

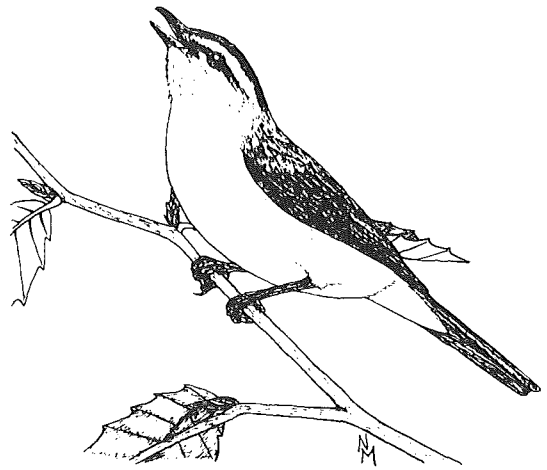
Red-eyed Vireo

Vireo olivaceus

The Red-eyed Vireo is generally conceded to be the most abundant woodland bird in eastern deciduous forests. Since more than 75% of Vermont is forested and 68% of that area is under deciduous cover (Johnson 1980), it is scarcely surprising that Red-eyed Vireos were found in all Atlas Project priority blocks. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird Survey data indicate that Red-eyed Vireos are increasing at a rate of 4.6% per year in Vermont (Robbins 1982b), a fact that undoubtedly reflects the ongoing reforestation of the state. Similar trends exist among populations of this species throughout the Northeast. Although the Red-eyed Vireo shares various habitats with Philadelphia, Yellow-throated, Warbling, and Solitary vireos, only the Solitary exhibited a greater percentage of increase in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird surveys between 1966 and 1979 (Robbins 1982b). Red-eyed Vireos, however, remain by far the more abundant and widespread of the two species.

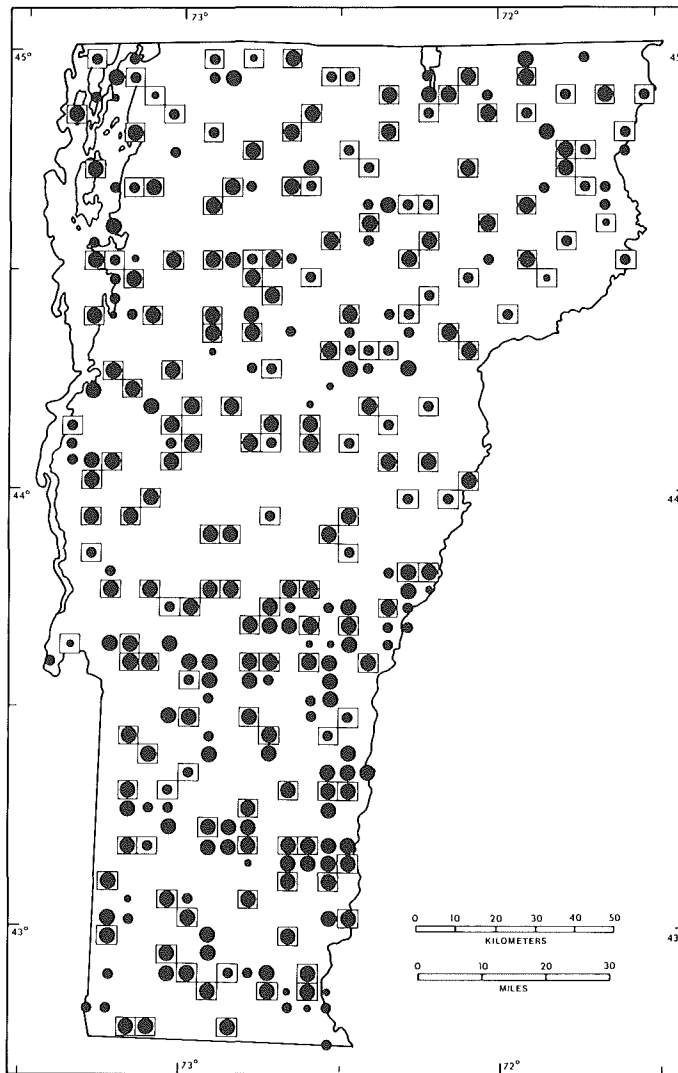
The Red-eyed Vireo breeds throughout the deciduous forests of eastern North America. Although recorded in Vermont as early as April 22, males usually arrive on territory during the second week of May. Females appear shortly thereafter. Territories are 0.3–0.7 ha (0.8–1.7 a) in area (Williamson 1971; Rice 1978). The highest density recorded for the species in mixed forest was 44 pairs per 40.5 ha (100 a), at Woodstock (Nicholson 1975). Territories are patrolled by the male, who sings incessantly and with incredible monotony throughout the breeding season until the young fledge and postnuptial molt starts.

Vireos have few obvious courtship displays. The swaying display given by the male Red-eyed and many of its congeners apparently functions as a form of courtship (Barlow and Rice 1977), but in some contexts may, like tail fanning, have an aggressive function as well. Since pair bonding is accompanied by aerial chases high in the can-



opy, much probably remains to be learned about the more intimate aspects of courtship.

The female Red-eyed, accompanied but unaided by the male, builds a nest that is suspended in the fork of a low horizontal branch, usually 1–3 m (3–10 ft) above the ground. Nest building has been observed from May 23 to July 1 in Vermont. American beech and sugar maple are preferred nest trees in Vermont, though a variety of trees and shrubs, deciduous and coniferous, are used throughout the species' range. Several days of mating activity follow nest completion and precede initiation of the 3- to 5-egg clutch. The eggs are white with reddish-brown or black markings on the larger end. Twenty-eight nests with eggs have been found in the state between May 28 and July 9. The male's constant song appears to reassure the incubating female that all is well; cessation puts her instantly on the alert (Stokes 1979). The male may feed her occasionally during the 12- to 14-day incubation period. Once the young hatch the male attends the nest more closely, bringing food to the young and the female as she broods. Nestlings have been recorded between June 16 and August 14 (17 records); adults with food for young accounted for more than 40% of the 124 confirmations. Red-eyed Vireos forage on insects by gleaning and hovering. The male usually feeds higher in the canopy than his mate (Williamson 1971). Both defend the nest site. Fecal sacs are eaten or carried off and



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 179 (100%)

Possible breeding: 5 (3% of total)
 Probable breeding: 50 (28% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 124 (69% 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	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

left on twigs or tree branches. The nestlings may fledge at 10 to 11 days of age. They have been observed being fed as many as 20 days after fledging, but are ignored at 30 days, although they still may beg (Lawrence 1953). Fledglings, which have been reported as early as July 7 and as late as August 25, accounted for nearly 15% of the confirmations.

Second clutches are rare in this species (Lawrence 1953), and renesting probably accounts for most late nesting dates. Red-eyed Vireos are common hosts to Brown-headed Cowbird eggs. Frequently one of the easiest ways to confirm breeding in the cowbird is to locate a vireo nest. Nests are relatively easy to find; they accounted for more

than 37% of all confirmations for the species. Red-eyed Vireos are abundant fall migrants, normally completing their departure from Vermont by the end of September, occasionally lingering until October 20.

Although the Red-eyed Vireo was apparently always a common summer resident in Vermont, its population must have been considerably less than its current size during the late 1800s, when agricultural clearing reached its zenith.

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