

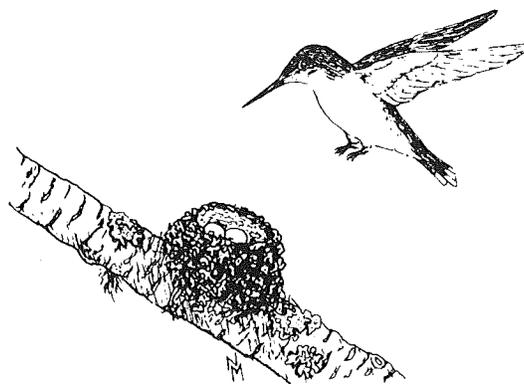
Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Archilochus colubris

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is the only one of this large, mostly neotropical family to nest east of the Mississippi River. It breeds from southern Canada to Florida and west to the Great Plains, and winters from Texas and Florida through Mexico to Panama (AOU 1983); many of the birds cross the Gulf of Mexico on the northward flight (Terres 1980). The tiny Ruby-throat, 7.6 cm (3 in) long, shares with the other hummingbirds the unique ability to fly backward, and also can hover while feeding at flowers. Its wings can beat 55 to 75 times a second; its unique wing structure allows the forewing to lead on both the forward and backward strokes (Pough 1946; Terres 1980). The humming noise made by the wings gives the name "hummingbird."

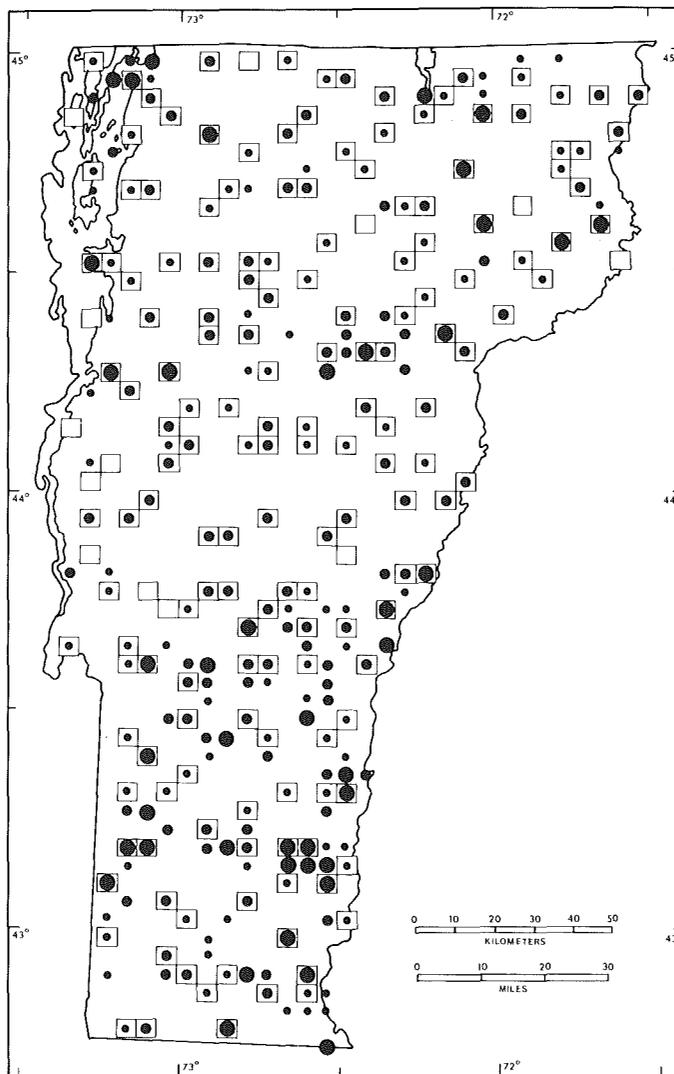
The Ruby-throated Hummingbird, though not common, is widely distributed in Vermont, and was found in 93% of the priority blocks. It occurred in all seven physiographic regions. Hummingbirds return to Vermont during the first week in May (early date, April 24) and become conspicuous in late May when the flowers are open and small flying insects are abundant. They are diurnal migrants and are frequently seen from Vermont hawk-watching lookouts, streaking south like so many little bullets. Most are gone by the end of September, but there are a number of October sighting dates; a late date of October 26, 1976, exists for Woodstock (RVB, Fall 1976). On occasion, late birds are inadvertently brought into houses while roosting in hanging flower pots.

Ruby-throats are difficult to confirm; their tiny, knot-shaped nest is well concealed. However, most of the 27 Atlas Project confirmations came from finding the nest. The birds themselves are most easily located by listening for the distinctive hum of their wings or their high-pitched, squeaky call notes. Often they can be spotted perched on some dead tree snag or utility wire, or feeding in flower gardens. They are very fond of red and orange flowers such as bee-



balm, jewelweed, salvia, and trumpet-creeper. They collect nectar and insects from many plants, often feed on sap at sapsucker holes, and are enthusiastic visitors to hummingbird feeders. The diet appears to consist of both flower nectar and insects year-round; a study of wintering Ruby-throats in Costa Rica found them relying on both (Wolf 1970).

The male puts on an impressive courtship display that consists of flying back and forth in a wide arc, swinging as if on a pendulum; at the bottom of the arc, he buzzes his wings. The Ruby-throat will nest in a variety of locales, such as gardens, orchards, roadside thickets, and woodland clearings. The female alone builds the tiny 3.8 cm (1.5 in) lichen-covered nest, which is saddled on a branch at an elevation of 1.5–6 m (5–20 ft), often near or over running water in an open woodland. The nest is built of soft down from ferns, milkweed, fireweed, or thistles, and is held together by spider webs or the web from tent caterpillars' nests (Allen 1930). The female ordinarily returns to the same place every year to nest. The one Vermont nest-building date is June 1. Two tiny white eggs are laid, occasionally 3 (Bent 1940). Seven reports of Vermont nests recorded egg dates ranging from May 29 to August 6; the nests were in sugar maples at 2.1–2.4 m (7–8 ft); in a paper birch at 11 m (36 ft); and in a hemlock at 3.7 m (12 ft), at the edge of a road. The female incubates the eggs for 11 to 16 days (Allen 1930), and the young fledge at 19 to 22 days (Harrison 1978; Terres 1980). Nestling dates run from June 26 to July 13 (three records). Occa-



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 166 (93%)

Possible breeding: 68 (41% of total)

Probable breeding: 71 (43% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 27 (16% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	24	77	15
Green Mountains	54	100	33
North Central	18	95	11
Northeast Highlands	14	88	8
East Central	19	100	11
Taconic Mountains	14	88	8
Eastern Foothills	23	96	14

sionally, 2 broods are raised; rarely, 3 (Bent 1940).

At Winhall, Vermont, interesting hummingbird feeding behavior has been observed. Frequently, hawk moths (*Sphingidae*) attracted to floodlights left on during nights in June were found with their ample abdomens eviscerated. One morning a Ruby-throat was observed in the act of eviscerating a large moth, its bill jammed deeply into the moth's abdomen (W. J. Norse, pers. observ.).

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