

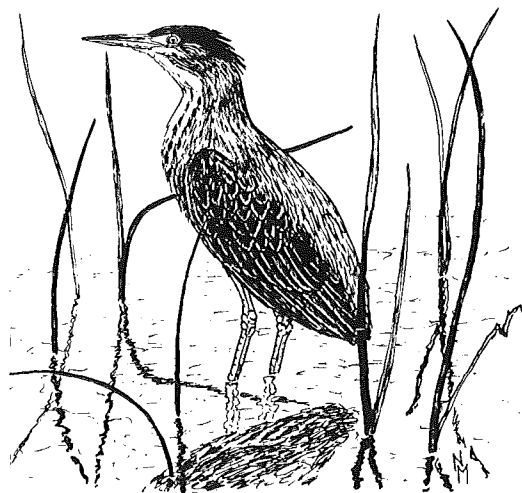
## Green-backed Heron

*Butorides striatus*

The Green-backed Heron (formerly called the Green Heron) ranges widely from the northwestern U.S. across southeastern Canada and south to the West Indies, Panama, and northern South America (AOU 1983). In Vermont, the species is near the northern limit of its range. Consequently, its distribution is somewhat spotty, and it is absent or very irregular at higher elevations and in the northeastern corner of the state. Palmer (1962) believed the species to be extending its range to the north. Green-backed Herons arrive around the third week in April and depart early in the fall, becoming scarce after early September (a late date is October 10). The species winters from the southern U.S. south through the Caribbean to Trinidad and northern South America (AOU 1983).

This heron inhabits a variety of habitats including marshes, margins of slow-moving streams and rivers, swamps, shrubby wet meadows, beaver ponds, and, occasionally, upland areas such as orchards (Palmer 1962). Foraging birds occur in wetlands of most sizes and types. The sharp *skeow* call of the Green-backed Heron is a clue to its presence. Nest sites are in trees, shrubs, or, occasionally, on the ground. A nest found in Winhall was 5 m (15 ft) high in a red maple; another, found in Rockingham, was about 3 m (10 ft) high in a deciduous tree. In Arlington, a nest was discovered at 11 m (35 ft) in a white pine. Forbush (1925) considered the white pine a preferred species for Green-backed Heron nests. Nests are built on the ground or at heights up to 9 m (30 ft) (Palmer 1962), but are commonly at 5–6 m (15–20 ft) (Forbush 1925).

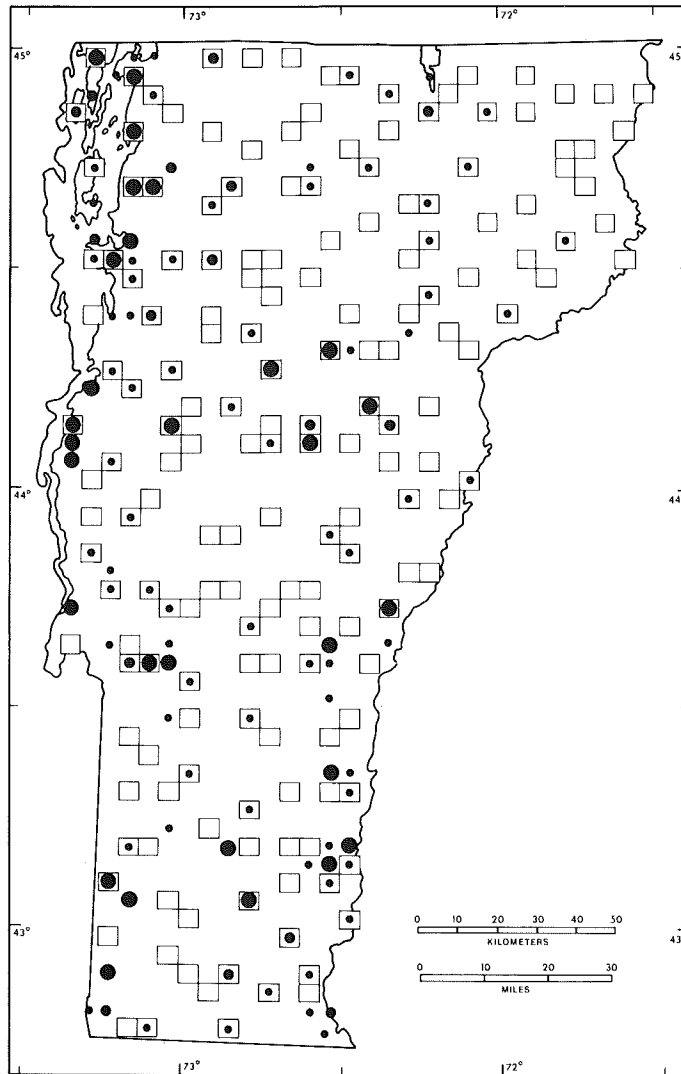
Pairs of Green-backed Herons often nest alone, although occasionally they nest in small colonies. Small numbers of Green-backed Herons may nest in association with other species of herons. The nest is a stick platform, often so flimsy that the 4 to 5 bluish green eggs are easily seen from un-



derneath (Forbush 1925). Vermont egg dates are May 23 to June 24 (five records), with clutches of 4 or 5 eggs. Bull (1974) reported April 29 to August 4 as the range for egg dates in New York, and an incubation period of 20 days. The only nestling date for Vermont is June 12, when young Green-backs were observed just beginning to climb (W. G. Ellison and N. L. Martin, pers. comm.). Nestling dates in New York are May 22 to August 24; the nestling period there lasts 16 to 17 days (Bull 1974). Bull reported fledgling dates of July 4 to September 19 and an average of 3 fledglings per nest. Green-backed Herons will raise a second brood, but possibly only along the coast or in the South (Forbush 1925; Bull 1974). Adverse weather conditions such as gusty winds, drenching rains, and low temperatures will curb breeding activities (Palmer 1962).

Like others in the heron family the Green-backed eats primarily aquatic animal prey, including small fish, crayfish, snails, leeches, frogs, and aquatic insect larvae and adults (Palmer 1962). These herons also eat orthopteran prey (grasshoppers, katydids, and crickets). The reader is referred to the intensive behavior study of the Green-backed by Meyerriecks (1960).

Green-backed Herons were recorded in all of Vermont's seven physiographic regions but were not confirmed as breeding in the



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

TOTAL 75 (42%)

Possible breeding: 48 (64% of total)

Probable breeding: 11 (15% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 16 (21% of total)

**Physiographic regions in which recorded**

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	24	77	32
Green Mountains	16	30	22
North Central	7	37	9
Northeast Highlands	1	6	1
East Central	9	47	12
Taconic Mountains	8	50	11
Eastern Foothills	10	42	13

North Central region or Northeast Highlands. The greater number of records in the Champlain Lowlands region is to be expected because of the extensive wetlands there. Because Green-backed Herons will occupy even small wetlands, it is not surprising that they were found throughout Vermont.

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