

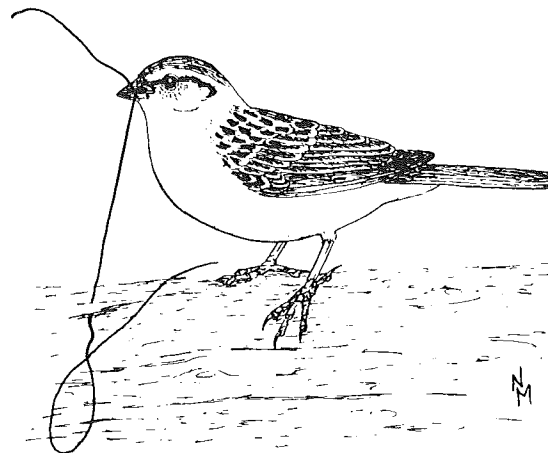
Chipping Sparrow

Spizella passerina

The Chipping Sparrow is one of the handful of native North American birds that has adjusted admirably to human alteration of the natural environment. This diminutive bird may be encountered in farmyards, orchards, the edges of fields, pastures, city parks, and suburban yards. In less settled areas these birds frequent burns, clear cuts, and the shores of lakes and streams. So well has the species fit into human settlements that it is far more common in these areas than in those that constituted its habitat before the Europeans' arrival. The Chipping Sparrow is common in summer from Canada and Alaska south through most of the U.S., and winters in the southern states from Maryland and Virginia south.

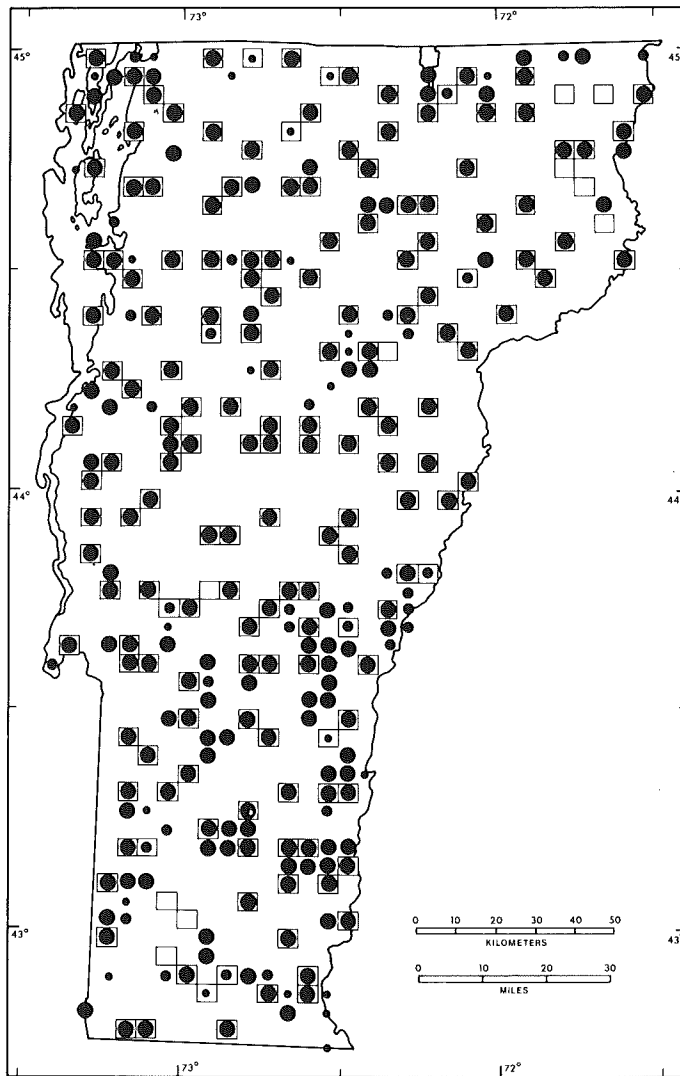
The Chipping Sparrow's close association with human dwellings makes it one of the easiest bird species to locate, as evidenced by its confirmation as a breeder in 92% of the Atlas Project priority blocks. During the breeding season its bright chestnut cap, white eyeline, and incessant song make the Chipping Sparrow one of Vermont's most readily identified sparrows. The song is a distinctive, monotonous, metallic trill, usually given from an elevated perch such as a tall tree, shrub, or wire. Most nests are placed rather low in shrubs and ornamental plantings; active nests (those containing eggs or nestlings) provided 24% of the confirmations in Vermont. Parents are often seen gathering prey for their young; food for young constituted 46% of the confirmed breedings. Fledgling "Chippies" are noisy and possess a distinctive streaked juvenile plumage; 23% of the confirmed breedings resulted from encounters with recently fledged young.

Chipping Sparrows arrive in Vermont in April, usually in the second and third weeks of the month. Nesting is under way by mid May. The placement of 21 Vermont nests was at an average height of 3.7 m (12 ft); nests built before June 15 were placed at an



average height of 0.5 m (1.5 ft), and those built later at an average of 5 m (16 ft). Young conifers are preferred as nest sites, probably for the protection from wind and predation they often provide. The nest itself is constructed of grasses, stems, and rootlets, and is lined with hair. Before the automobile replaced the horse, the species preferred to line its nest with horsehair, but it has proved adaptable to the loss of this resource. The species appears to be double-brooded in Vermont; dates for 31 clutches range from May 19 to August 12. August clutches expose some bias in the data, as 7 nestling dates range from June 3 to August 6, and 29 dates for fledglings include reports from June 13 to only August 8, probably as a result of reduced observer coverage in late summer. Clutch sizes for 30 Vermont nests range from 2 eggs (one record) to 5 eggs (two records), with an average of 3.7 eggs. Chipping Sparrows begin their autumn departure in early September; autumn movement peaks in late September and October; a few individuals remain into November and, on occasion, into December (RVB, Winter 1973-83).

The Chipping Sparrow is a widespread and common bird in Vermont. It was located in 94% of the priority blocks, being missed in only 10 out of the total of 179. The only areas where this bird was markedly absent are those above 610 m (2,000 ft) and those that lack suitable forest clear-



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 169 (94%)

Possible breeding: 5 (3% of total)

Probable breeding: 8 (5% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 156 (92% 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	50	93	30
North Central	18	95	11
Northeast Highlands	11	69	7
East Central	19	100	11
Taconic Mountains	16	100	9
Eastern Foothills	24	100	14

ings. These two factors are characteristic of the 4 blocks in the Green Mountains and the 5 blocks in the Northeast Highlands in which the species was not recorded. Early distributional lists indicate that the species' status has changed little, although large areas of Vermont have been reforested over the last 50 years.

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