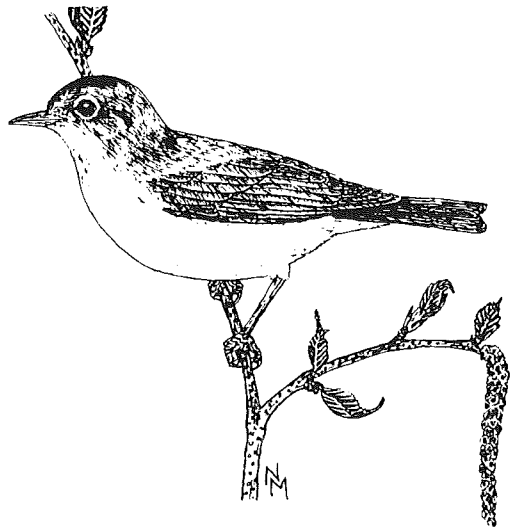
Nashville Warbler

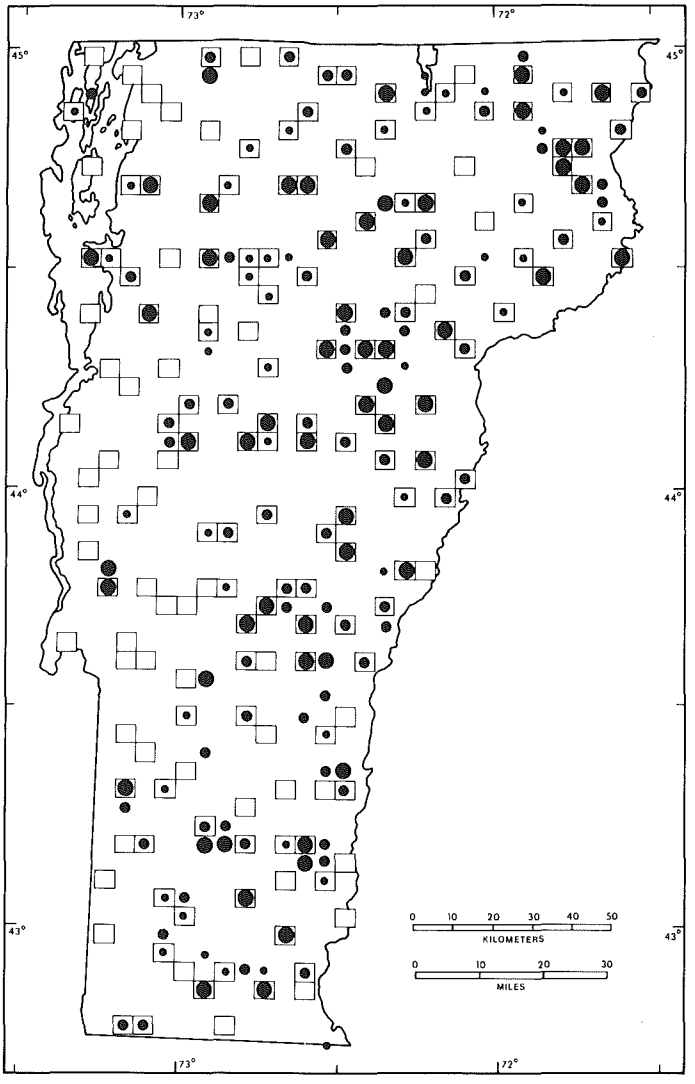
Vermivora ruficapilla



The Nashville Warbler breeds across southern Canada and the northern U.S. from British Columbia east to Nova Scotia and south in the mountains to California and Virginia. Within this large range the species occupies a variety of ecological locales ranging from bog scrublands to dry seral forests and mountaintops. On Mt. Mansfield it is the second most abundant warbler to occur above 1,100 m (3,608 ft), exceeded only by the Blackpoll Warbler (Able and Noon 1976). Although the Nashville Warbler frequently breeds in dry second-growth birch and aspen stands where fire and/or lumbering have occurred, it is most common in and around Vermont's spruce and tamarack bogs and on mountains such as Ascutney. Certainly it has not undergone a dramatic population increase following man's disturbance of the primeval forest, as did the Chestnut-sided Warbler. Although widespread, the Nashville remains one of the less common breeders in the state's abundant abandoned pastures and disturbed seral forest lands. Dawson (1979) suggested that logging may enhance lowland conifer habitat for Nashvilles by increasing edge and shrub growth.

Atlas Project results indicate that Nashville Warblers become progressively less common toward western and southern areas of the state. The species was recorded in every priority block in the Northeast Highlands and East Central region, but in only 39% and 31% of the Champlain Lowlands and Taconic Mountain blocks, respectively. Breeding bird censuses in northern and east central Vermont have recorded five to fifteen pairs of Nashvilles per 40.5 ha (100 a) in second-growth conifer and hardwood habitats (Carpenter 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1978; Williamson 1975; Metcalf 1977). Little information exists on current population trends, but the species is undoubtedly more common today than it was a century ago when much of the state was deforested. What its status in Vermont was before settlement is, of course, unknown, but the Nashville is never found in unbroken forest and was consequently probably limited in its occurrence to the vicinity of burns, beaver meadows, and bogs.

Among the hardiest of Vermont warblers, Nashvilles may be present from the first week of May through the third week of October, when they retreat to their wintering grounds, which extend from southern Florida and Texas south to Guatemala. Although the male may typically be found singing from a high perch or in the canopy of a tree during May and June, a flight song may also be given (Chapman 1907). The nest is placed on the ground, well concealed at the base of a shrub or sapling, or in a grass clump or cluster of dead leaves. Roth (1977) found nests were generally placed in open areas with well-developed herbaceous cover. The nest, built of grasses, pine needles, and mosses, is lined with fine rootlets, grass, and hair. The 4 to 5 brown-speckled creamy white eggs are incubated by the female for 11 to 12 days, and the young fledge after a similar length of time in the nest (Lawrence 1948). Easily flushed, the female may feign injury once disturbed. Courtship feeding of the female on the nest occurs occasionally (Roth 1977). Both adults feed and care for the young, with the male often doing most of the feeding. Fledgling dates for Vermont range from June 25 to August 7 (eight records). Most foraging is reported to occur



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 124 (69%)

Possible breeding:	35 (28% of total)
Probable breeding:	41 (33% of total)
Confirmed breeding:	48 (39% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	12	39	10
Green Mountains	42	78	34
North Central	15	79	12
Northeast Highlands	16	100	13
East Central	19	100	15
Taconic Mountains	5	31	4
Eastern Foothills	15	62	12

low in trees and thickets at the forest edge, with occasional forays to the ground and to the upper canopy. A variety of prey is taken, including gypsy moths and tent caterpillars. There is no evidence as yet that the species responds to outbreaks of these prey, as do some of the boreal forest warblers to outbreaks of spruce budworms. Nashville Warbler nests are difficult to locate, and Atlas Project workers made 70% of their breeding confirmations through observations of adults feeding young.

The Nashville Warbler may have increased somewhat in Vermont since the late 1800s, when it was considered a rare summer resident (Perkins and Howe 1901). Although the species currently occurs more frequently than before in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird surveys in the Northeast (BBS 1966–79), its occurrence on Vermont routes has remained relatively low. Perhaps plant succession on Vermont's abandoned farmlands has passed the stage where these areas are attractive to Nashville Warblers. Nashvilles may still be found relatively easily in all but extreme western Vermont by a persistent observer familiar with the species' song and habitat.

DOUGLAS P. KIBBE