

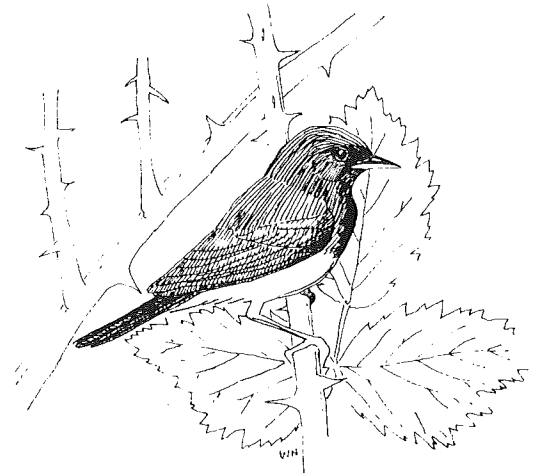
Mourning Warbler

Oporornis philadelphia

Once one learns its distinctive song and call note, the Mourning Warbler seems surprisingly more common than might be expected. Many observers consider it to be one of the rarer warblers, because its behavior makes it inconspicuous, yet it is a typical bird of the northwoods country. It occurred in 57% of Vermont's Atlas Project priority blocks and in all of the physiographic regions. It is difficult to know, as Peterson suggested in Griscom and Sprunt (1957), whether the early naturalists such as Audubon and Wilson simply did not detect Mourning Warblers, or whether the species was much rarer in the past than at present, and has increased in recent years as appropriate habitat has been created by forest clearing and regeneration.

In summer, Mourning Warblers range from northern Alberta, central Quebec, and Newfoundland south to Minnesota and central Massachusetts, and in the Appalachians south to West Virginia and Maryland. In Vermont they are found at all elevations in shrubby second growth. In the more southern parts of the state they are more usual at elevations above 457 m (1,500 ft). They skulk in dry hillside thickets of blackberry and pin cherry, in underbrush in cleared and burned-over areas, in moist groves of jewelweed and nettles, and in overgrowth at margins of swamps and bogs. They are frequently located at the brushy edges of ski trails. Mourning Warblers arrive in Vermont in late May and early June, when they are difficult to observe because of the newly leaved understory.

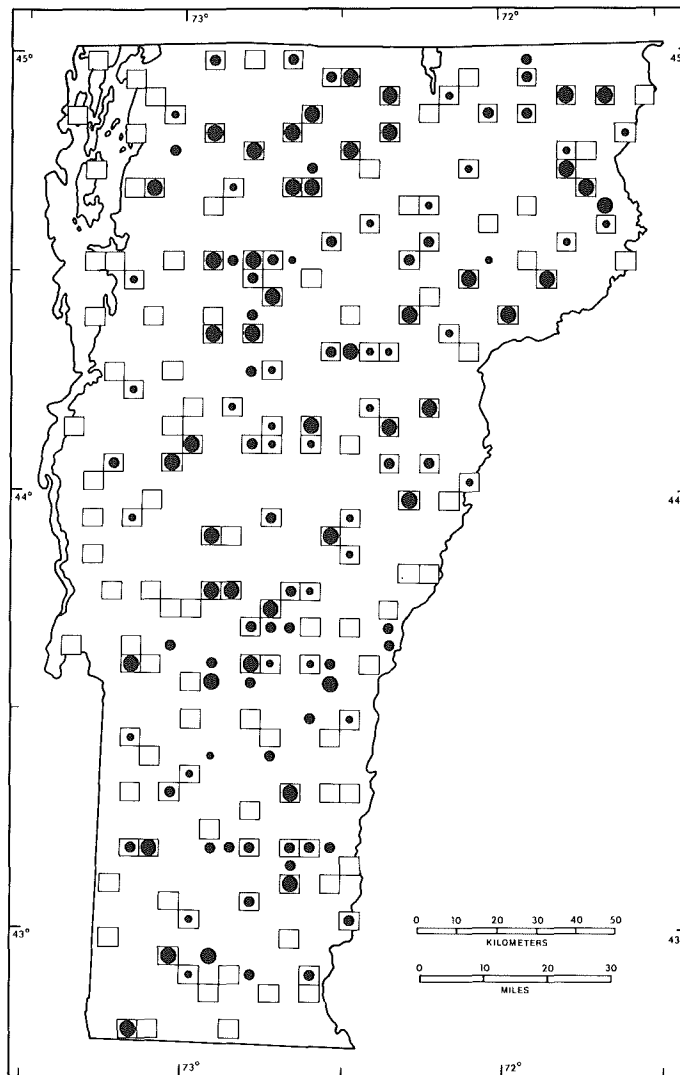
Despite their retiring nature, Mourning Warblers are easily detected by their sound. According to Cox (1960), males sing at any height from near ground level to the tops of shrubs and saplings 7.6 m (25 ft) high. When disturbed from these perches, they retire to a vegetative tangle from whence they frequently continue singing. They respond well to taped calls. Numbers of Mourning Warblers were located by Atlas Project work-



ers through the birds' singing (S), agitated behavior (D), or distraction display (DD).

Cox (1960) found territories in Minnesota to average about 0.8 ha (1.9 a), and referred to the area of a pair in New Hampshire as being about 0.6 ha (1.5 a). Territories are defended by both sexes. The Mourning Warbler's nest is placed on the ground or up to 0.9 m (3 ft) above the ground, and is well concealed in thick plant growth; it is often fastened to a number of stems of a leafy shrub. Nests have a bulky exterior of dried leaves, coarse grasses, weed stalks, and fibrous bark, and are lined with fine grasses, rootlets, and hair. Three to 5 eggs, commonly 4, are laid; they are incubated solely by the female. A nest containing 4 eggs was found in East Wallingford, Vermont on June 17, 1923. A nest with 4 eggs was located on June 10, 1920 at Mendon; this clutch had increased to 5 eggs when revisited on June 14 (Kirk 1921). In New York, Bull (1974) recorded nesting from May 28 to July 7. Forbush (1929) wrote that nesting occurred in June in Maine, New Hampshire, and southern Ontario. Incubation may begin the day before the last egg is laid, and lasts about 12 days. The female sits closely on the eggs, and never flies directly from the nest, leaving instead in a mouselike fashion. The male feeds the female at or away from the nest during incubation.

The young are tended by both parents; they remain in the nest for 7 to 9 days, and



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 102 (57%)

Possible breeding: 33 (32% of total)

Probable breeding: 27 (27% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 42 (41% 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 | 10 |
| Green Mountains | 38 | 70 | 37 |
| North Central | 13 | 68 | 13 |
| Northeast Highlands | 11 | 69 | 11 |
| East Central | 16 | 84 | 15 |
| Taconic Mountains | 5 | 31 | 5 |
| Eastern Foothills | 9 | 37 | 9 |

leave the nest unable to fly. They remain with the adults for 2 to 3 weeks. Nesting Mourning Warblers become easily agitated when they are feeding young and are conspicuous at this time. In late summer Mourning Warblers remain silent and are extremely hard to locate. Because they leave their breeding grounds soon after nesting they are seldom observed in the fall. Immature birds often appear south of their breeding range in early August. Mourning Warblers winter from southern Nicaragua south through Panama to Colombia, eastern Ecuador, and southern Venezuela (AOU 1983).

The bird's name comes from the male's dark gray head and throat and his black,

irregularly marked upper breast, which suggest the black crepe once commonly worn by mourners.

WHITNEY NICHOLS