with two apparent peaks, one in August (presumably adults) and another in late September (presumably juveniles).

The Killdeer was considered common in New England during the mid-nineteenth century. The species declined drastically during the latter half of that century because many were shot for sale at food markets, and it was considered a scarce migrant in Vermont in the 1890s and early 1900s (Davenport 1907; Ross 1906a). In Vermont breeding apparently did not resume until 1914, when nesting was reported in Rutland County (Kent 1916); in 1915, nesting occurred in Bennington County (Ross 1924). As late as 1946 the Killdeer was considered scarce in the Wells River area (W. P. Smith,



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 155 (87%)
 Possible breeding: 41 (27% of total)
 Probable breeding: 13 (8% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 101 (65% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	31	100	20.0
Green Mountains	41	76	26.4
North Central	19	100	12.3
Northeast Highlands	9	56	5.8
East Central	19	100	12.3
Taconic Mountains	16	100	10.3
Eastern Foothills	20	83	12.9

1945-51). At present, the Killdeer is widespread and common, indicating a healthy recovery.

Killdeer were recorded in 87% of the priority blocks in Vermont. They were recorded in all of the priority blocks in the Champlain Lowlands, the North Central and East Central regions, and the Taconic Mountains. The lowest incidences of occurrence were in the heavily forested Northeast Highlands and Green Mountains, as might be expected given this plover's predilection for sparsely vegetated barren areas.

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