

Dark-eyed Junco

Junco hyemalis

The Dark-eyed Junco that occurs in Vermont belongs to the "slate-colored" subspecies, and inhabits edge and small openings in coniferous and mixed woodlands. The species prefers areas with strongly sloping land and forest floors that are cluttered with boulders, fallen trees, or brush. A suitable nest site appears important to habitat selection. The junco is a ground nester, placing its nest in a hollow either in a bank or cliff face, or under fallen timber, brush, or thick herbaceous or shrubby vegetation (Bent 1968). For the most part, juncos forage on or near the ground (Sabo 1980), but they require conspicuous song perches. Males are often seen singing on the highest spire of a conifer. The climatic tolerance of this species at Vermont's latitude is quite broad; it ranges from elevations of 150 m to more than 1,220 m (500–4,000 ft) in the Green Mountains. The species appears to be best adapted to cool, moist climates, and is most numerous at high elevations where there are fewer competitors (Able and Noon 1976; Sabo 1980).

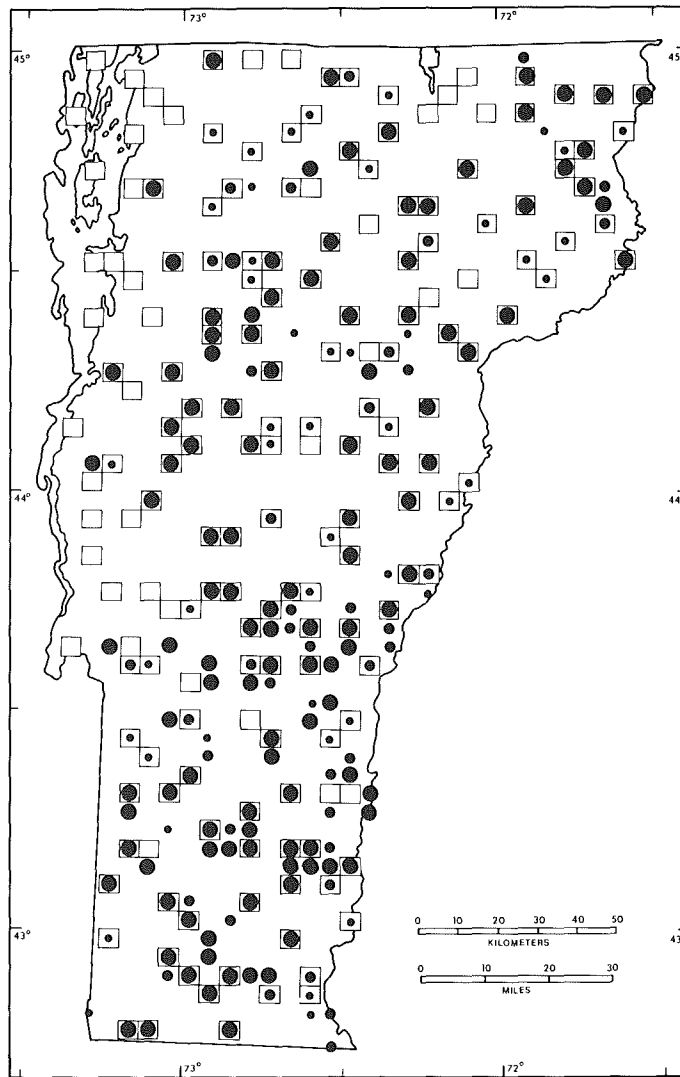
Because the males habitually use high singing perches, song presents the best way to detect these birds. The song is generally a slow, musical trill. Variations occur, ranging from a harsh buzz to a rapid, metallic trill not unlike that of the related Chipping Sparrow. Juncos often place their nests along trails and logging roads. When an observer passes close to a nest or young birds, the parents become quite agitated, give a sharp smacking call, and put on various display postures such as tail flicking and bill cleaning. Females will sit tightly on the nest until nearly trod upon. Because nests are frequently by trails, some 32% of the species' total confirmations by the Atlas Project were from nests. Parents carrying food (38%) and recently fledged young (26%) also provided means of confirmation.

A few Dark-eyed Juncos are seen during the winter in Vermont, mostly in southeastern and southwestern parts of the state.



Migrants do not return to nesting territory until March or April. The species is double-brooded; sometimes a third clutch is laid if one of the first two is unsuccessful (Smith 1934a). Eggs have been found in Vermont from May 5 to August 7. The eggs are bluish white with thick red-brown spotting at the large end. Eggs number from 3 to 5 per clutch; 68% of 19 Vermont clutches contained 4 eggs. The incubation period lasts 12 to 13 days (Bent 1968). Young have been noted in the nest from May 30 to August 17, and fledged young have been located from June 14 to September 4. The nestling period ranges from 10 to 13 days; dependent young remain with parents for about 3 weeks (Bent 1968). Most juncos depart from Vermont from late October to mid December.

The Dark-eyed Junco is common over most of its Vermont range. Atlas Project data reveal that juncos are most widespread in the Green Mountains (96% of the priority blocks) and the Northeast Highlands (100% of the priority blocks). Juncos have essentially the same distribution and numerical status today as was reported during the first half of this century (Ross 1906a), although they may now be more frequent at elevations below 305 m (1,000 ft) with the recent reforestation of farmlands. This species is found largely in the regions of coolest climate and highest average elevation in the state, probably because of its habitat re-



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 138 (77%)

Possible breeding: 34 (25% of total)

Probable breeding: 17 (12% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 87 (63% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	10	32	7
Green Mountains	52	96	38
North Central	11	58	8
Northeast Highlands	16	100	12
East Central	17	89	12
Taconic Mountains	10	62	7
Eastern Foothills	22	92	16

quirements: the distribution of favored coniferous forests and woodlots is largely limited to areas of high relief and low average temperature. Significantly, the species' distribution in the Champlain Lowlands is limited to such prominent hills as Snake Mountain, Mt. Philo, and Arrowhead Mountain.

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