

Warbling Vireo

Vireo gilvus

The Warbling Vireo is a bird of unprepossessing habits and appearance whose song is pleasant, if incessant. Warbling Vireos inhabit the middle level and canopy of medium to tall deciduous trees. The species is not partial to extensive woodlands; it prefers mature trees in edge or open locations. James (1976) found that canopy cover in Warbling Vireo territories in southern Ontario averaged 34%—an indication of the species' preference for openings. Warbling Vireos may be excluded from more heavily wooded areas by competition with the Red-eyed Vireo, which has similar foraging habits and food preferences. The Warbling Vireo's territories are often located near water; pairs are seldom found far from a small pond, lake, or stream. By its habitat preference, the Warbling Vireo was preadapted for the rows of tall shade trees found in the villages of New England; the species is common in residential areas.

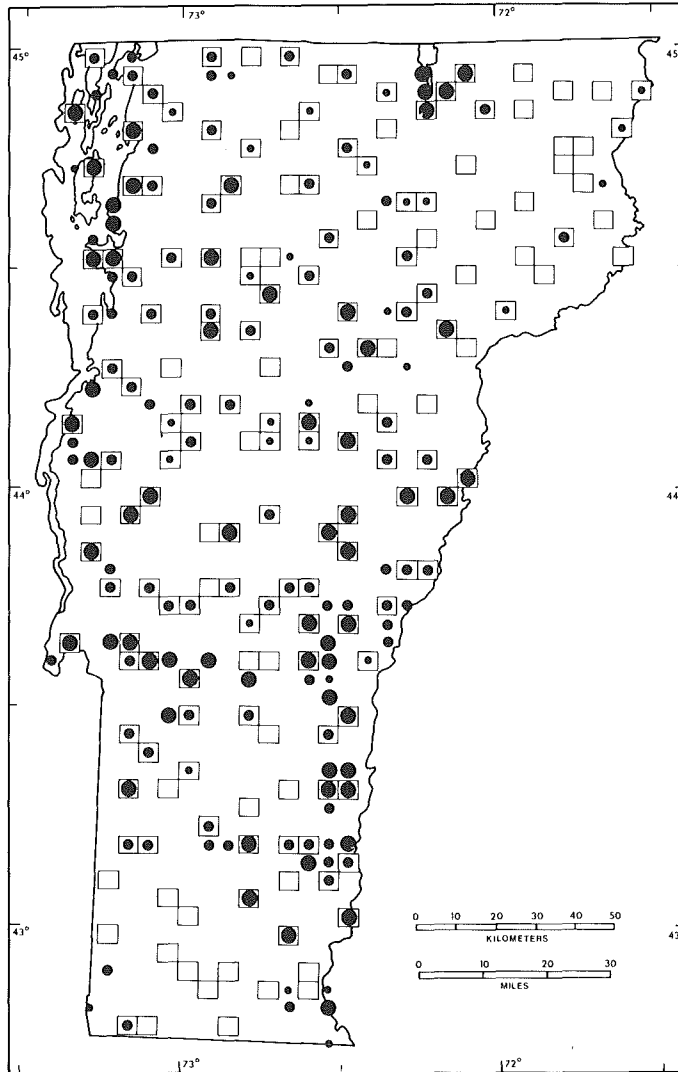
Were it not for their voices, these unobtrusive gray birds would pass unnoticed. Their song is a mellow, leisurely warble, which weaves up and down the scale, ending abruptly with a sharp, upward-inflected note. Warbling Vireos are usually seen high in the foliage of a shade tree, moving deliberately in search of prey among the leaves. With care and patience, an observer may see them visit the nest, a basketlike structure of bark strips, fine grass, plant down, and webbing placed in a branch fork, usually well out from the trunk. The male, who shares the chore of incubation, often bursts into song while on the nest. Nearly 43% of the Atlas Project confirmations for this species were of active nests containing either eggs or nestlings; an additional 41% were of parents bearing food to their young.

Warbling Vireos winter in Central America and reappear in Vermont during May, either late in the first week or within the second week. The species is single-brooded, and commences nesting during late May.



Early literature implies that elms were preferred nest trees (Bent 1950); however, with the advent of Dutch elm disease this vireo has adapted to other tree species. Of 10 Ontario nests located by James (1976), 4 were in maples and 5 in poplar. The nest is built fairly high; James's (1976) nests averaged 8.2 m (27 ft) above ground, and 6 Vermont nests averaged 8.9 m (29 ft). There are only four egg dates on record for Vermont, covering a range of dates from May 24 to June 23. The eggs are white with sparse, dark speckling at the large end; the clutch usually numbers 4 eggs, in a range of 3 to 5. Of the four known nestling dates for Vermont, three fall on June 25, and the fourth is for June 29. Nestling dates for New York State range from late May to late June (Bull 1974). Dependent young have been reported on five dates in Vermont, ranging from June 26 to July 26. The autumn migration of the Warbling Vireo peaks in August.

The Warbling Vireo is widely but thinly distributed in Vermont. Most Atlas Project blocks having some open land with groves of tall trees had at least two to four pairs of these birds, often more. The Northeast Highlands was the only region in which they were recorded in low numbers in priority blocks. That region's extensive closed-canopy forests, often dominated by conifers, are ill-suited to the Warbling Vireo's requirements. Warbling Vireos are largely limited to river valleys in the Green Mountains, and are



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 123 (69%)
 Possible breeding: 19 (15% of total)
 Probable breeding: 60 (49% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 44 (36% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	27	87	2.2
Green Mountains	34	63	2.8
North Central	14	74	1.1
Northeast Highlands	3	19	2
East Central	14	74	1.1
Taconic Mountains	13	81	1.1
Eastern Foothills	18	75	1.5

rare in the broad southernmost portion of the Vermont range.

The Warbling Vireo is widely perceived to have declined in the Northeast during the 1950s and 1960s, apparently as a result of the spraying of shade trees with persistent pesticides (Bull 1974). The species is recovering from this decline; it has been increasing in numbers at an annual rate of 3.4% in the northeastern U.S. since 1966, according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird Survey data (Robbins 1982b).

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