

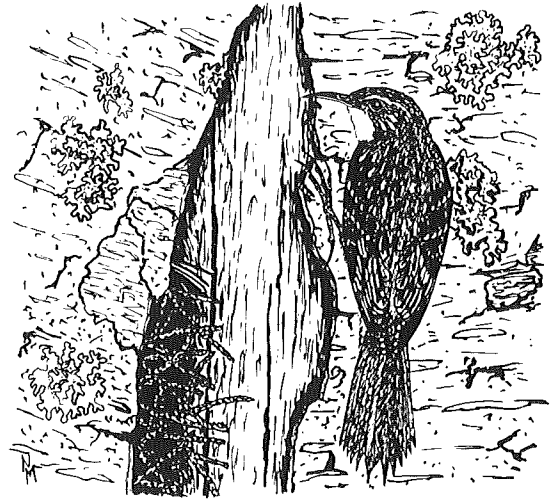
Brown Creeper

Certhia americana

The diminutive and inconspicuous Brown Creeper is essentially a woodland bird. The availability of suitable nest sites determines its habitat during the breeding season. Nest sites are provided by standing dead trees on which the bark curls up from the trunk in relatively long adherent flakes, under which the nest is wedged. Davis (1978), during her study of the species in Michigan, found all nests to be within at least 60 m (197 ft) of standing or running water. Representative habitats of Brown Creepers include bottomland, swamps, flooded timber, bogs, and mature upland forest (usually coniferous or northern hardwood).

The Brown Creeper's distinctive song and less distinguished call usually draw attention to the species. Both are sibilant and of high frequency. The song is most frequently heard early in the spring; males commence territorial singing in February, and the peak of song activity ranges from March to May. Singing is far less frequent and may cease entirely in June and July. The song is a high-pitched jumble of notes similar in quality to but shorter and less varied than the song of the Winter Wren. Because Brown Creepers spend most of their time on the trunks and branches of trees and are small and cryptically colored, they are often difficult to see.

Once Brown Creepers are located, confirmation of breeding presents further difficulties. The nest's unusual site creates special problems for the observer; suitable habitat usually includes several trees with satisfactory nest sites, and the nest is difficult to find in a tree. Trees utilized for nesting are usually 20 cm (8 in) or more DBH. Seven Vermont nests were at an average height of 3 m (9 ft), out of a range of 1–6 m (4–18 ft). Davis (1978) found mean nest heights of 2.6 and 3.8 m (8.5 and 12.4 ft) for nests on balsam fir and elm trunks, respectively. Most of the confirmations obtained by Atlas Project workers in Vermont derived from parents bearing food to their young (41% of confirmed breeding), or

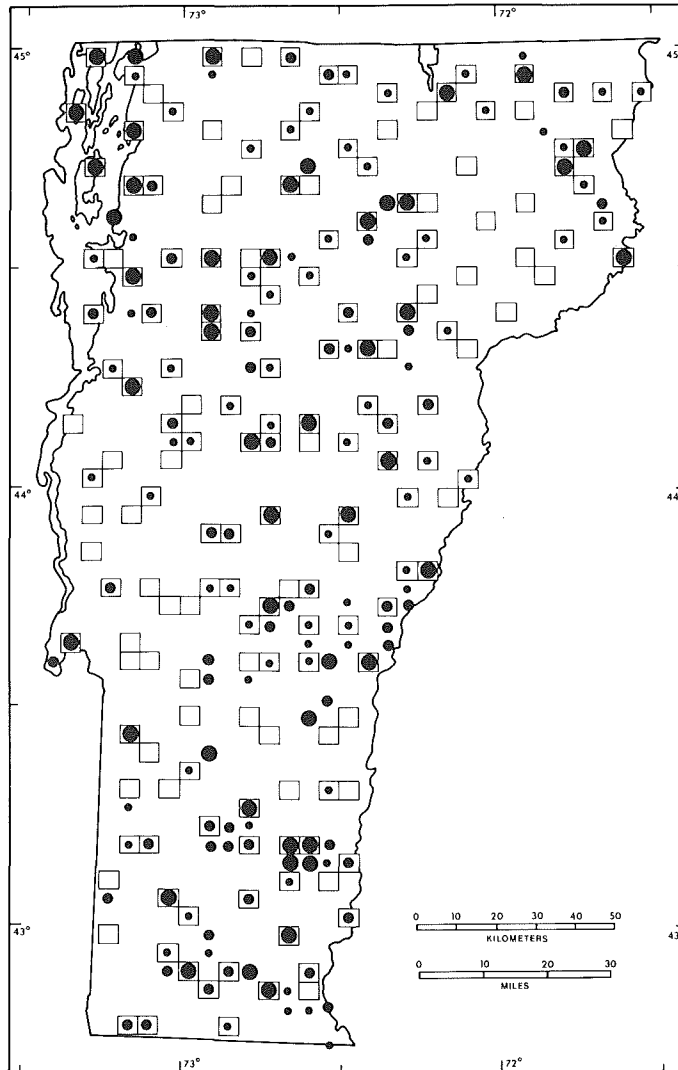


from noisy parties of recently fledged young (22% of confirmed breedings).

While perched in a vertical position, the Brown Creeper sings its territorial song, which may be heard up to 120 m (394 ft) away (Davis 1978). Nest building begins in mid to late May. The nest is attached between the bark flake and the main trunk of the supporting tree by means of cocoons and spider-egg cases. The base of the nest, composed of twigs and wood chips, is lined with moss, fine bark, fibers, plant down, or feathers. Eggs number from 4 to 8, usually 6. In Vermont, eggs have been reported for 4 dates ranging from June 1 to June 28. Two reported dates for nestlings are July 6 and July 18; fledglings have been reported on 12 dates from June 21 to July 23. Davis (1978) found that the species is single-brooded, but renests when an early attempt fails.

The Brown Creeper, while not totally sedentary, is found throughout the year in virtually all parts of the state, with the possible exception of elevations exceeding 915 m (3,000 ft). Some migratory movement is detectable in October and November and during March and April.

Early accounts of Vermont birds listed the Brown Creeper as rare or as a winter visitor; apparently its distribution was formerly limited in large part to the Green Mountains, the only repository of extensive forest in the state in the late 1800s and early



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 123 (69%)

Possible breeding: 54 (44% of total)

Probable breeding: 30 (24% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 39 (32% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	20	64	16
Green Mountains	47	87	38
North Central	12	63	10
Northeast Highlands	11	69	9
East Central	13	68	11
Taconic Mountains	4	25	3
Eastern Foothills	16	67	13

1900s. With reforestation, the species has increased greatly in numbers and broadened its distribution. Brown Creepers were reported from 69% of the priority blocks. The highest percentage of occurrence by region was within the species' stronghold, the Green Mountains, where it was located in 87% of the priority blocks. The areas in which the species was most scarce included the southern Champlain Lowlands from Shelburne south and the Taconic Mountains (where it was present in only 25% of the priority blocks).

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