

Sedge Wren

Cistothorus platensis



The Sedge Wren has one of the most complicated migration and breeding strategies of any North American passerine. Its breeding season occurs in two phases. In late May and June, Sedge Wrens breed in the upper Midwest; afterwards, they head to the southern plains and the northeastern states, where they breed from July to September (Bedell 1996, Herkert et al. 2001). As a result, the Sedge Wren is an occasional late-summer breeder in Vermont's wet hayfields. Little is known about the ecology and life history of this species, particularly in the Northeast, where it is at the very edge of its range. Most research on the Sedge Wren has focused on the evolution and function of its song (Herkert et al. 2001). In Vermont, the species appears to be fairly nomadic, using a given site for perhaps one or two years.

Sedge Wrens show no plumage dimorphism and are easily identifiable among the wrens by their clearly striped crown and back (Herkert et al. 2001). Males build multiple dummy nest shells to attract a female, who later lines the nest of her choice. Nests with eggs have been reported as early as 21 May in Wisconsin (Robbins 1991), and as late as 9 September in Ohio (Peterjohn and Rice 1991). Nests typically contain clutches of 7 eggs, although late clutches in the second part of the breeding season are often smaller. Incubation is carried out by the female (Burns 1982), and lasts about 14 days, with eggs hatching asynchronously over 3 days. Primarily cared for by the female, nestlings fledge in 12 to 14 days (Herkert et al. 2001).

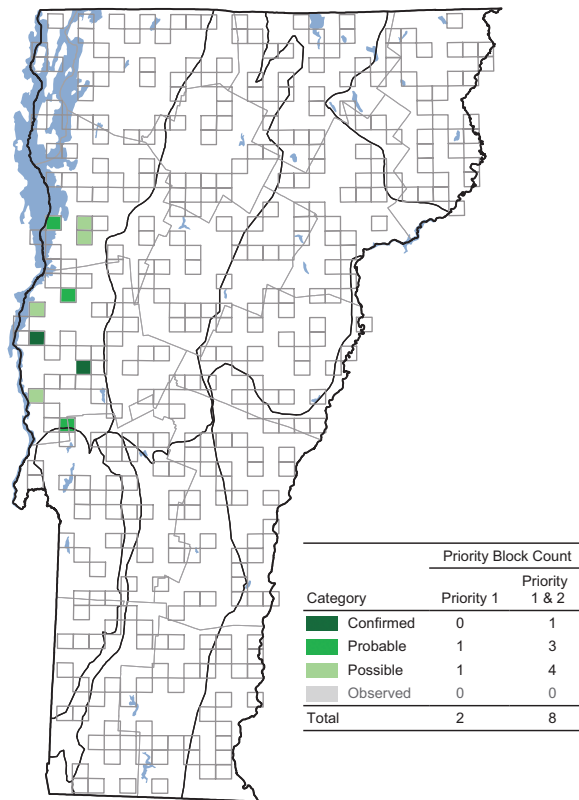
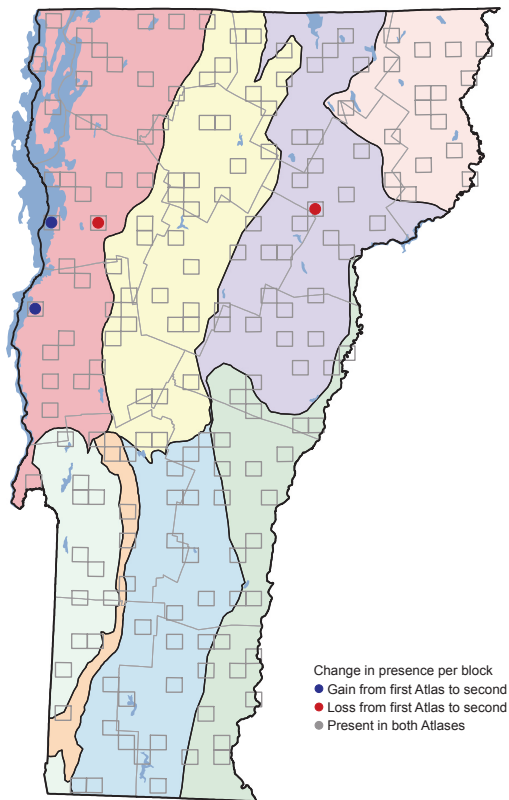
Sedge Wrens were rare in Vermont during both the first and second atlases. In the first atlas, the species was found in 1 Champlain Valley block and 1 Northern Vermont Piedmont block. Seven records were scattered elsewhere in the state, outside of priority blocks. During the second atlas, Sedge Wrens were confirmed in only 2 Champlain Valley blocks. Four PO and three PR records were also reported, all of these within priority blocks in the Champlain Valley. In mid-August 2006, adults were observed carrying food into and fecal sacs out of a nesting area in a wet, predominantly reed canarygrass field in Middlebury; that site was also occupied in 2004. Sedge

Wrens were present in one Addison County field in late May (when they are typically in the Midwest), late July, and early August 2004; the August sighting included nest building and three adults were present. From 2003 to 2007, Perlut and Strong (pers. comm.) found five males in diverse habitats. Two were observed in the spring on a well-drained, older hayfield that was 50 percent alfalfa. One likely migrant remained on that field for one day (11 May). The second established a territory on 19 May and sang until the field was hayed on 27 May, without attracting a mate. A third sang in an old, wet, grass-dominated hayfield in mid-July. The fourth sang for one late June day in a wet ditch bisecting an old, grass-dominated hayfield. The fifth sang for one early June day in a flooded, ungrazed, grass-based pasture paddock.

Additional evidence of the scarcity of this species was collected from 2004 to 2005: in a tally of 774 point counts in 199 hayfields and 18 pastures covering 1325 hectares (3273 acres) throughout Chittenden, Franklin and Addison counties (Perlut et al. 2008b), only two Sedge Wrens were detected (A. Strong unpubl. data). The second New York atlas showed a 26 percent (15-block) increase (McGowan and Corwin 2008). In Pennsylvania, Sedge Wrens were found in 38 percent more blocks during the second atlas (Wilson et al. 2012). This species is listed as endangered in Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and Connecticut.

Habitat conservation for Sedge Wrens should focus on maintaining undisturbed, large, wet, grass-based fields through late August. Mowing after 1 September would provide sufficiently maintained grassland habitat without impacting breeding. Wetland loss and habitat loss through shrub and tree encroachment continue to decrease available habitat for this species.

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CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	1	2	+1	+100
Northeastern Highlands	0	0	+0	+0
Northern Green Mountains	0	0	+0	+0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	1	0	-1	-100
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	2	2	+0	+0

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	10	100
Northeastern Highlands	0	0
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