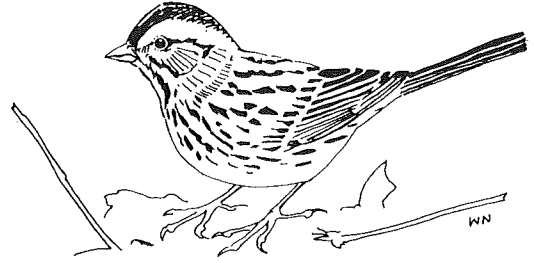


## Lincoln's Sparrow

*Melospiza lincolnii*

Lincoln's Sparrows are most familiar to birders from spring and fall migrations. This sparrow's shy and retiring nature causes it to appear less common in Vermont than it actually is. The Atlas Project has shown it to be a more widely distributed breeder than was previously suspected, for it is another one of those northern species whose presence in Vermont is frequently unmentioned (see Forbush 1928; AOU 1957; Bent 1968). Lincoln's Sparrows are fairly common nesters in the Northeast Kingdom and are local and rare in suitable habitat in other parts of the state. Breeding Lincoln's Sparrows in the southern Green Mountains are restricted to isolated patches at higher elevations. They prefer places that are often wet underfoot, and inhabit shrubby pastures, overgrown grassy meadows, open sphagnum bogs, beaver ponds, and scrub-grown power line rights-of-way, as well as brushy blowdowns, logging scars, and burnouts. Lincoln's Sparrows are primarily edge-dwelling birds, and are found in open areas interspersed with thick, low cover. Alder and willow, meadow-sweet and steeple-bush, aspen and birch, and larch, spruce, and fir are frequently found in many sparrow territories.

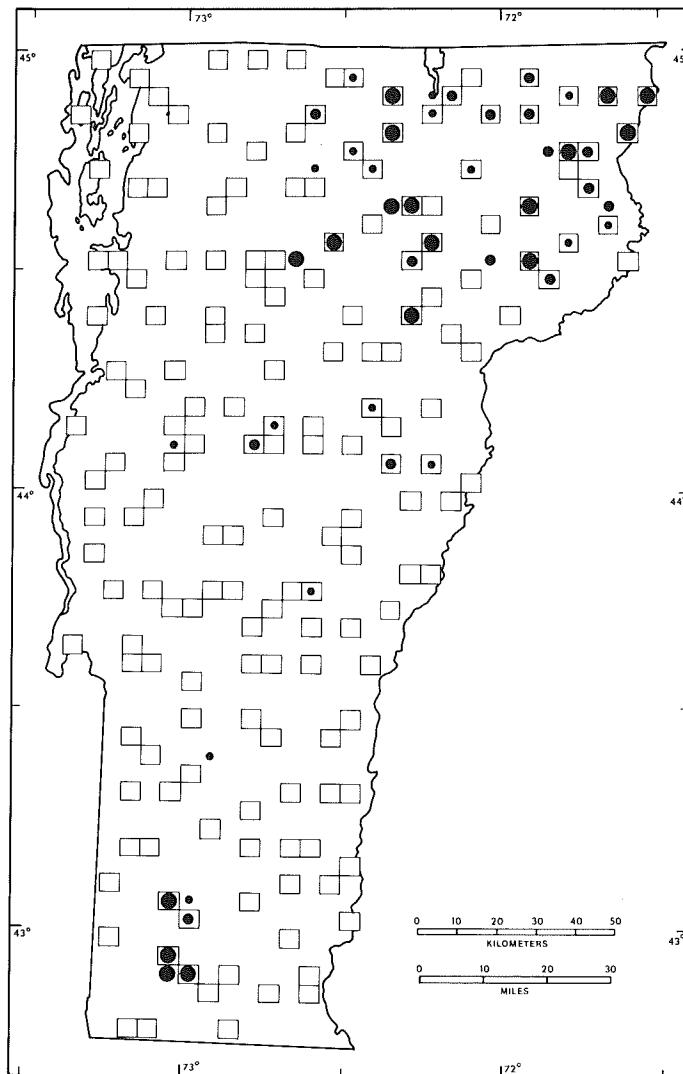
Lincoln's Sparrows spend most of their time on or near the ground and seldom venture far into the open. At first alarm they disappear with the alacrity of a mouse, and they are exceedingly difficult to flush. Palmer (1949) related that four Lincoln's Sparrows were unintentionally captured in mouse traps near Mt. Katahdin; the trappers never saw a live bird during their 4-month visit. Spears and Spears (Bent 1968) stated that most of the literature about the Lincoln's Sparrow deals with its occurrence, migratory behavior, and song, and that much remains to be learned about its breeding biology. In part a result of the species' elusive behavior, this lack of information undoubtedly also results from the inaccessibil-



ity of much of its wide breeding range. These sparrows nest from Alaska and Canada south to California and northern New England. Lincoln's Sparrow was named after Thomas Lincoln from Dennysville, Maine, who collected the first specimen in Labrador while traveling with Audubon in 1833.

First spring arrivals of Lincoln's Sparrows in Vermont are usually recorded during the second week of May, and most of the migrants pass through by the third week. The birds are on territory soon thereafter. Males are rather conspicuous vocally at this time, and are often located by their bubbling House Wren-like songs. They sing from the ground or from hidden perches or, occasionally, in the open. As the breeding season progresses, the agitated behavior of adults makes them increasingly apparent. They respond well to squeaking sounds made by the observer. The easiest way to confirm breeding is by watching for parents with food.

The nest is difficult to find because it is built into the ground and is carefully concealed by surrounding vegetation. None were discovered in Vermont during the Atlas Project. The nest is a neat cup of dry grasses lined with finer grasses, and is often placed on a mound of sphagnum (Harrison 1975). The 4 to 5 pale green or buff eggs are thickly spotted with reddish brown and lavender. They hatch in 13 to 14 days, and are incubated only by the female (Harrison 1978). In Sunderland, fledglings were found as early as June 14. Both adults feed the young insect matter. The young leave the nest in 10 to 12 days (Bent 1968). Birds remain in the nesting vicinity until late August, and begin their southward movement by early Sep-



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

TOTAL 39 (22%)  
 Possible breeding: 12 (31% of total)  
 Probable breeding: 12 (31% of total)  
 Confirmed breeding: 15 (38% of total)

**Physiographic regions in which recorded**

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	0	0	0
Green Mountains	13	24	33
North Central	9	47	23
Northeast Highlands	14	87	36
East Central	3	16	8
Taconic Mountains	0	0	0
Eastern Foothills	0	0	0

tember. At this season they are more common and are somewhat more easy to detect than at other times of the year. Lincoln's Sparrows winter from the Gulf Coast states and California south to Guatemala. Little is known about the Lincoln's diet; it probably consists of insects in summer and seeds for most of the rest of the year.

The Atlas Project documented a considerable southern range extension for the species by locating breeding populations in Somerset (ASR, D. P. Kibbe), Woodford (ASR, W. G. Ellison), and Glastonbury (ASR, D. P. Kibbe) in the southern Green Mountains.

Probably Lincoln's Sparrows have nested in these areas for some time, and because of their elusiveness have gone unnoticed. Utilization of man-made edge such as power-line cuts is a relatively recent phenomenon and may have contributed to this sparrow's southern range extension.

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