

American Redstart

Setophaga ruticilla

The American Redstart prefers deciduous growth, both young and mature. The species is most abundant in mature second-growth northern hardwood forests with a thick understory growth of saplings. Redstarts also occupy clear cuts, reforesting farmland, hedgerows, and alder or willow thickets. The species may also occur in habitats dominated by conifers (Ficken and Ficken 1967; Sabo 1980); even in these habitats the species prefers deciduous growth: redstarts foraged in conifers less than 10% of the time in subalpine forest in the White Mountains of New Hampshire (Sabo and Holmes 1983).

The vigorously whistled songs of male American Redstarts readily call attention to territorial birds. When territories are being established, swiftly uttered and sharply accented songs are frequent. Unaccented songs seem to predominate later in the season, from about mid June on. Redstarts are fairly easy to observe because they usually forage at middle levels in the forest, and use much tail fanning and wing flashing, revealing bright patches of orange or yellow in their plumage. Most confirmations (52%) for the species during the Atlas Project were of parents observed with food for their young. Twenty-five percent of the confirmations were of active nests.

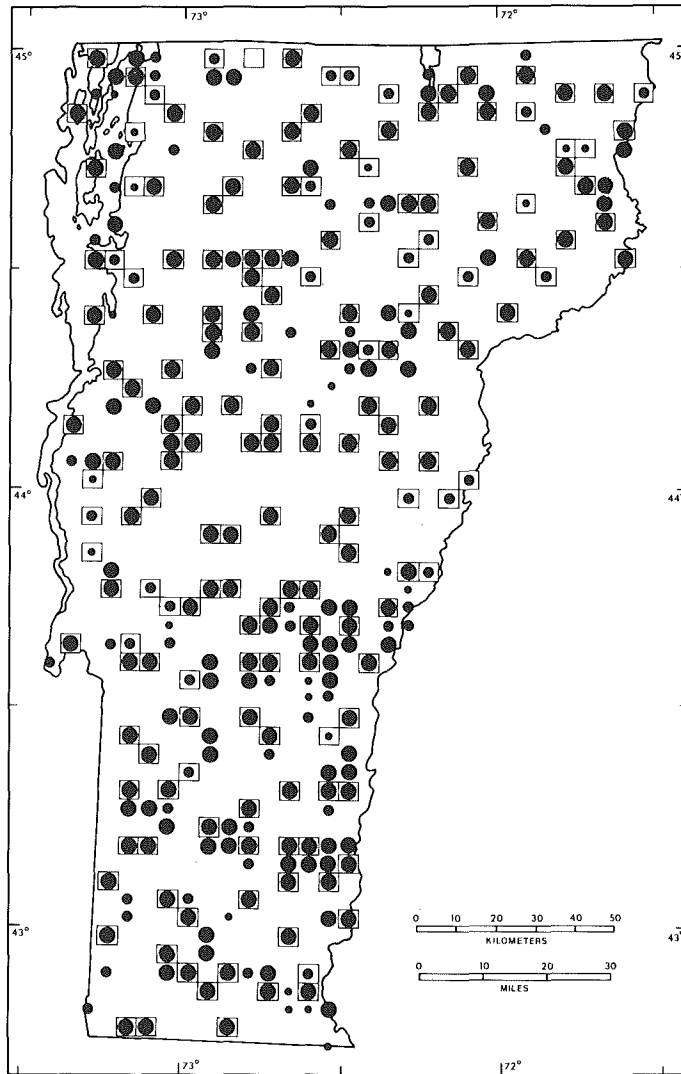
American Redstarts arrive in Vermont in the first or second week of May. Females arrive after the adult males. Yearling males, which closely resemble the gray and yellow females except for some black feathering about the face and breast, arrive still later—on average, about 2 weeks later than the older males (Ficken and Ficken 1967). Nest building commences in late May and continues to the first week of June; renesting attempts are noted through the third week of June. Nests are commonly situated in a three-way crotch in a deciduous tree or shrub (Ficken 1964). Nests are placed 0.6–2.5 m (2–82 ft) above the ground (T. Sherry,



pers. comm.). The heights of 21 Vermont nests averaged 5 m (16 ft).

Redstarts lay 3 to 5 whitish eggs spotted with gray and brown. The eggs are laid early in the morning on consecutive days (Sturm 1945). The average size of 8 Vermont clutches was 4 eggs. Dates for 22 nests containing eggs in Vermont range from May 27 to July 6. The incubation period lasts 11 to 12 days (Sturm 1945). Nestlings have been reported on eight dates in Vermont, from June 2 to June 28; the lack of July dates reflects low levels of fieldwork during that month. The young are in the nest for a period of 8 to 10 days (Sturm 1945). Thirteen records of dependent young for Vermont range from June 17 to August 9. The species is an early migrant, commencing movement as early as late July in some cases. The peak of departure is in late August, with a few remaining into late September or, occasionally, early October.

The American Redstart is common to very common throughout Vermont, and was located in all but 1 of the 179 priority blocks in the state. The lowest densities of this warbler occur in the drier portions of the Champlain Lowlands, in coniferous forests at high elevation, and in the Northeast Highlands. The species can exist within a broad array of habitats and exhibits considerable behavioral plasticity (Sherry 1979). In a foraging study in West Virginia, Seidel



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 178 (99%)

Possible breeding: 10 (6% of total)
 Probable breeding: 29 (16% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 139 (78% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	30	97	17
Green Mountains	54	100	30
North Central	19	100	11
Northeast Highlands	16	100	9
East Central	19	100	11
Taconic Mountains	16	100	9
Eastern Foothills	24	100	13

and Whitmore (1982) found that redstarts utilized similarly structured areas within forests whose overall structure was quite varied. Sherry (1979), during a study at the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest in central New Hampshire, found that Least Flycatchers, which are similar in structure, foraging behavior, and habitat selection to American Redstarts, are behaviorally dominant over redstarts and exclude them from some areas. Because of the abundance of deciduous woodlands and shrub habitats in Vermont, the American Redstart ranks as one of Vermont's most common wood warblers.

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