

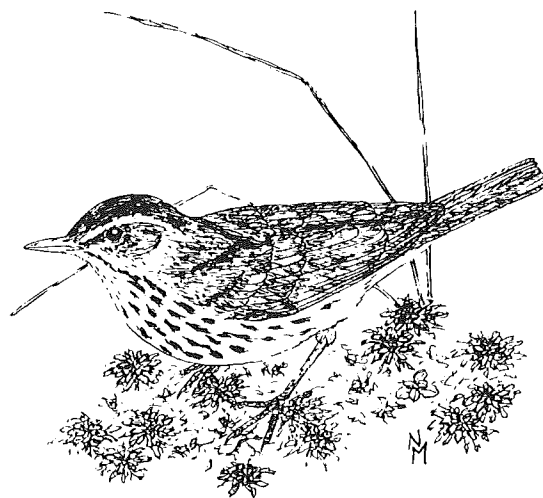
## Northern Waterthrush

*Seiurus noveboracensis*

The Northern Waterthrush is distributed throughout Vermont, from the Champlain Lowlands to the higher elevations of the Green Mountains, wherever wooded wetlands occur. This species is fond of dense shrubbery near water. Alder swales, bog margins, and black spruce swamps often host dense populations. More open areas, such as the margins of beaver ponds, usually support only scattered pairs. The species is sometimes present in streamside wetlands and occurs at many high-elevation bogs, but unlike the Louisiana Waterthrush, it does not frequent rushing streams. The Northern Waterthrush is the more abundant and widely distributed of these two species in Vermont. Factors contributing to its success may include its capacities to exist in extremely high densities and to occupy a wide range of moist deciduous and coniferous habitats at any elevation.

The Northern Waterthrush breeds commonly across North America from the limits of the muskeg in Alaska east to Newfoundland, south to northern New England, and, locally in the mountains, south to North Carolina and Idaho. The species winters from southern Mexico and the West Indies to northern South America, returning to Vermont during the first week of May.

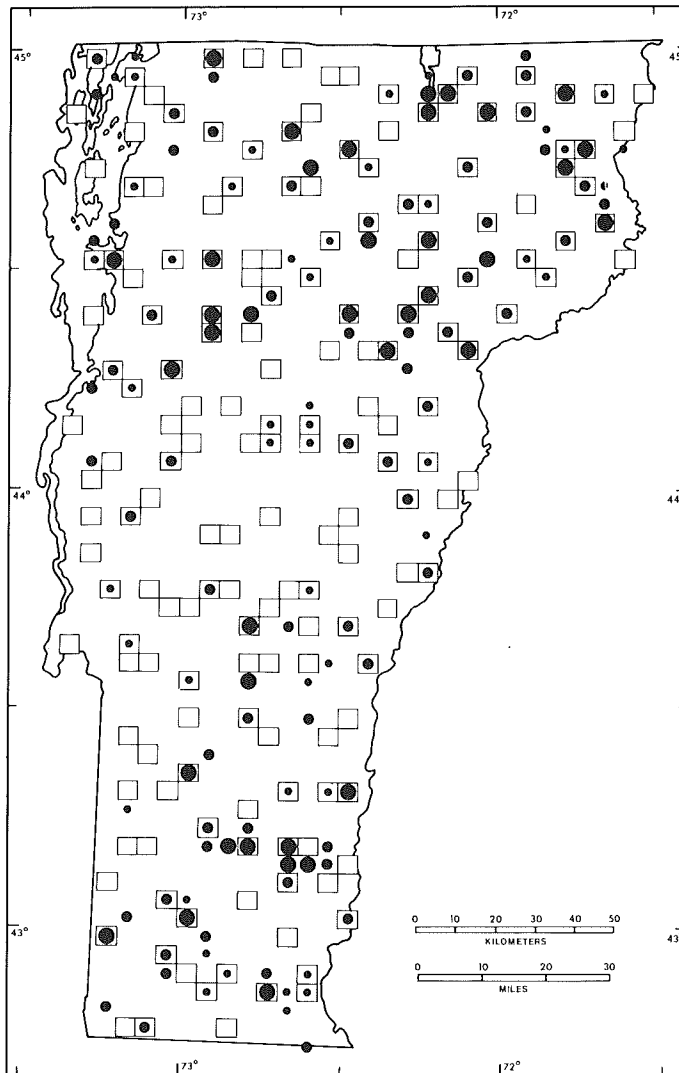
The species is most readily located by its loud, ringing staccato song, which the males give from any available low perch; in addition, flight songs are often given at dusk. Breeding pairs tend to concentrate in small portions of apparently suitable habitat. Individual territories are small, varying from 0.8 to 1.5 ha (1.9 to 3.7 a). There is some evidence that polygyny may occur occasionally (Eaton 1957). Up to three females have even been found to utilize the same uprooted tree stump as a nest site (Griscom and Sprunt 1957). A territory-mapping study conducted in coniferous forest at Wolcott (Metcalf 1977) yielded 12 pairs per 40.5 ha (100 a), but local densities in prime habitat may be



even greater (D. P. Kibbe, pers. observ.). Unfortunately, greatest densities are reached in the wettest, most impenetrable habitats, which are consequently least likely to be surveyed.

Northern Waterthrushes place their nests on the ground, frequently beside water among the roots of a downed tree. The nest is a bulky structure constructed mostly from moss by the female. Usually from 4 to 5 creamy white eggs marked with reddish brown are laid. Only one clutch (with 4 eggs, on May 26) has been reported in Vermont. Incubation, performed by the female, lasts 12 days. The female is an extremely tight sitter and sneaks on foot to and from the clutch, making nests exceptionally difficult to locate; if flushed, however, she gives an agitated distraction display. The nestlings may desert the nest at 9 days of age if disturbed, although they are unable to fly even short distances until several days later. At 3 weeks of age the young are still being fed occasionally by the parents (Eaton 1957).

Since both parents feed and are very attentive to the young, confirmations are relatively easy to obtain during the nestling and fledgling periods. Adults with food, fledglings, and nests with young accounted for 58%, 21%, and 8%, respectively, of all Atlas Project confirmations. Fledglings were noted as early as June 16 and as late as July 15. The departure dates of Northern Water-



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

TOTAL 96 (54.0%)

Possible breeding: 31 (32% of total)

Probable breeding: 36 (38% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 29 (30% of total)

**Physiographic regions in which recorded**

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	16	52	16.7
Green Mountains	27	50	28.1
North Central	16	84	16.7
Northeast Highlands	12	75	12.5
East Central	10	53	10.4
Taconic Mountains	4	25	4.2
Eastern Foothills	11	46	11.4

thrushes nesting in Vermont are unknown, since their place is taken by migrants from the vast breeding grounds in Canada. All, however, are gone by the end of September. A Northern Waterthrush banded on May 13, 1973 and recaptured on October 5, 1980 at Marshfield, Vermont holds the species' current longevity record of 7 years 11 months (Klimkiewicz et al. 1983).

The Northern Waterthrush has apparently always been well distributed throughout Vermont. Habitats occupied by Northern Waterthrushes, with the exception of some shoreline and spruce-fir areas, are relatively undisturbed by human activity. Unlike its

southern counterpart, the Northern Waterthrush is evenly distributed throughout most physiographic regions of the state, including the Champlain Lowlands. Elevation at Vermont's latitude has little effect on the distribution if habitat is available. Only in the Taconic Mountains, where the Northern Waterthrush occurred in 25% of the priority blocks, was the species relatively scarce.

DOUGLAS P. KIBBE