

Mourning Dove

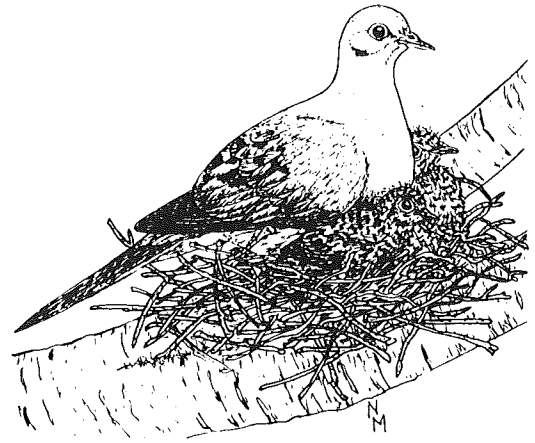
Zenaida macroura

The Mourning Dove, essentially a seed eater, may be found in the bare weed and seed-producing ground areas associated with orchards, farmland, open mixed woodland, residential areas, and road edges. It is not found in dense forests or at high mountain elevations.

The range extension and increased abundance of the Mourning Dove in Vermont during the past 20 years can be dramatically illustrated by comparing Christmas Bird Count records for 1959–61 to those for 1980–81 (CBC 1959–61, 1980–81). Sightings at Saxtons River in the Eastern Foothills went from 36 in 1959 to 539 in 1981; at Bennington in the Taconic Mountains sightings rose from 31 in 1961 to 369 in 1980; and at Ferrisburg in the Champlain Lowlands sightings exploded from 1 in 1961 to 792 in 1981. Wintering concentrations of Mourning Doves are identified with those physiographic regions offering the most suitable habitats and lowest elevations, such as the Champlain Lowlands, Eastern Foothills, and Taconic Mountains.

The Mourning Dove is relatively abundant in both its winter and summer ranges in Vermont, making it difficult to speculate on the species' migration in the state. Banding records for New York indicate that numbers of individuals banded in that state migrate to the South, to Georgia and Florida in particular (Bull 1974). In New England, fall migration occurs during August and September (Keeler et al. 1977); spring migration takes place in the first half of April (Bent 1932). Sanderson (1977) observed that those Mourning Doves that do migrate return with remarkable fidelity to the areas in which they nested the previous year, although immatures are seldom faithful to their natal areas.

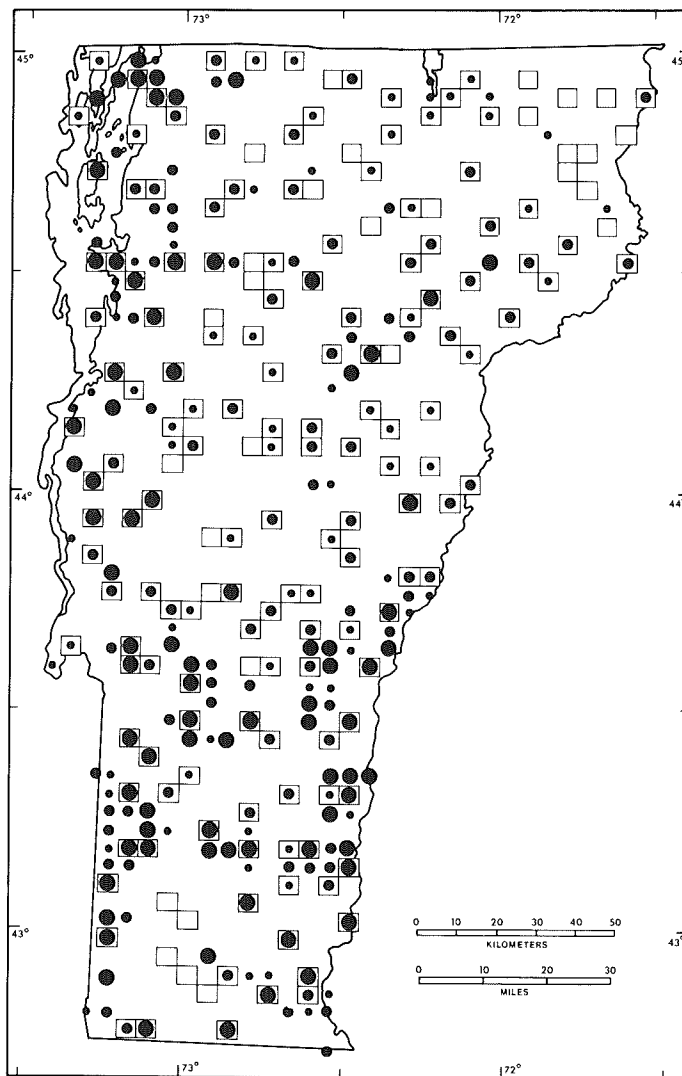
The normally gregarious Mourning Dove is one of the earliest nesters in Vermont. Courtship display occurs both on the ground, where the bowing male intently and per-



sistently pursues the female, and in the air, where the male may be seen towering upward, often with noisy wing beats, then gliding downward or sweeping in circles on widespread wings (Goodwin 1977) with tail feathers spread (Bent 1932). During the breeding season, the Mourning Dove may be heard articulating its characteristic *coo*, a clear, melodious, and somewhat sad tone, with distinguishable variations according to whether the bird is advertising its presence, displaying, or calling from the nest.

Nests of the Mourning Dove are characteristically flimsy structures composed of sticks and twigs. The male and the female construct the nest together. Nest building as a rule takes place in the early morning (Nice 1922–23). The Mourning Dove exhibits a wide choice of nesting sites, although the typical nest may be placed in the tangles of a shrub or on the horizontal branch of a tree—often an evergreen—not far from the trunk, and at a height of 3–8 m (10–25 ft). However, any horizontal support, including the ledge of a building or an old nest of another species may be used as a foundation for a new nest (Nice 1922–23; Harrison 1975).

Two pure white eggs form the normal clutch. Incubation of the eggs and brooding of the young are shared by both male and female, the former usually attending during the day and the latter during the night, early morning, and late afternoon (Nice 1922–



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 149 (83%)
 Possible breeding: 44 (30% of total)
 Probable breeding: 57 (38% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 48 (32% 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	21
Green Mountains	38	70	25
North Central	15	79	10
Northeast Highlands	6	37	4
East Central	19	100	13
Taconic Mountains	16	100	11
Eastern Foothills	24	100	16

23). Four egg dates recorded during Atlas Project fieldwork fell between April 25 and June 25. Both parents regurgitate "pigeon milk" for the young squabs; it is soon supplemented by weed seeds and grain. As the incubation period lasts from 14 to 15 1/2 days, and the young fledge in 13 to 15 days, the nesting cycle is completed in approximately 30 days. Two nestling dates for Vermont were April 17 and May 14, and the latest of five fledgling dates was July 16; the Mourning Dove potentially can have at least three broods. Nice (1922-23) recorded two striking differences between nest behavior of the Mourning Dove and passerine birds:

Mourning Doves provide almost constant brooding of the young until the end of nest life nears, and do not take sanitary care of the nest.

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