

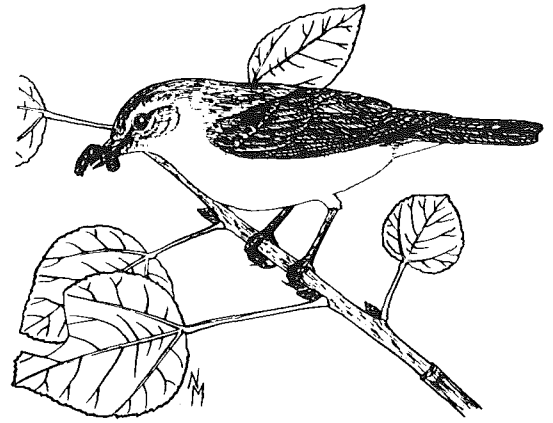
Tennessee Warbler

Vermivora peregrina

The Tennessee Warbler, a bird of the Nearctic boreal forest zone, breeds only rarely and sporadically in Vermont, largely in the northeastern quarter of the state; however, breeding has been confirmed south to Winhall and Rutland. Most summer reports are from the cool spruce-fir forests in the vicinity of Island Pond.

There are few reports of breeding for Vermont. Ross (1906) observed two pairs of Tennessees in Mount Holly in June 1897; Evans reported a pair in Townshend during the summers of 1890 and 1899 (Howe 1902); Eldred found one or more pairs breeding in the Morgan area during the second half of the 1960s (Eldred, Field notes). There were two confirmations during the Atlas Project: a pair feeding four to five fledglings, July 13, 1978, at Bear Swamp in Wolcott (ASR, G. F. Oatman and C. Schultz); and an adult feeding a stub-tailed young near Winhall, August 8 and 9, 1981 (ASR, W. J. Norse). One probable and four possible reports were also tallied during the Atlas Project. In addition, two highly suggestive reports came from the Vermont Institute of Natural Science's banding station in Woodstock: on August 5, 1975 and July 29, 1976 hatching-year Tennessees, looking very recently fledged, were captured and banded. The Tennessee is probably as rare in Vermont as these few records suggest, since many promising nesting habitats covered by the Atlas Project census as unique and fragile areas failed to yield them.

In the East, the Tennessee's breeding range extends south to southern Maine, central New Hampshire, southern Vermont, and northeastern New York (AOU 1983). Some researchers believe the Tennessee is much more numerous now than it was in the last century (Bent 1953; Bull 1974). As it prefers openings and clearings in coniferous forests for breeding, this species may have benefited from increased human use of northern boreal forests. It favors brushy areas, scattered with small conifers, at the

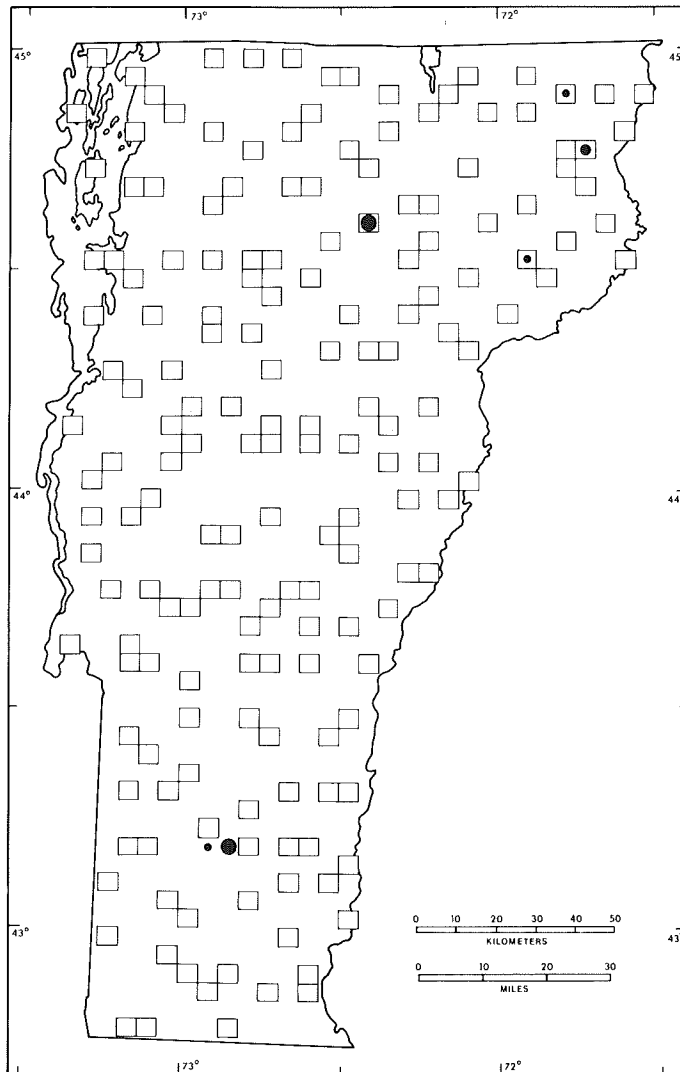


edges of bogs, streams, and other damp places. On its breeding grounds the Tennessee is not overly difficult to find as males sing their rather loud, ringing song as often as 6 to 9 times per minute (Robbins et al. 1966).

The nest is placed in a hummock of sphagnum moss or under a small bush, and is usually concealed from above by dead vegetation of the previous year. The nest is made of sedge or grass; in it are laid 4 to 7 (commonly 5 to 6) white or creamy white eggs, spotted or speckled with brown (Palmer 1949; Reilly 1979). The incubation period and age at first flight are still unknown (Reilly 1979). Nesting data for Maine are probably roughly applicable to Vermont: eggs advanced in incubation, June 4 and 7; nests with young, June 10 and 15; males singing until August 20 (Palmer 1949).

On its summer territory the Tennessee forages through the leaves and over the branch tips at almost any height. In migration it may appear, often in large numbers, in trees of any type, though in spring it especially favors hunting amid the catkins and blossoms of very tall deciduous trees. It feeds on a variety of insects and spiders; seeds, berries, and grapes are taken to a lesser extent, especially in the fall (Terres 1980).

The Tennessee is normally seen in Vermont as a migrant, uncommon to fairly common in spring, and common in fall. Spring migration usually begins about May 10-14 (extreme date, May 7) and peaks



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 4 (2%)

Possible breeding: 2 (50% of total)

Probable breeding: 1 (25% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 1 (25% 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	1	5	2.5
Northeast Highlands	3	19	7.5
East Central	0	0	0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	0
Eastern Foothills	0	0	0

around May 18–26; the spring high count of individuals seen at one time in a single area is 28. The last spring migrants are usually seen from May 27 to 29 (extreme date, June 3).

Like other boreal zone nesters (e.g., the Bay-breasted Warbler), the Tennessee may occasionally linger and even breed well south of its usual range. But observers should be aware of assuming that extralimital singing males represent breeding pairs: they may instead merely be lingering, unattached males. Even summer reports from the Northeast Highlands may represent unmated males. Furthermore, Tennessees begin moving in the fall quite soon after breeding; an ex-

treme early departure date in Vermont is July 12, and first departures on July 14–21 are not uncommon. Again, care must be taken to avoid mistaking these individuals for nesters. The fall movement normally peaks from August 23 to September 15, and ends between September 28 and October 22 (extreme date, October 25) (RVB 1973–81).

G. FRANK OATMAN