

Bay-breasted Warbler

Dendroica castanea

The Bay-breasted Warbler is so closely associated with the boreal forest zone that it has been considered an indicator species of that northern habitat. Its nesting range barely extends into northeastern Vermont, where it has been confirmed as a breeder only once. It must therefore be considered casual or accidental as a breeder in Vermont. The breeding habitat it requires (cool, dense stands of spruces, especially black spruces, with some edge condition) is quite limited in the state.

The American Ornithologists' Union's *Check-list of North American Birds* (1957) listed a breeding record for Tamworth, Vermont, but this is an obvious error of transposition from Bent's (1953) life history of the species (Tamworth is in New Hampshire). The few old records of summer Bay-breasts in Vermont (Perkins and Howe 1901; Spear 1976) do not claim breeding confirmation and doubtless represent lingering or late migrant males. Thus the sighting of a male gathering and carrying food for young on July 5, 1980 at Sable Mountain in the Granby-Guildhall area represented the first (and only) breeding confirmation for Vermont (ASR, D. P. Kibbe). The habitat was a closed spruce woods containing some yellow birches, adjacent to a small stream and alder thicket.

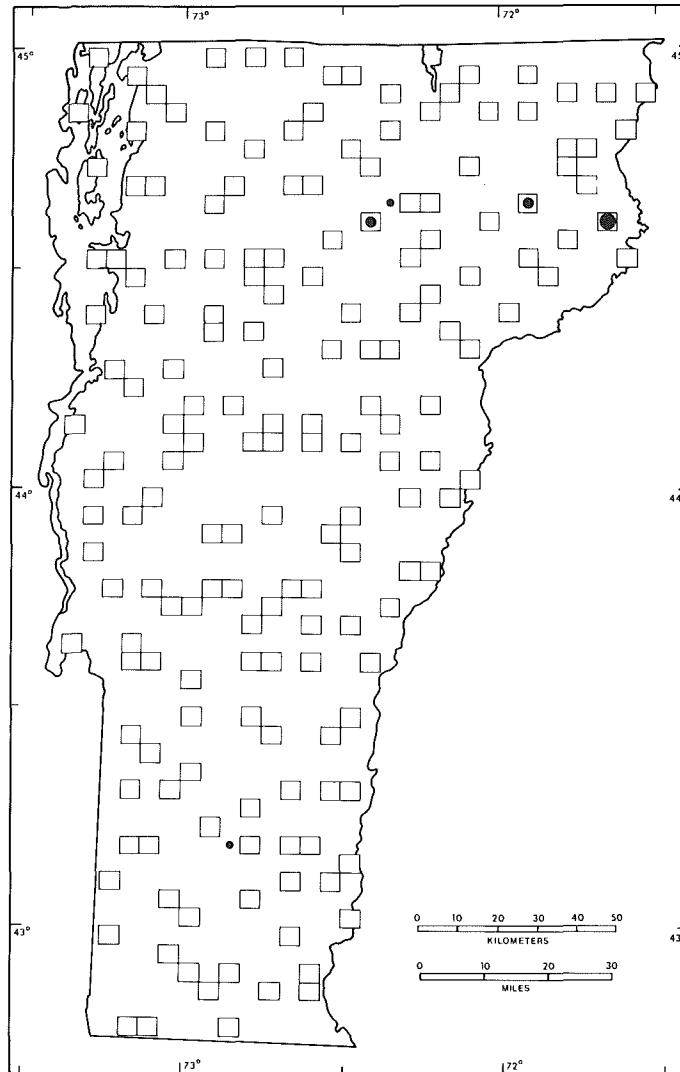
Like other boreal zone breeders (such as the Tennessee Warbler), the Bay-breast may occasionally linger and even breed well south of its usual range. Observers should beware of assuming that extralimital singing males represent breeding pairs: they may instead be merely lingering, unattached males. It is quite likely that singing males seen June 9, 1915 at Barnard (G. H. Ross, G. L. Kirk, GMAS records), on July 4, 1977 at Stratton Mountain (W. J. Norse, pers. observ.), and on June 21–25, 1981 at Winhall (W. J. Norse, pers. observ.), as well as a bird collected at Reading on June 29, 1927 (GMAS record, J. L. Peters) were such; even summer reports from the Northeast Highlands and



the North Central region may represent singing but unmated males. Harder to explain are these records: two males between Bourne and Stratton ponds, July 19, 1924; six males at Lake Pleiad, Ripton, June 20 and 21, 1925; males at Sucker Brook Lodge on the Long Trail, June 20, 1925; and males near Breadloaf Mountain below Middlebury Gap, June 21, 1925 (Eaton and Curry 1926).

The Bay-breast is not an easy bird to observe on its breeding grounds. Although the male may sing from the same perch for up to 15 minutes (Reilly 1979), he often chooses a perch out of sight from the ground, and the song does not carry far. Further, Bay-breasts usually forage at the midlevel in conifers, where they move deliberately, searching (often out of sight) among the twigs and needles for their insect and spider food (Reilly 1979).

The nest is normally placed on a horizontal limb or against the trunk of a conifer, 1.5–6.1 m (5–20 ft), occasionally up to 15 m (50 ft), above the ground (Godfrey 1966). The nest is up to 15.2 cm (6 in) in diameter, and is constructed from fine twigs, bark strips, roots, moss, grass, and hair. Clutches number from 3 to 7 eggs, though 4 to 5 is usual. Incubation, which takes 12 to 13 days, is performed by the female alone; the young first fly 11 to 12 days after hatching (Godfrey 1966; Reilly 1979). In Maine, Bay-breasted Warblers have been



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 3 (2%)

Possible breeding: 0 (0% of total)
 Probable breeding: 2 (67% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 1 (33% 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	33
Northeast Highlands	2	12	67
East Central	0	0	0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	0
Eastern Foothills	0	0	0

seen gathering nesting material as early as June 1, and eggs have been found from June 3 to 15 (Palmer 1949; Bent 1953).

The Bay-breasted Warbler breeds in the boreal forest zone across most of the northern portion of the continent, from British Columbia, Mackenzie, and Alberta east to the Atlantic coast. In the eastern U.S. its breeding range dips south to southern Maine, central New Hampshire, northeastern Vermont, and northeastern New York. Its numbers have varied widely over the years, building to high levels in areas of forests where infestations of spruce budworms occur (Reilly 1979).

Most Bay-breasts seen in Vermont are mi-

grants, passing to or from their Canadian breeding grounds. The species is uncommon in both spring and fall, though at the height of its migration daily totals of 6 to 10 are not unusual. Spring migration normally begins from May 11 to 14, and peaks from May 21 to 24 (when observers have seen as many as 30 a day [RVB, Spring 1973-83]). The last spring migrants are usually seen from May 23 to 30 (extreme date, June 2). Fall migration usually begins between August 11 and 17, and peaks from August 23 to September 17 (Bent 1953; RVB 1973-81).

G. FRANK OATMAN