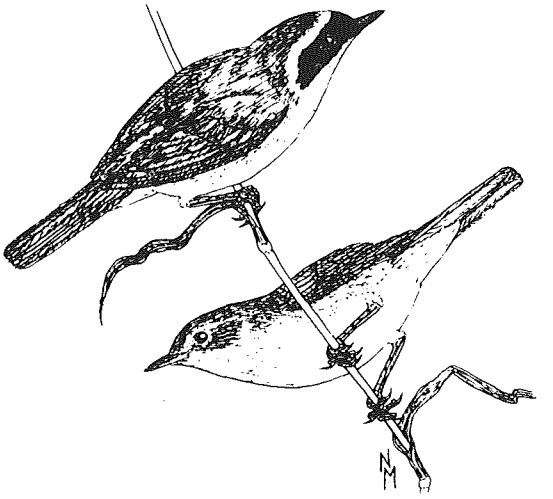
Common Yellowthroat

Geothlypis trichas

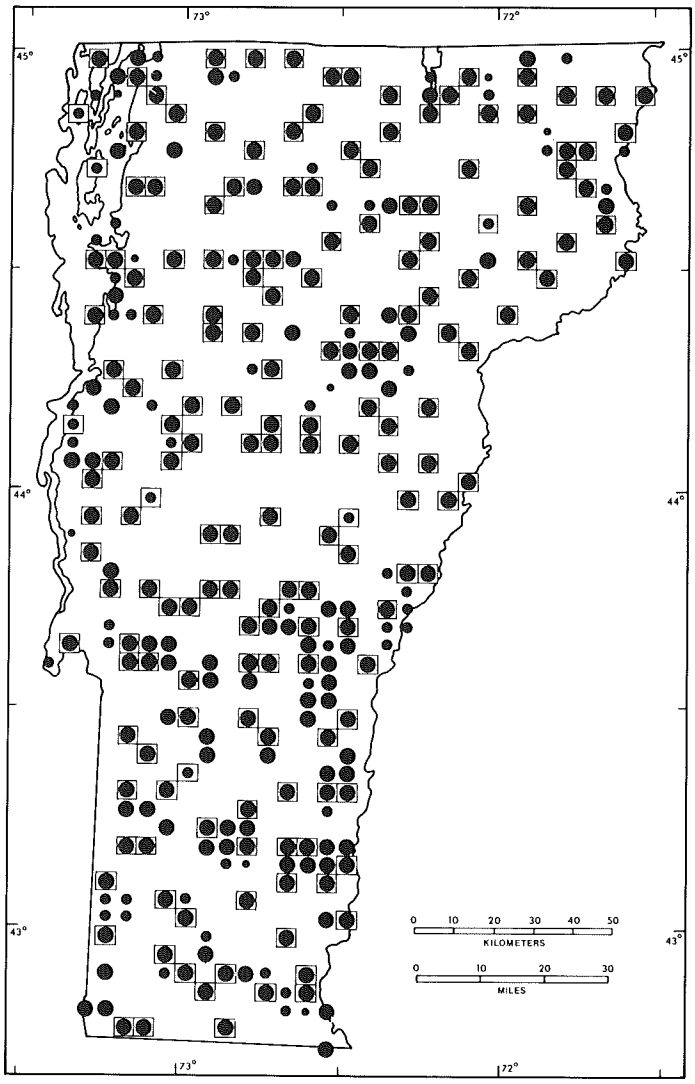


Common Yellowthroats are prevalent among open areas with dense, low vegetation. Yellowthroats occur in higher numbers in areas with moist soil because such conditions promote the growth of rank vegetation (Kendeigh 1945a). This species tends to inhabit subclimax habitat—marshes, swales, and bogs—or areas disturbed by external agencies—burns, beaver meadows, overgrown pastures or fields, clear cuts, and ski trails. Yellowthroats may be seen throughout Vermont, from the lowest elevations to some of the highest mountains (e.g., Jay Peak, at 1,100 m [3,608 ft]). However, Ross (1934) found it most abundant below 305 m (1,000 ft) in Bennington County.

Although the Common Yellowthroat is a small bird and forages in low vegetation, it occurs in such high densities and is such a loud and persistent singer that it is difficult to overlook. The song, a loud *wichity* rendered in series of threes or more, is easily recognized. Yellowthroats nest on or near the ground in dense shrubbery or coarse herbs. Most (nearly 64%) of the yellowthroat breedings confirmed by Atlas Project workers were of adults carrying food to nestlings or fledglings. Seven and a half percent of yellowthroat confirmations were of parents putting on distraction displays to protect nests and young (DD)—a relatively high occurrence for this code.

The Common Yellowthroat is among the first 10 species of warblers to arrive in Vermont in the spring. Males usually return during the first and second weeks of May, with most on territory by midmonth. Females arrive after the males—an average of four days later according to the Vermont Institute of Natural Science's banding data. The nest is a rather bulky structure of grass or grasslike leaves, supported by or braced against surrounding vegetation, and lined with fine grass, sedge, rootlets, or hair. Nest heights rarely exceed 48.3 cm (19 in). The eggs are white with red-brown spotting wreathing the large end; they number from 3 to 5 per clutch. The average size of 8 Vermont clutches was 3.9 eggs. Ten Vermont egg dates range from May 29 to July 28. The incubation period lasts from 11 to 13 days, averaging 12 (Stewart 1953). Nestlings have been reported on four dates in Vermont, ranging from June 17 to July 23. The young remain in the nest from 8 to 9 days, usually departing the nest before they are capable of sustained flight (Stewart 1953). Fledglings have been reported from June 27 to August 14 in Vermont (four records). Yellowthroats are often double-brooded, and may attempt a third nesting if one of the initial two fails. The autumn migration begins in late August, and large numbers of migrants are reported through late September. Most yellowthroats are gone by mid October; a few remain annually into November.

When Cutting (1884) stated that "any bush in Vermont may contain [a yellowthroat]," he only exaggerated slightly. From the mid-nineteenth century to the present, the Common Yellowthroat has been among the most abundant of Vermont's many warblers. It is the most abundant warbler recorded on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird surveys in the state (BBS 1966–79). The species was reported from all of the Atlas Project's priority blocks and, as befits an abundant and well-known species, confirmed in 96% of the priority blocks. There was no significant difference among regional confirmation rates, although



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 179 (100%)

Possible breeding:	0 (0% of total)
Probable breeding:	7 (4% of total)
Confirmed breeding:	172 (96% 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	17
Green Mountains	54	100	30
North Central	19	100	11
Northeast Highlands	16	100	9
East Central	19	100	11
Taconic Mountains	16	100	9
Eastern Foothills	24	100	13

the species was confirmed in slightly fewer blocks in the Champlain Lowlands. More than 22 yellowthroats per block were recorded during the Atlas Project by one observer, the highest figure in his compilations for any member of the Parulinae (W. G. Ellison, pers. observ.). Nicholson (1974, 1978) found densities of 26 pairs per 40.5 ha (100 a) in mixed forest and old field habitat. As long as there are wetlands, abandoned agricultural land in early successional stages, and other damp, brushy habitats, this adaptable species will continue to flourish in Vermont.

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