

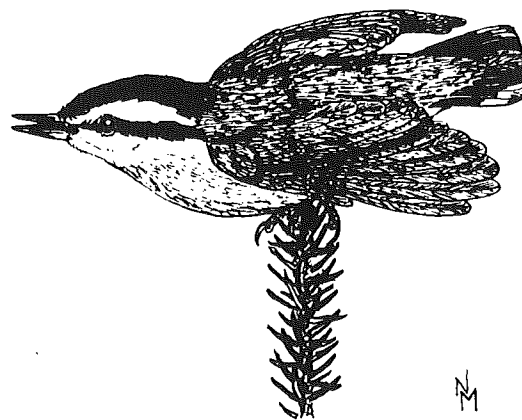
Red-breasted Nuthatch

Sitta canadensis

The Red-breasted Nuthatch inhabits the boreal forests in North America. It ranges from Alaska and Canada to the southwestern U.S. and from the northeastern U.S. to the higher mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina. In Vermont, this species is common in coniferous forests and uncommon in mixed woods with cone-bearing trees.

The Red-breasted Nuthatch moves as readily upside down as right side up as it feeds along the trunks of trees; the species also feeds out at the tips of branches, unlike the White-breasted Nuthatch. Its diet consists of the seeds of pine, spruce, fir, and other conifers, as well as insects such as beetles, wasps, and caterpillars and a variety of insect eggs and larvae (Bent 1948). Red-breasted Nuthatches frequently wedge their food into bark crevices and then hammer at it until they succeed in breaking off a bite-sized piece. Especially in years of irruptive flights, they are frequent visitors to winter bird feeding stations where they feed on suet and sunflower seeds.

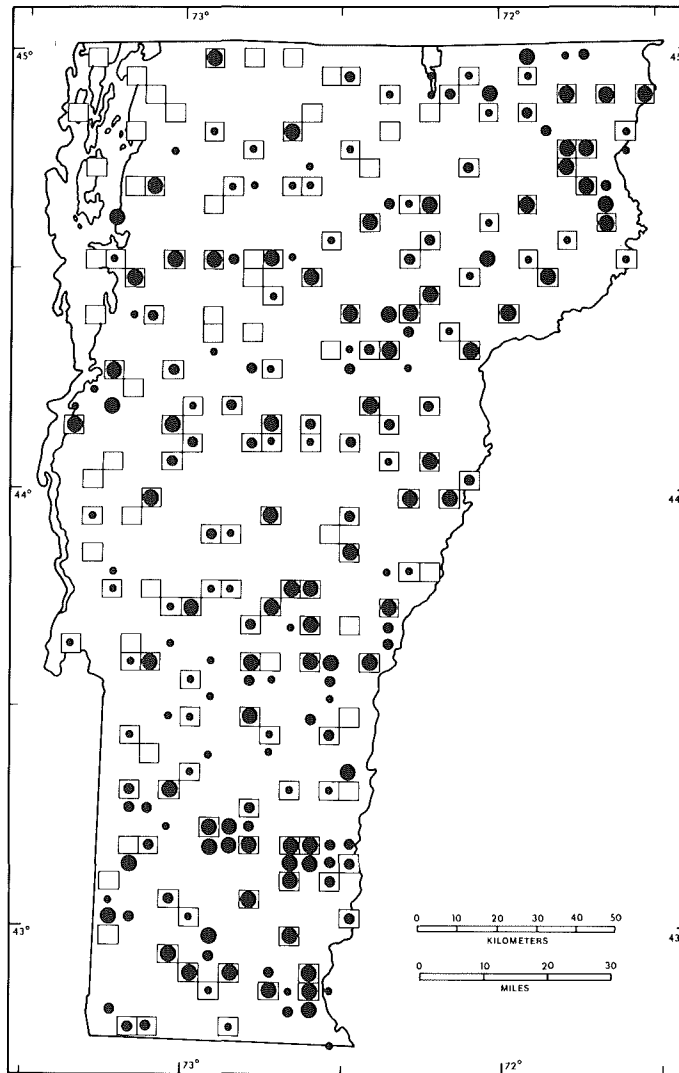
The male Red-breasted Nuthatch begins singing his courtship song in late March. Kilham (1973) described the song as a "repeated series of plaintive, nasal *waa-aa-ns*. There may be 2–6 notes in a series, and 12–16 series sung per minute." Courtship activities are usually carried out among the branches and tops of conifers and are not readily witnessed by the field observer. The Red-breasted Nuthatch excavates a nest cavity in a rotted stub or dead branch of a coniferous or deciduous tree; occasionally the species uses an old woodpecker hole. Usually several nest sites are investigated; the female chooses the final site. The cavity is placed 2 to 12 m (5–40 ft) above ground; the average height is 5 m (15 ft) (Harrison 1975; Harrison 1978). The cavity entrance is 3.8 cm (1.5 in) wide, beyond which a passageway slants down for 7.6–10.2 cm (3–4 in) before the cavity drops straight down for 10.2 cm (4 in) (Harrison 1975). The bottom of the cavity may be lined with



bark shreds, grass, moss, feathers, rootlets, hair, or fur.

Nuthatches modify entrances and/or cavities by a variety of methods. The Red-breasted Nuthatch in particular brings globules of pitch or resin from pines, balsam, and other conifers and smears them around the entrance. The male nuthatch continues to bring fresh pitch to the entrance throughout the incubation and nestling periods (Kilham 1972b). Parent birds avoid the pitch by flying straight into the nest. The pitch may protect against predators, competitors, and weather. Kilham (1972b) noticed in nests of both a wild pair of Red-breasted Nuthatches and a pair raised and bred in captivity that the bottom of the passageway was lined with litter.

The Red-breasted Nuthatch is single-brooded. Both female and male incubate the 4 to 7 (usually 5 to 6) eggs (Terres 1980; VINS banding data). The incubation period is reported to be 12 days (Bent 1948). In New York State, eggs have been found in nests from April 30 to June 17 (Bull 1974). The seven Vermont egg dates range from May 5 to July 10. The young birds leave the nest 18–21 days after hatching (Harrison 1978). Dates for nests with young range from May 28 to July 9 (seven records), and dates for dependent young range from June 25 to August 6 (eleven records). Both periods are similar to those given for New York State (Bull 1974). This species was most frequently confirmed by FY (food for young) and FL (recently fledged young) codes.



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL	138 (77%)
Possible breeding:	45 (33% of total)
Probable breeding:	31 (22% of total)
Confirmed breeding:	62 (45% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	14	45	10.0
Green Mountains	42	78	30.5
North Central	19	89	14.0
Northeast Highlands	16	100	12.0
East Central	17	89	12.0
Taconic Mountains	10	63	7.0
Eastern Foothills	20	83	14.5

During the Atlas Project the Red-breasted Nuthatch was found to be most common in the Northeast Highlands, the North Central region, and the East Central region, which contain large tracts of boreal forest; it was least common in the Champlain Lowlands, a region of predominantly open farmlands with hardwood or mixed pine-hardwood woodlots. An interesting contrast to the White-breasted Nuthatch exists with regard to physiographic distribution. The White-breasted Nuthatch is more common in the Champlain Lowlands and less common in the North Central region and the Northeast Highlands.

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