

## Eastern Phoebe

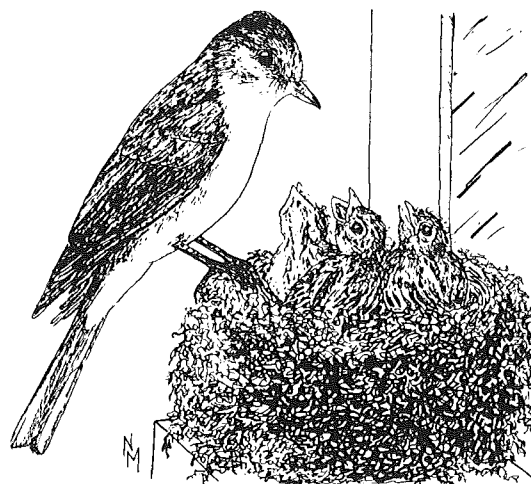
*Sayornis phoebe*

The Eastern Phoebe is a common species, breeding from central and eastern Canada south to central Texas and Georgia and wintering from the southern extremity of its breeding range south to Florida, the Gulf Coast, and southern Mexico (AOU 1983). A Vermont nestling banded in June at Wells River was recovered in Louisiana in November of the same year (Smith 1942). This is the hardiest of Vermont's flycatchers and the first to arrive in the spring. Eastern Phoebes generally return in late March or early April. Territorial displays may begin within a week of arrival on the breeding grounds. The last phoebes have departed in the fall by the third week of October.

Eastern Phoebes inhabit farmlands, towns, roadsides, and streamsides. Before human habitation, these phoebes nested on rock shelves or in cavities on the sides of steep ravines. They still nest in such natural situations, as well as in crevices in boulder talus where the vegetation has been logged off or burned (C. Fichtel, pers. observ.); but today they nest mainly on man-made structures such as bridge girders, rafters in open buildings, window sills, and under eaves. Weeks (1979) suggested that the Eastern Phoebe was able to expand its range into new regions as man-made dwellings and other structures became available. He found bridges and culverts were used extensively as nest sites. These sites were close to woodland edge that probably provided perches from which to sally forth for insect prey.

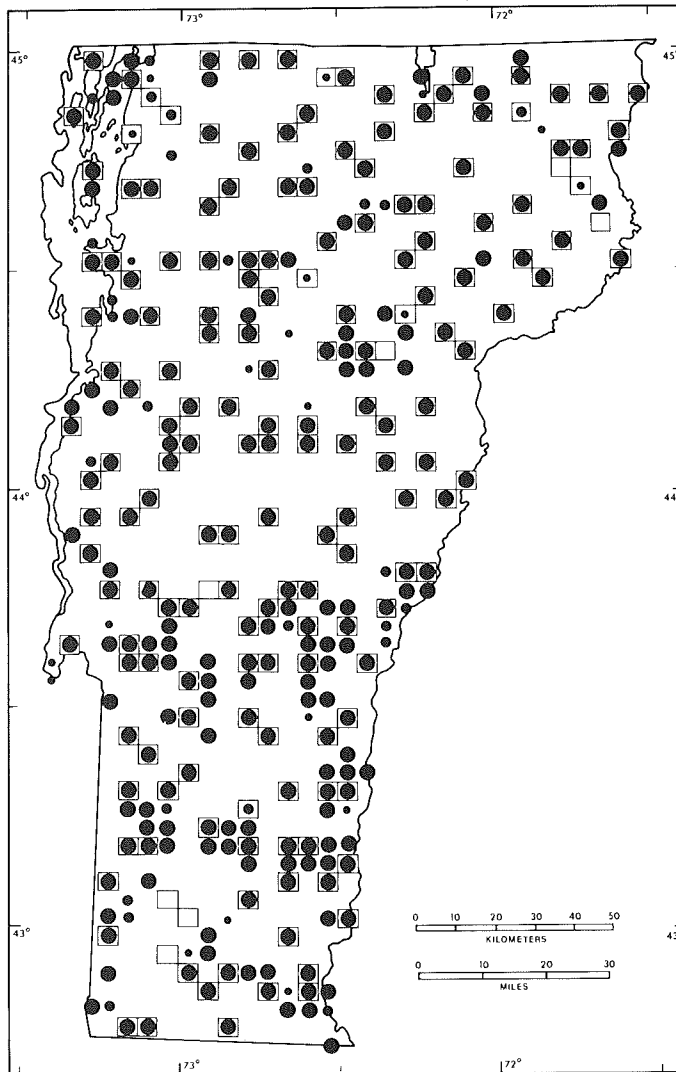
The Eastern Phoebe's call is distinctive, given as *phoebe* or *wheepy* (Bent 1942) while the bird sits at its perch flicking its tail. Insect prey includes beetles, dragonflies, moths, flies, bees, and wasps. Phoebes will also consume caterpillars, fruits, and seeds (Bent 1942).

Eastern Phoebes build both statant and adherent nests (Weeks 1979). Adherent nests are built on smooth-surfaced structures (e.g., culverts), and are secured firmly to the



structure with mud by the female. Statant nests are built under eaves or on bridge supports. Nests are built of moss and mud, lined with grass and hair. Female Eastern Phoebes will occasionally use old nests rather than build new ones (Weeks 1978). Nest-building dates for Vermont are April 15 through May 18 (seven records); Smith (1942) reported 3 to 6 days for nest building in Vermont. At Wells River, females were seen attempting to build as many as 15 nests in a season before completing one (Smith 1942). Nests with eggs were found between April 28 and July 24 (68 records); clutches ranged from 2 to 6 white eggs (the average was 4.2). Smith (1942) recorded incubation as 14 to 17 days. The mean incubation period was reported to be 16 days (Weeks 1979); the species is usually double-brooded. Hatching occurs between May 30 and June 16 (four records) (Smith 1942). The nestling period is 16 days (Smith 1942; Weeks 1979); dates in Vermont range from May 21 to July 30 (52 records). Dates for fledged young range from June 16 through August 4 (16 records).

Because they return early in the spring, Eastern Phoebes may suffer from spring snowstorms. Weeks (1979) reported that temperature is a factor governing nest building, as phoebes may curtail their activities when the temperature is below a certain level. Brown-headed Cowbirds occasionally



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

TOTAL 172 (96%)

Possible breeding: 5 (3% of total)

Probable breeding: 4 (2% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 163 (95% 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	18.0
Green Mountains	50	93	29.1
North Central	18	95	10.5
Northeast Highlands	14	88	8.1
East Central	19	100	11.0
Taconic Mountains	16	100	9.3
Eastern Foothills	24	100	14.0

parasitize the nests of Eastern Phoebes. Nest predators include black rat snakes, white-footed mice, and raccoons (Weeks 1979).

Eastern Phoebes breed in all seven physiographic regions of Vermont. Population density appears to be lowest at the higher elevations where suitable nest sites, particularly man-made structures, are scarce (W. J. Norse, pers. observ.). This species was confirmed in 95% of the priority blocks.

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