

Species Status Assessment

Common Name: Black-backed Woodpecker **Date Updated:** 2024-12-20
Scientific Name: *Picoides arcticus* **Updated By:** tgh
Class: Aves
Family: Picidae

Species Synopsis

(a short paragraph which describes species taxonomy, distribution, recent trends, and habitat in New York):

The black-backed woodpecker, *Picoides arcticus*, is an insectivorous bird found in coniferous forests across northern North America (Tremblay et al. 2020). Black-backed woodpeckers in New York are primarily found in the Adirondack Mountains in balsam fir and spruce forests. Black-backed woodpeckers primarily feed on wood-boring insects that are more prevalent in recently burned areas. Reduction in burns, as well as pesticide use and pollution can negatively impact their foraging success (Tremblay et al. 2020).

I. Status

a. Current legal protected Status

i. Federal: Not listed

Candidate:

ii. New York: Not listed: protected native

b. Natural Heritage Program

i. Global: G5

ii. New York: S3?

Tracked by NYNHP?

On Watch List

Other Ranks:

New York 2025 SGCN status: Species of Greatest Conservation Need

COSEWIC: Not listed in Canada

IUCN Red List: Least Concern

Northeast Regional SGCN: Not listed

Status Discussion:

The IUCN red list status was last assessed in 2016.

II. Abundance and Distribution Trends

Region	Present?	Abundance	Distribution	Time Frame	Listing status or S-Rank	SGCN?
North America	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend for US		
Northeastern US	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown		
New York	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	S3?	
Connecticut	No	Unknown	-	Unknown		
Massachusetts	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	S1N	
New Jersey	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	SNA	
Pennsylvania	No	Unknown	-	Unknown		
Vermont	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	S2	
Ontario	Yes	Increasing	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend	S5	
Quebec	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	S4	

Column options

Present?: Yes; No; Unknown; No data; (blank) or Choose an Item

Abundance and Distribution: Declining; Increasing; Stable; Unknown; Extirpated; N/A; (blank) or Choose an item

SGCN?: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item

Monitoring in New York

(specify any monitoring activities or regular surveys that are conducted in New York):

Trends Discussion

(insert map of North American/regional distribution and status):

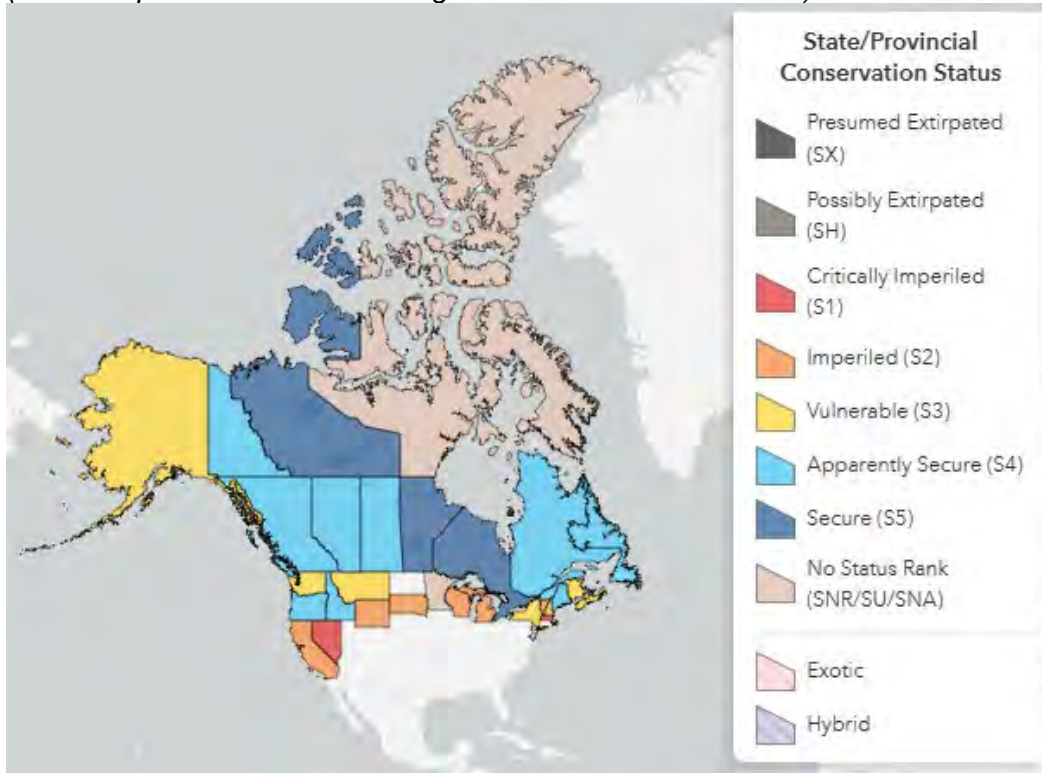


Figure 1. Conservation status of black-backed woodpecker (NatureServe 2025).

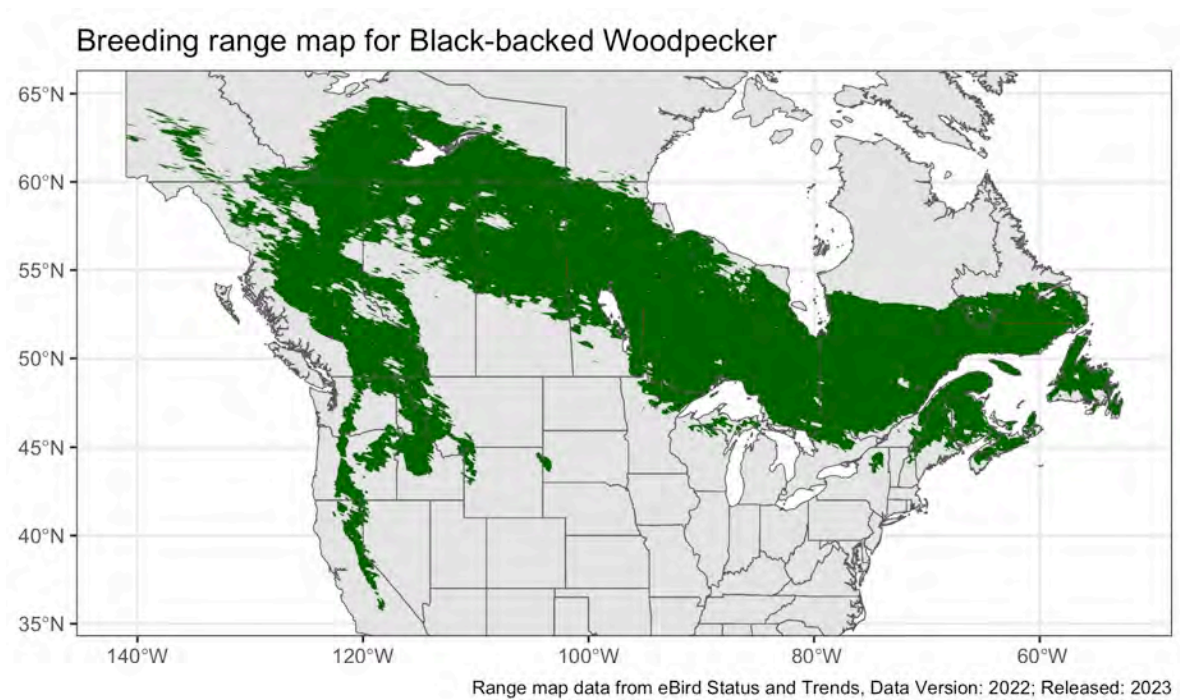
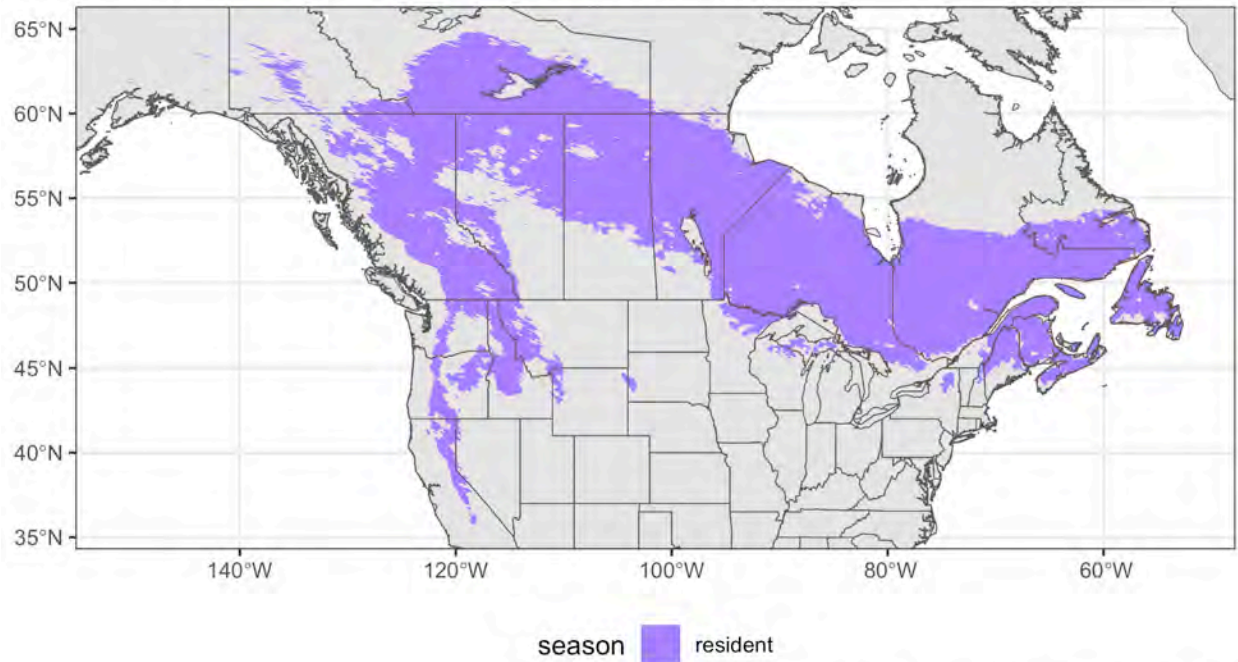


Figure 2. Breeding range of black-backed woodpecker (eBird).

Year-round range map for Black-backed Woodpecker



Range map data from eBird Status and Trends, Data Version: 2022; Released: 2023

Figure 3. Full (year-round) range for black-backed woodpecker (eBird).

III. New York Rarity

(provide map, numbers, and percent of state occupied)

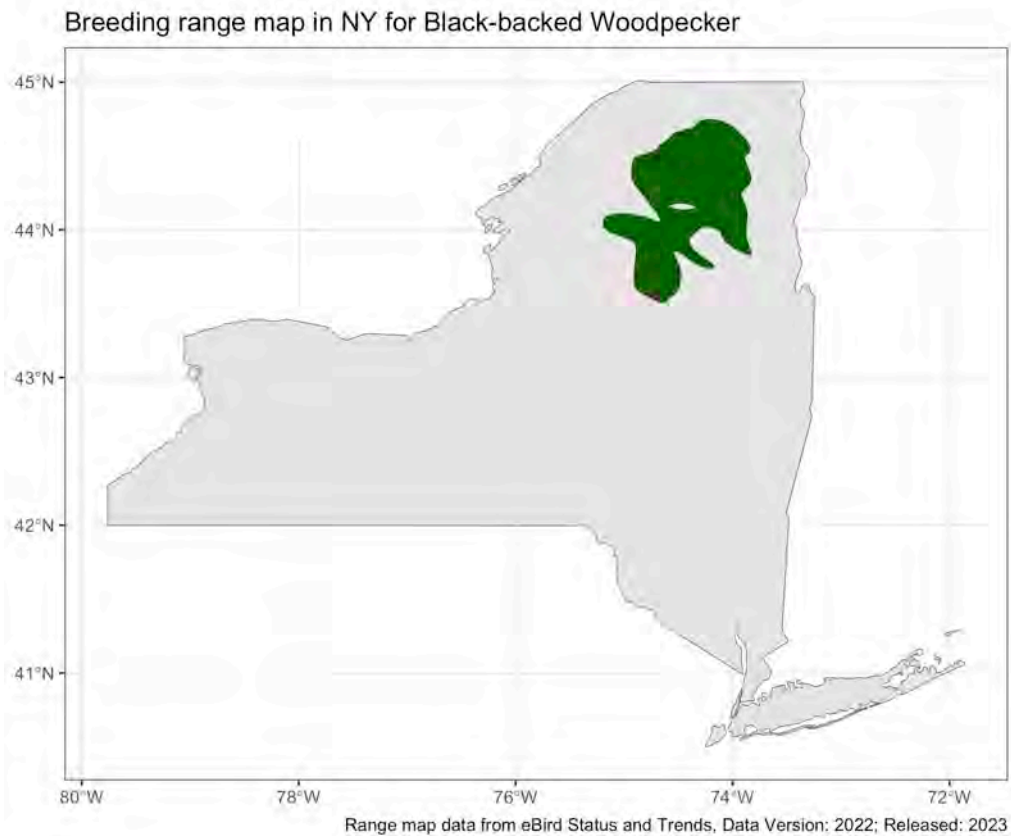


Figure 1: NYS breeding range for black-backed woodpecker based on eBird data.

Details of historic and current occurrence:

The first Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) (1980-85) documented occupancy in 114 blocks, 2.1% of the survey blocks statewide (Andrle and Carroll 1988). The second BBA (2000-05) documented occupancy in 127 blocks, 2.4% of the survey blocks statewide (McGowan and Corwin 2008).

The third BBA (2020-25) is currently underway and utilizes a different number and layout of survey blocks across New York, making direct comparison with the first two Atlases difficult. There were 5,333 blocks in the first and second BBAs, and there are 5,710 blocks in the current BBA, of which 1,815 are considered priority blocks. To date, black-backed woodpecker has been documented in 96 priority blocks, 2.5% of all priority blocks statewide during the third BBA (NY BBA III Overview, 2024).

New York's Contribution to Species North American Range:

Based on eBird data, 0.1 percent of the population breeds in New York, while 0.1 percent of the non-breeding population occurs in New York. Among all states with breeding populations, New York ranks 8 of 15.

Percent of North American Range in NY	Classification of NY Range	Distance to core population, if not in NY
1-25%		

Column options

Percent of North American Range in NY: 100% (endemic); 76-99%; 51-75%; 26-50% 1-25%; 0%; Choose an item

Classification of NY Range: Core; Peripheral; Disjunct; (blank) or Choose an item

IV. Primary Habitat or Community Type

(from NY crosswalk of NE Aquatic, Marine, or Terrestrial Habitat Classification Systems):

NatureServe broad habitat types: Forest - Mixed, Forest - Conifer, Riparian, FORESTED WETLAND

Habitat or Community Type Trend in New York

Habitat Specialist?	Indicator Species?	Habitat/ Community Trend	Time frame of Decline/ Increase
Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Column options

Habitat Specialist and Indicator Species: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Habitat/Community Trend: Declining; Stable; Increasing; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Habitat Discussion:

As low as 1700' where it breeds in spruce & tamarack swamps, to over 4000' on forested slopes of spruce-fir. Also found in clearings, burned areas & lake & river shores in conif. forest. Nest hole in spruce, larch or fir 4-40' above ground.

Associated with boreal and montane coniferous forests, especially in areas with standing dead trees such as burns, bogs, and windfalls; less frequently in mixed forest and rarely in winter in deciduous woodland (AOU 1983). Distribution is closely associated with closed boreal forests and montane coniferous forests. The northern limits appear to coincide with the limit of continuous pine forest (Bock and Bock 1974). Extremely restricted in its use of habitat types and is strongly associated with recently burned forests (Raphael and White 1984, Hutto 1995b). Found in pine (PINUS spp.) including jack pine (P. BANKSIANA), white pine (P. STROBUS), and lodgepole pine (PINUS CONTORTA); spruce (PICEA spp.) such as black spruce (P. MARIANA) and white spruce (P. GLAUCA); fir (ABIES spp.) such as boreal balsam fir (A. BALSAMEA), and red fir (A. MAGNIFICA), Douglas-fir (PSEUDOTSUGA MENZIESII) and tamarack (LARIX spp.; Bock and Bock 1974, Goggans 1989, Villard and Beninger 1993, Villard 1994, Darveau et al. 1995). In Montana, it is more abundant in lower elevation pine and Douglas-fir forests than in high-elevation subalpine spruce forests (Bock and Bock 1974). In the northern Rocky Mountains of the United States, a region-wide landbird survey and extensive literature review revealed that the species is almost exclusively associated with early successional burned forests, although it is occasionally observed in mixed conifer, lodgepole pine, Douglas-fir, and spruce-fir forests (Hutto 1995a, 1995b). Hutto (1995b) found that the number of small trees present in a burn served as the best correlate of species abundance. May invade burns immediately after a fire, but use of burns appears to be restricted to the first years following a fire, as long as wood-boring insects are present and abundant. In Alberta, a pair

nested within two weeks following a severe fire and successfully raised young (Villard and Scheick 1996). In a 1945 burn in the Kootenai National Forest, Montana, a local irruption of more than 20 birds was observed in November, four months after the fire (Blackford 1955). In jack pine-black spruce forest in Minnesota, were absent in a 6.25 hectares study site prior to a burn, but moved in after the area burned in a wildfire, becoming one of the most prominent bird species after the fire (Apfelbaum and Haney 1981). In Teton National Park, Wyoming, were recorded for the first time in the park in 1976 following a 3,500-acre wildfire in 1974 (Kingery 1977). In a survey of burns across Teton and Yellowstone National Parks in Wyoming, were present from one to three years after severe and moderate fires, but were not recorded on older burns. By two years post-fire, populations of wood-borers declined, and black-backed and three-toed woodpeckers likewise dropped off (Taylor and Barmore 1980). In California, occurred in burned sites six to eight years after fire, but were not recorded during surveys 15-19 years and 21-25 years post-fire, although they were present in very low densities during all periods in unburned control plots (Raphael et al. 1987). Hutto (1995b) suggests that a mosaic of recently burned forests may represent source habitat, where local reproduction exceeds mortality. The low densities of woodpeckers in unburned forests may be sink populations that are maintained by birds that move into these areas as conditions on post-fire habitats become less suitable over time. NEST SITE: Nests in a hole excavated in a hard snag, partially dead tree, or live tree with dead heartwood, also occasionally in a stump, fence post, or utility pole. Male does most of the excavation. Nest cavity is usually 0.6-4.6 meters above ground, in trees averaging 21-23 centimeter dbh, in forest opening or in dense stand, often near water. Nests usually in a conifer such as pine, spruce, fir, or Douglas-fir (Scott et al. 1977). In northwestern Montana western larch (*LARIX OCCIDENTALIS*)/Douglas-fir forests, nested in areas with a major component of old-growth, and used nest trees ranging from 8 to 12 centimeter dbh, averaging 10 centimeter dbh (N = 2; McClelland et al. 1979). In Idaho, used nest trees averaging 32.3 centimeter dbh (N = 15; Saab and Dudley 1998). In a study in the Sierra Nevada, California, favored partially dead trees and hard snags for nesting; used nest trees more than 41 centimeter dbh and more than 13 meters tall in both burned and unburned forest (Raphael and White 1984). In northeastern and north-central forests, Evans and Conner (1979) estimated optimum range of tree dimensions as 30-46 centimeter dbh and 6-12 meters tall. FORAGING: In a study in northeastern Oregon, 97 percent of foraging occurred on ridges, the birds preferred to forage in lodgepole pine and ponderosa pine (*PINUS PONDEROSA*), and fed almost equally on live and dead trees. The species used trees averaging 31 centimeter dbh and 18 meters tall, with more than 40 percent of their needles intact, suggesting that they preferred live or recently dead trees (Bull et al. 1986). In the Sierra Nevada, California, concentrated foraging on live trees, but also used snags and logs, and most often used red fir and Jeffrey pine (*PINUS JEFFREYI*; Raphael and White 1984).

V. Species Demographics and Life History

Breeder in NY?	Non-breeder in NY?	Migratory Only?	Summer Resident?	Winter Resident?	Anadromous/Catadromous?
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

Column options

First 5 fields: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Anadromous/Catadromous: Anadromous; Catadromous; (blank) or Choose an item.

Species Demographics and Life History Discussion

(include information about species life span, reproductive longevity, reproductive capacity, age to maturity, and ability to disperse and colonize):

Intraspecifically territorial. In Oregon, home range size for three individuals was 72, 124, and 328 hectares; small home range size was associated with abundant mature/old growth timber (Goggans et al. 1988). In the Sierra Nevada, California, densities estimated at 0.2 pairs per 40 hectares (Raphael and White 1984). In northeastern and north-central forests, territory size estimated at 30 hectares and maximum density 3.3 pairs per 100 hectares (Evans and Conner 1979). In Idaho, home range of one male in breeding season 72 hectares (Dixon and Saab 2000). In Vermont, home range size reported to be 61 hectares (Lisi 1988). See Short (1982) for a detailed description of habits, calls, and behavior. Highly responsive to forest fire and other processes, such as spruce budworm outbreaks, that result in high concentrations of wood-boring insects invading dead trees. Local and regional irruptions and range extensions have been observed in response to burns and wood-borer outbreaks (West and Spiers 1959, Bock and Bock 1974, Kingery 1977, Yunick 1985).

VI. Threats

Threat Level 1	Threat Level 2	Threat Level 3	Spatial Extent	Severity	Immediacy	Trend	Certainty
5. Biological Resource Use	5.3 Logging & Wood Harvesting	Choose an item. (salvage logging post-burn)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
7. Natural System Modifications	7.1 Fire & Fire Suppression	7.1.2 Suppression in the fire regime	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.

Table 1. Threats to black-backed woodpecker.

Fire suppression reduces available habitat and foraging opportunity for black backed woodpeckers. This species relies on post burn habitats, and salvage logging areas post-fire reduces abundance and nesting success (Tremblay et al. 2020).

Are there regulatory mechanisms that protect the species or its habitat in New York?

Yes: ✓ **No:** **Unknown:**

If yes, describe mechanism and whether adequate to protect species/habitat:

This species is included in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703-712) and is protected as a native species under the NYS Environmental Conservation Law.

Describe knowledge of management/conservation actions that are needed for recovery/conservation, or to eliminate, minimize, or compensate for the identified threats:

Action Category	Action	Description
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.1 Manage plants, animals, fungi, or bacteria	Leave snags standing after timber harvests or burns
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.2.2.1 Prescribed fire management	

Table 2. Recommended conservation actions for *black-backed woodpecker*.

VII. References

This SSA drew heavily from these resources:

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