

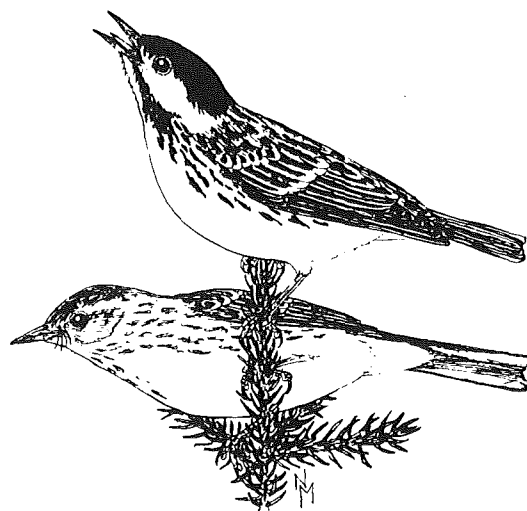
## Blackpoll Warbler

*Dendroica striata*

Strictly a denizen of spruce and fir forests, the Blackpoll Warbler is generally restricted to the higher-elevation boreal forests of Vermont, seldom occurring below 610 m (2,000 ft) in southern portions of the state, though more widely distributed at lower elevations further north if suitable habitat is present. Wintering in South America south to Chile and Peru, more than 5,600 km (3,500 mi) from its Vermont breeding grounds, it is one of the last of the wood warblers to return in the spring. Although migrants may begin appearing in the state during the second week in May, transients may be found well into June.

Blackpolls breed from the Alaskan muskeg southeast to the Maritime provinces and western Massachusetts. Northernmost breeders make an annual round trip exceeding 16,093 km (10,000 mi) in length. Radar studies have shown that many, if not most, Blackpolls fly nonstop across water from coastal New England to the coast of South America; their initial course would take them into the South Atlantic Ocean if prevailing winds in southern latitudes did not push them westward toward land (Nisbet 1970).

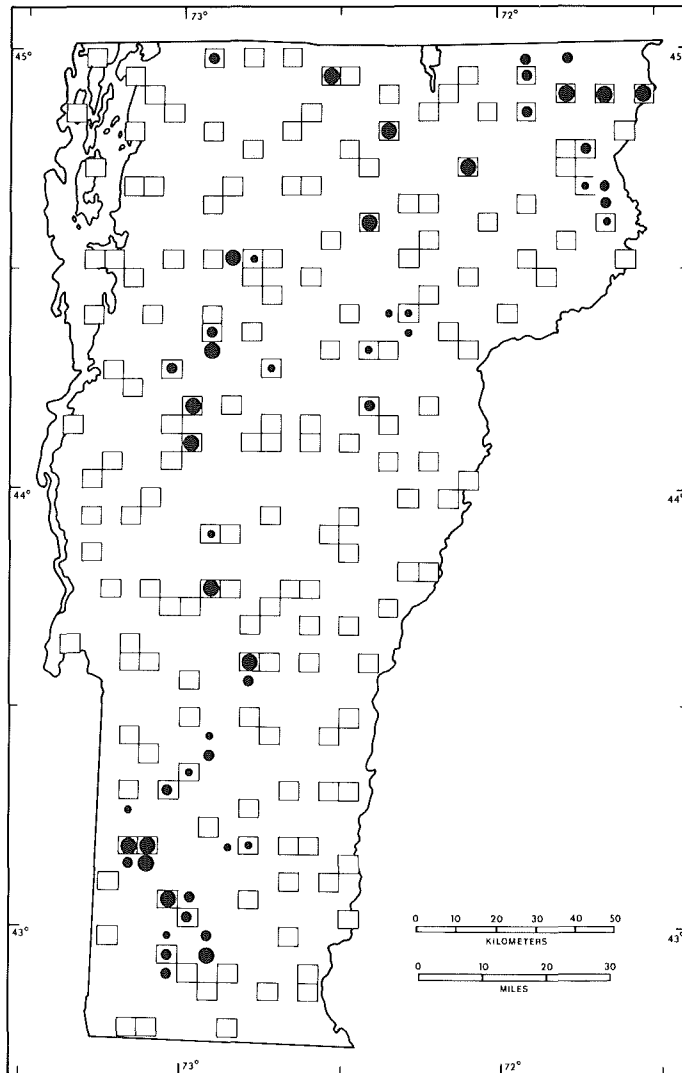
Blackpolls are among Vermont's largest warblers, a fact that probably stands them in good stead in their immense overwater flight and on the nesting grounds, where temperatures may dip below freezing well into the breeding season. The male, more strikingly marked—with his black cap (or "poll") and streaked sides—than the somber female, sings his high-pitched song (inaudible to some ears) from treetops throughout his territory. During June the song is a characteristic feature of the stunted spruce-fir forests that crown Vermont's higher peaks. Only two territory-mapping studies have been conducted in the Blackpoll's breeding habitat in Vermont. Metcalf (1977) found 30 pairs per 100 ha (247 a) in coniferous forest near Wolcott. Blackpolls generally appear to be fairly abundant in suitable



habitat, but data are lacking on how much habitat is necessary to sustain a local population. Small pockets of occupied and unoccupied, yet suitable, higher-elevation breeding habitat are scattered throughout Vermont, but further research is necessary to define the parameters limiting the Blackpoll's occurrence. Morse (1979) speculated that the Blackpoll Warbler might be excluded by its close relative, the Bay-breasted Warbler, from lower elevation coniferous forests in portions of their sympatric range. That the Blackpoll is not more widespread in boreal forests in Vermont, despite the virtual absence of the Bay-breasted Warbler, indicates that other factors must restrict its distribution.

Blackpolls build their bulky, well-concealed nest low in a conifer, next to the trunk or, occasionally, on the ground. Three to 5 creamy buff or greenish eggs, spotted and/or wreathed with brown or lavender, are laid. Vermont egg dates (five nests) range from June 15 to June 26. Incubation and nestling periods last approximately 11 days. Both parents tend the young; age to independence is unknown. Fledglings were reported by June 23 at Woodford (Ross, Field notes).

The Blackpoll Warbler is one of Vermont's most abundant fall migrants, mainly because most members of its Canadian population depart from the East Coast for South America. Departure dates of local breeders



**No. of priority blocks in which recorded**

TOTAL 33 (18%)

Possible breeding: 9 (27% of total)

Probable breeding: 10 (30% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 14 (43% of total)

**Physiographic regions in which recorded**

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	2	6	6
Green Mountains	14	26	43
North Central	4	21	12
Northeast Highlands	8	50	24
East Central	2	10	6
Taconic Mountains	3	19	9
Eastern Foothills	0	0	0

are, as a consequence, unknown, but most birds migrate in September; tardy Blackpolls may be present through the first week of October (exceptionally, to October 18). Although earlier authorities (Perkins and Howe 1901; Allen 1909) considered the species a common migrant, they were apparently uncertain about the regularity with which it bred in the state. Currently the Blackpoll Warbler appears to be well distributed in the Green Mountains and Northeast Highlands, with more localized but significant numbers present in the North Central region and Taconic Mountains. Elsewhere the species appears rare or absent, probably because available habitat is

lacking. Lumbering activities in the Northeast Kingdom may disturb some local populations, but it is unlikely that the species was ever significantly affected by man's activities in Vermont, even during the height of agricultural clearing in the mid-1800s.

DOUGLAS P. KIBBE