

Swamp Sparrow

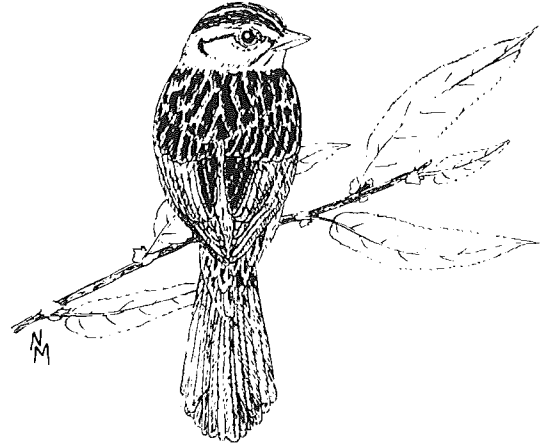
Melospiza georgiana

The Swamp Sparrow inhabits freshwater marshes, swamps, bogs, wet meadows, and the low swampy shores of lakes, slow-moving streams, and rivers. It nests across eastern North America to the Great Plains. This reticent bird is not easily seen except when singing (Bent 1968; Reinert and Golet 1979). Except when migrating, it rarely flies more than a few dozen yards at a time, or more than a few feet above the tops of grasses.

Swamp Sparrows first arrive in Vermont about mid April; their migration peaks in mid May. The males appear first. Their territorial songs are given from a conspicuous position on an alder, willow, or cattail (Bent 1968). The principal habitat requirements seem to be shallow standing water, low dense cover, and elevated songposts (Reinert and Golet 1979).

The female Swamp Sparrow usually builds the nest alone. At least 50% of the species' nests are placed directly over standing water (Reinert and Golet 1979); nests are almost never built on the ground. They are usually built between cattail stalks, or upon clumps of stalks and leaves, and are frequently hidden from above by broad, dead leaf blades. Nests may also be built in green sedge tussocks. The nest is generally entered from the side. The foundation and the thick outer cup are built entirely of tightly woven coarse, dead marsh grasses, sedges, and cattails. The lining is made of fine round stems of grass and similar vegetation (Bent 1968).

Swamp Sparrows lay from 3 to 6 (usually 4 or 5) ovate, slightly glossy eggs (Bent 1968); six records in Vermont indicate egg dates from May 28 to June 11. Egg color is usually a pale green that fades to greenish white upon exposure (Bent 1968); eggs are spotted and blotched with red-brown. Swamp Sparrow eggs are practically indistinguishable from those of the Song Sparrow. One clutch per season is usual, although sometimes two are laid (Harrison 1975).

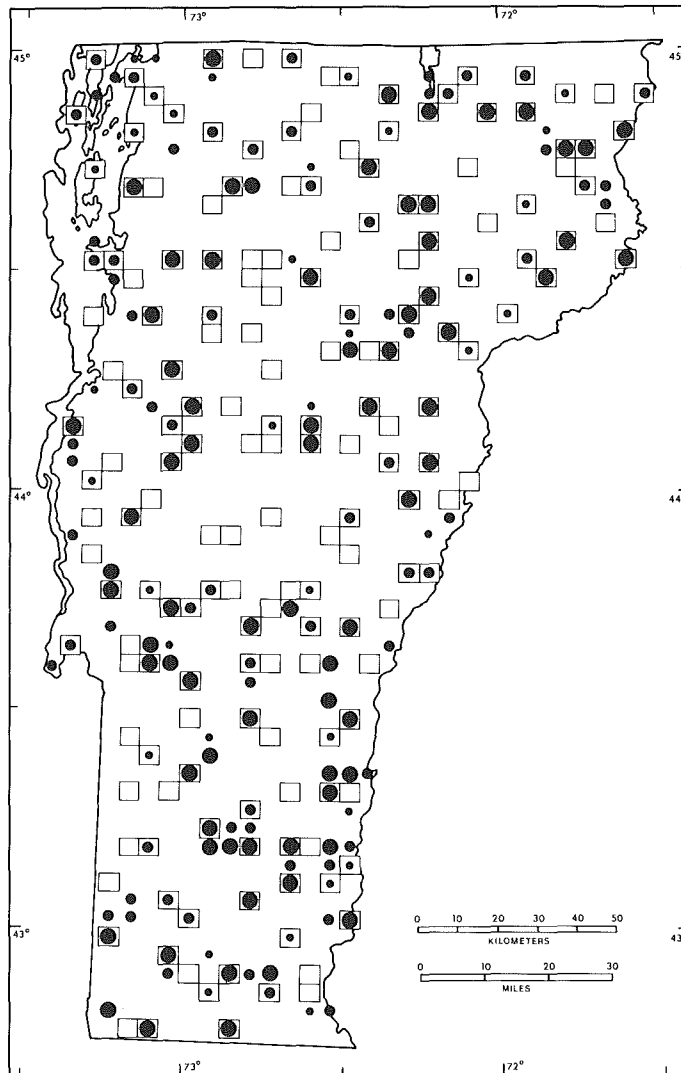


Incubation is performed by the female and usually lasts 12 to 13 days (Harrison 1978). The male feeds the female on the nest while she broods. Once hatched, the young ordinarily remain in the nest about 7 to 11 days. A nest with young was observed on June 22 in Vermont; fledglings have been seen between June 18 and July 13 (six records).

The Swamp Sparrow is one of the most highly insectivorous species of the genus *Melospiza* (Bent 1968). In winter, 55% of its diet consists of insects; in spring and early summer, 88% of the diet is insects. In late summer and fall the diet becomes 84% to 97% granivorous. Much of the feeding is done by wading in shallow water and picking insects and seeds from the surface.

Fall migration in Vermont occurs between the last week of September and the last week of October. At this time the Swamp Sparrow may be observed in all types of habitat except deep woodlands, but is most frequently found among weed-grown fields and hedges. The species occurs rarely in Vermont in winter.

The Swamp Sparrow was observed breeding in all seven physiographic regions of the state. It was least well represented in the northern half of the Green Mountains, where topography is most severe and marshes are scarce. Swamp Sparrows were located in 64% of the Atlas Project priority blocks, confirmed in 51% of those blocks, and found to be probable in another 31% of the



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 114 (64%)
 Possible breeding: 21 (18% of total)
 Probable breeding: 35 (31% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 58 (51% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	22	71	19.3
Green Mountains	33	61	29.0
North Central	14	74	12.3
Northeast Highlands	13	81	11.4
East Central	11	58	9.6
Taconic Mountains	8	50	7.0
Eastern Foothills	13	54	11.4

blocks. Feeding young (FY) was the code most frequently used for confirmation of nesting. Swamp Sparrows should maintain their status in Vermont, as long as the wetlands they depend upon for nesting habitat continue to exist.

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