

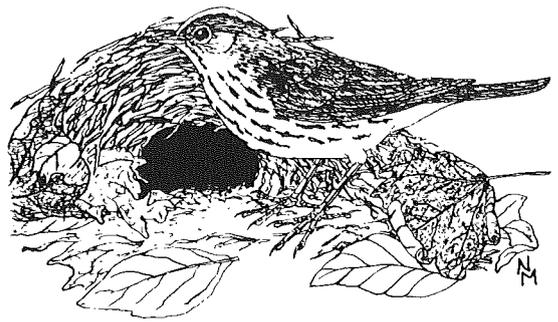
Ovenbird

Seiurus aurocapillus

The Ovenbird's loud ringing song is one of the most familiar sounds of the forests of Vermont. This species was located in 176 of the 179 Atlas Project priority blocks, being overlooked in or absent from only 3 largely unforested and dry blocks in the Champlain Lowlands. Ovenbirds inhabit almost every variety of woodland in the state, ranging from stands of young aspen to spruce-fir forests. Kendeigh (1945a) suggested that a variety of broad-leaved trees may be required to supply the dead leaves used by the species in building its distinctive domed nest in the forest litter. Ovenbirds are most common in northern hardwood forest of beech, sugar maple, yellow birch, and hemlock. The species is least common in extensive spruce-fir woods. The Ovenbird is generally absent from the cool, moist, stunted subalpine forest of the state's mountains.

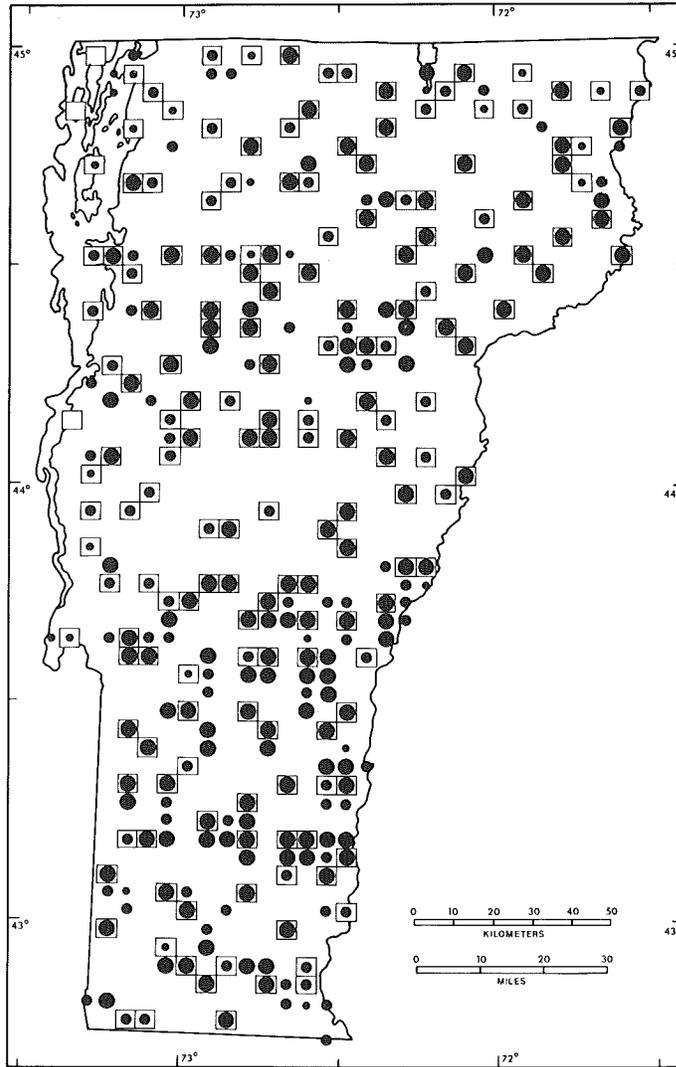
By far the most arresting characteristic of the Ovenbird is its powerful voice, and the species is most often located by its call. Its song is ringing and strident and builds to a crescendo; it consists of a series of paired phrases, the first note of which is normally higher-pitched than the second, which is lower and carries farther. A more complex song is generally given in flight at night. This impressive vocalizer is a rather small, brown, thrushlike bird that is often difficult to glimpse. The domed nest built into the forest floor is the best camouflaged of such structures. Perhaps because the species often builds along trails and old wood roads, location of nests accounted for 24% of its Atlas Project confirmations. As was the case in locating many other breeding songbirds, parents detected with food for their young accounted for a large percentage of the confirmations (42%); recently fledged young accounted for another 23%.

Ovenbirds generally arrive in Vermont during the first week of May. Nest building commences during the third week of the



month. The nest is built into a natural or excavated hollow from which litter has been cleared; it is domed over with dead leaves, grasses, and pine needles. Sometimes living herbs and ferns are incorporated into the structure. The nest is then lined with fine grass, rootlets, or hair. Egg dates for 25 Vermont nests range from May 27 to July 23. The white eggs, which are speckled at the large end with purple, number from 3 to 6, although most clutches contain either 4 or 5 eggs. Twenty-two Vermont clutches averaged 4 eggs. Incubation usually requires 12 days, and the young leave the nest on foot at 8 to 10 days of age. Records of 7 nests with young include dates from June 7 to June 20, although nestlings are likely to be found well into July. Recently fledged young have been noted on 18 dates from June 21 to August 3. The autumn migration commences in August and peaks in early September. Most Ovenbirds are gone by the last two weeks of September, but there are several later records.

The Ovenbird is common in Vermont. The species has averaged up to 10 per route on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird surveys, and one observer averaged 12 per block over four years of the Atlas Project. There are two principal areas from which the Ovenbird is absent: the largely open Champlain Lowlands, in particular Grand Isle County, where it was not recorded in 2 priority blocks; and at elevations above 915 m (3,000 ft). The Ovenbird has been defined as "area sensitive," meaning that the species is not present in smaller woodlots (MacClintock et al. 1977). The Ovenbird's



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 176 (98%)

Possible breeding: 16 (9% of total)
 Probable breeding: 53 (30% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 107 (61% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

| | no. of priority blocks | % of region's priority blocks | % of species' total priority blocks |
|---------------------|------------------------------|--|---|
| Champlain Lowlands | 28 | 90 | 16 |
| Green Mountains | 54 | 100 | 31 |
| 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 |

population has apparently not changed significantly over the last 100 years, as most early authorities for Vermont refer to it as a common species.

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