

Eastern Kingbird

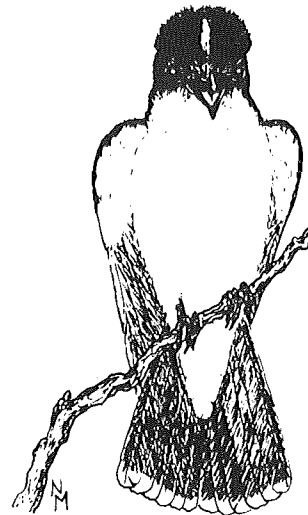
Tyrannus tyrannus

The Eastern Kingbird is a widespread Nearctic species that ranges over almost all of eastern and central North America. The species winters in northern South America (AOU 1983).

The Eastern Kingbird inhabits all manner of edge habitats, frequently near water (Smith 1966). In Vermont, kingbirds may be found in pastureland, hedgerows on cultivated land, orchards, and the edges of woodlands; on floodplains and lakeshores; in swales and bogs, and around beaver ponds.

The kingbird is a noisy and conspicuous bird. It may often be seen sitting on wires or fence lines along country roads. The Eastern Kingbird is very aggressive toward other birds, particularly large species such as crows and raptors, which it often hounds out of its territory. The kingbird is a skilled flier, seeming to fly on the tips of its wings—an effect created by its rapid, shallow wing beats. Nests are usually placed fairly low and are not as well hidden as those of other songbirds. The species was confirmed in 86% of the priority blocks in which it occurred. Fifty-one percent of breeding confirmations were of active nests. Dependent young accounted for another 16% of confirmations, and parents feeding young led to a further 25% of confirmations.

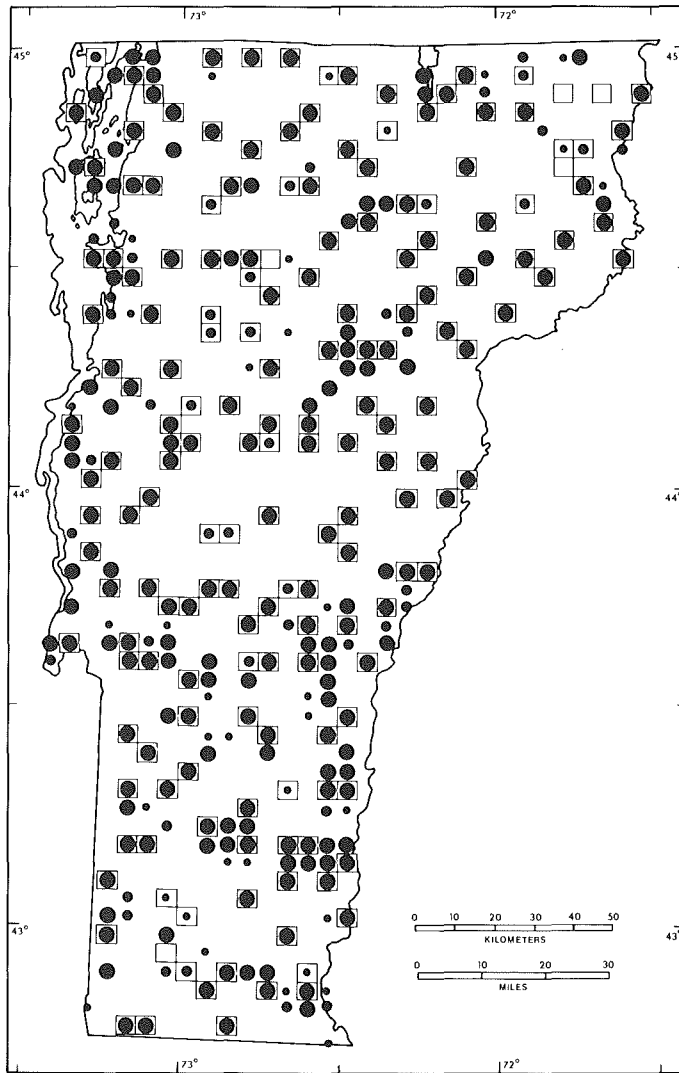
Most kingbirds arrive in Vermont from their tropical wintering grounds in mid May. The average arrival date at Bennington over 51 years was May 9 (L. H. Ross, Field notes). Nesting commences during the second and third weeks of May. The nest is a rather loose mass of sticks, straws, weed stems, and other material, lined with a well-constructed cup of fine grass, rootlets, and hair. The average height of 14 Vermont nests was 4.9 m (16 ft). Kingbirds tend to build on side forks of small trees; more than half of 65 nests in a Montana study were located well out on side limbs (Davis 1955). More than 50% of 11 Vermont nests were located in apple trees. Kingbirds often will build



over water; 29% of 14 Vermont nests were either surrounded by or over water.

The eggs of the Eastern Kingbird are creamy white with red-brown speckling and gray blotching. In Vermont, clutch size ranged from 3 to 5 eggs in 14 clutches, with an average of 3.7 eggs; egg dates as determined from 23 sets ranged from May 19 to July 2. The incubation period lasts about 16 days (Davis 1941). Dates of the 18 records of nests with young for Vermont ranged from June 17 to July 26. Nestlings depart from the nest at 14 to 17 days of age (Morehouse and Brewer 1968). Fledglings may remain dependent on their parents for food for more than a month (Morehouse and Brewer 1968). Dependent young have been reported in Vermont on 12 dates from June 29 to August 4. The species' major southward movement occurs during August. Kingbirds become scarce by early September; the latest departure date is October 5 (W. G. Ellison, pers. observ.). Large concentrations of migrants may be seen in favored locations each autumn; more than 200 have been seen on a given day in August at Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area.

The Eastern Kingbird was recorded in more than 95% of the priority blocks in six of the seven physiographic regions of Vermont. It was recorded in 81% of the priority blocks in the Northeast Highlands, where it was not present in three heavily



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 174 (97%)

Possible breeding: 7 (4% of total)
 Probable breeding: 18 (10% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 149 (86% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	31	100	18
Green Mountains	52	96	30
North Central	19	100	11
Northeast Highlands	13	81	7
East Central	19	100	11
Taconic Mountains	16	100	9
Eastern Foothills	24	100	14

forested blocks. It was also not located in two well-forested blocks of medium elevation in the Green Mountains.

The Eastern Kingbird is a very successful species in Vermont, where it should continue to prosper as it is capable of adapting to a variety of edge habitats. It remains to be seen if inevitable changes in its riparian forest wintering habitat in the Amazon River basin will have a telling effect on the numbers of Eastern Kingbirds breeding in eastern North America (Fitzpatrick 1980).

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