

Orchard Oriole

Icterus spurius

Vermont is at the northern periphery of the Orchard Oriole's breeding distribution. The species is rare in the Green Mountain State: only 18 records exist for it, dating back to the initial record made in 1883 (Knowlton 1884; RVB 1973–83; GMAS records). Only one reference to breeding was made before the Atlas Project: "Found once with young in Brattleboro, but careful search in all vicinity after trees were bare failed to reveal the nest" (Davenport 1907). One breeding confirmation was documented during the Atlas Project, and that from a non-priority block. Two more breeding records were documented in 1982.

The Orchard Oriole inhabits edge and disturbed sites, and occurs in agricultural regions and residential areas, and around bodies of water and wetlands. In the Northeast, the species inhabits stands of shade trees, overgrown farmlands, orchards, and tree nurseries. Much of Vermont is poor Orchard Oriole habitat, as the species tends to shun extensive closed-canopy woodlands and high elevations. All Vermont records are restricted to the Champlain Lowlands, the Valley of Vermont (just east of the Taconic Mountains), and the valleys of the Connecticut River and its tributaries.

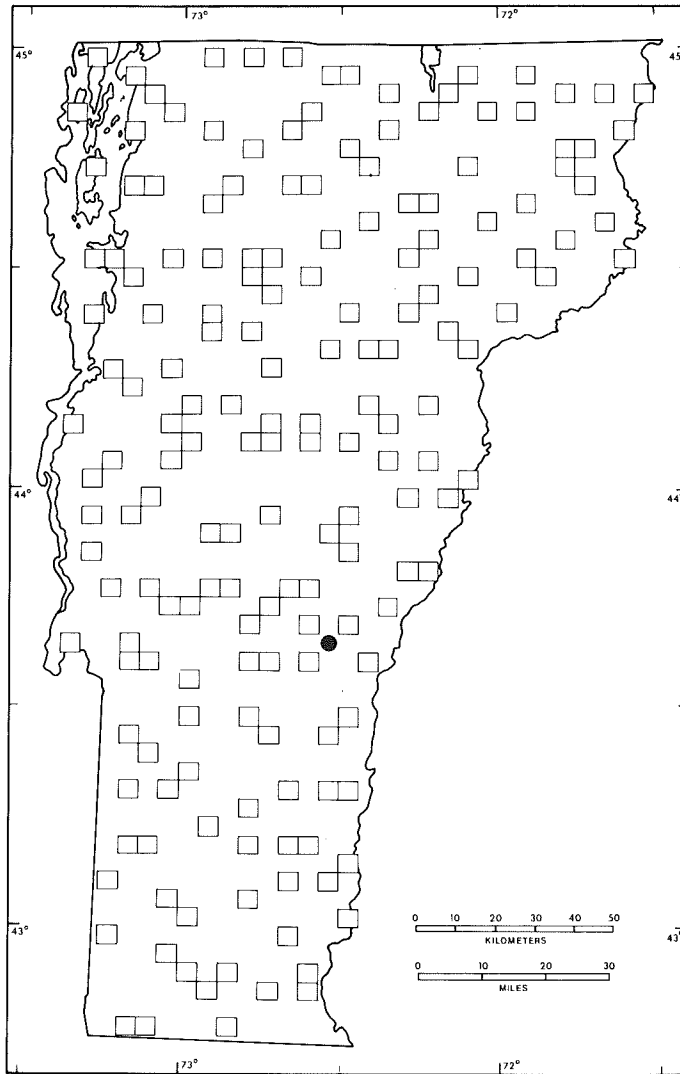
Summering Orchard Orioles in Vermont have most often been located by their song, a rich, varied warble that is higher-pitched and more complex than that of the Northern Oriole. The basketlike nest is relatively easy to locate; the Atlas Project breeding record involved the location of an active nest.

Spring arrival dates for the Orchard Oriole in Vermont tend to be during the second or third week of May. The earliest date on record is April 27, 1979, at Cornwall (RVB, Spring 1981). The two Vermont nests were both found during June. One nest was located in 1977 near Woodstock, about 6 m (20 ft) up in a maple sapling in an open field near a house and stream. It contained eggs from June 7 to 21; young were detected in the nest on June 22; and the nest



was apparently deserted on June 26 (ASR, C. Powell). The second nest was located on an island in Lake Champlain, about 7.6 m (25 ft) up in a large white birch on a lawn, on June 27, 1982, at which time it contained nestlings; young successfully fledged the next week (BVR, S. B. Laughlin, D. Hazlett). Both males of these nesting pairs were second-year birds, in greenish yellow plumage with a black bib. Sealy (1980) pointed out the importance of young birds in range extension. The third recent record involved the sighting of an adult male feeding a juvenile at Addison on June 26, 1982.

The nest of the Orchard Oriole is a well-woven purse of fine grasses, lined with plant down. The nest is slung in a trunk fork, or on a fork near the tip of a branch. The eggs are white with dark brown blotches, scrawls, and spots concentrated at the large end. Clutch size may range from 3 to 7 eggs; the average clutch has about 4 eggs (Dennis 1948; Bull 1974). The incubation period lasts from 12 to 15 days; the average is 14 (Dennis 1948). The nestling period lasts about 13 days (Dennis 1948), and the young may remain within 20–30 m (65–100 ft) of the nest for another week, after which they wander about with their parents until they depart for winter quarters (Sealy 1980). Orchard Orioles migrate early, usually leaving breeding territories by late July. The latest date on record for Vermont is July 30, 1983 (RVB, Summer 1983).



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 0 (0%)

Possible breeding: 0 (0% of total)

Probable breeding: 0 (0% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 0 (0% 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	0	0	0
North Central	0	0	0
Northeast Highlands	0	0	0
East Central	0	0	0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	0
Eastern Foothills	0	0	0

Sealy (1980) speculated that the Orchard Oriole is subject to numerical and range-front fluctuations at the northwestern edge of its range in Manitoba. Similar fluctuations appear to have occurred in northeastern North America as well. Early in the twentieth century the species was widespread in New York State and common as far north as Albany (Eaton 1914). The species was documented nesting as close to Vermont as Granville, Washington County, New York in 1890 (Bull 1974). From 1883 to 1908 there were five reports of the species for Vermont. After 1920 the species declined in New York; it became much less common by the late 1960s and early 1970s

(Bull 1974). The recent history of the species in Vermont suggests that its population is increasing. The Orchard Oriole reappeared in Vermont reports during the 1970s after being absent for more than 60 years; there were 14 records of its occurrence from 1970 to 1983 in Vermont.

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