

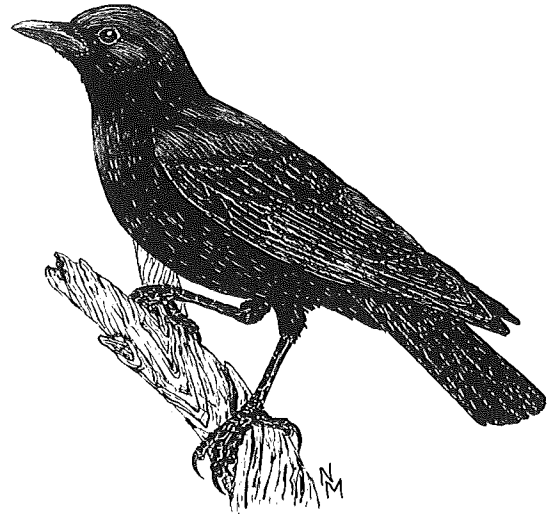
## American Crow

*Corvus brachyrhynchos*

American Crows require open areas for feeding and trees for nest sites. They favor areas with extensive fields and small- to medium-sized woodlots over extensive woodlands and open landscapes (Johnston 1961). The species is principally a terrestrial forager. Flocks and small groups will feed on the ground, with one or more birds on nearby lookouts to give warning of approaching danger. This species' broad diet includes large insects, carrion, small rodents, the eggs and nestlings of birds, fruits, nuts, and other seeds.

The American Crow is quite common in Vermont. However, its nest, though large, is difficult to locate as the birds become almost unnaturally silent during incubation and immediately afterward. Only 16% of the Atlas Project confirmations were for nests with eggs or young. The begging calls of fledglings are very distinctive; these calls are nasal and harsh—*karr* rather than the familiar *caw* of adults—and are given in series that ends in a throaty, gargling sound if the young are being fed. Observers must interpret this call cautiously, as Townsend (1927) found that adult females may give a similar call during incubation. The most frequently used code for confirming this species in Vermont was *FL*, for recently fledged young; these accounted for 59% of all confirmations.

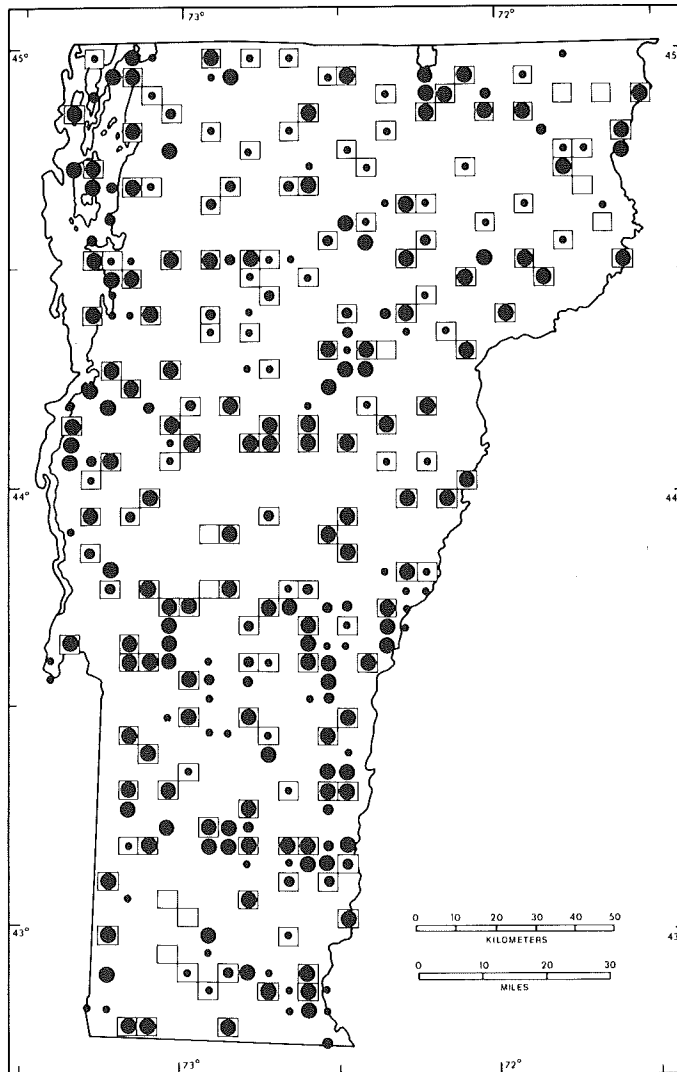
American Crows reside in Vermont throughout the year, although their populations vary seasonally at high elevations. Large migrating flocks, sometimes numbering several thousand birds, are seen in early spring and mid-autumn; however, the migratory behavior among crows in Vermont has never been determined. In early spring flocks of crows break up into small groups of two to five birds, which apparently include the young of previous years and parents (Stokes 1979). This is also a period of intergroup fighting and of aerial territorial chases. Nest building is usually



under way by late March or early April. The nest is a bulky structure of sticks, weed stalks, and vines lined with a variety of soft, fibrous materials. Nests are normally placed in the trunk fork of a tall tree, occasionally in the fork of a sturdy side limb. Crows seem to prefer coniferous trees, when available, as nest sites. The average height of eight Vermont nests was 13 m (42 ft).

The eggs are blue to blue-green with variable dark brown and gray blotches and spots. The clutch size of 18 Vermont nests ranged from 3 to 8 eggs, with an average of 5.1. Dates for 19 Vermont nests containing eggs range from April 9 to May 17. The incubation period lasts about 18 days (Bent 1946). The three dates for nestlings on record for Vermont range from June 3 to June 21. According to Bent (1946), young crows are fully feathered at 4 weeks and depart the nest within the following week. Young remain with their parents all summer and even into the next breeding season (L. Kilham, pers. comm.). Eighteen Vermont dates for dependent young range from June 11 to July 5.

Because of the rural character of the Vermont landscape, the American Crow is common in the Green Mountain State. It appears to be most common in the Champlain Lowlands, Connecticut River valley, Valley of Vermont, and northern Orleans



**No. of priority blocks in which recorded**

TOTAL 169 (94%)

Possible breeding: 47 (28% of total)

Probable breeding: 21 (12% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 101 (60% 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	18
Green Mountains	49	91	29
North Central	18	95	11
Northeast Highlands	12	75	7
East Central	19	100	11
Taconic Mountains	16	100	10
Eastern Foothills	24	100	14

County, where mixtures of open and closed habitats occur. Least numerous in the Northeast Highlands, it was undetected in 25% of the region's Atlas Project priority blocks. The species also appears to be less common in the Green Mountains.

Breeding Bird Survey data collected through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from 1966 to 1979 indicate a 3% annual decline in numbers of the American Crow on 21 Vermont survey routes; this decline is in direct contrast to the positive trend indicated for the 500 total routes for the northeastern U.S. (Robbins 1982b). The recent reforestation of much of Vermont, which

has reduced the amount of suitable habitat available to support a large crow population, is probably responsible. Regardless of recent declines, this adaptable bird will most likely remain a conspicuous part of the Vermont avifauna.

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