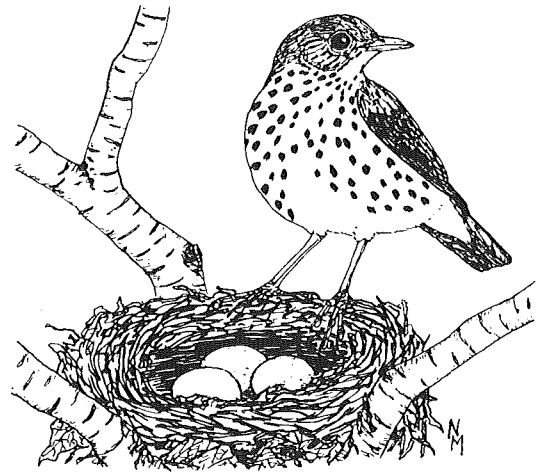


Wood Thrush

Hylocichla mustelina

The Wood Thrush is the largest of Vermont's woodland thrushes. Its loud, liquid, bell-like notes resound through Vermont's woodlands, beginning early in May. Although its preferred habitats greatly overlap those of the Veery and Hermit Thrush, the Wood Thrush appears to favor mature woods (Bertin 1977). It particularly favors moist, bottomland deciduous forests for breeding. Coniferous stands support few if any Wood Thrushes. Relatively tolerant of man's presence, like the American Robin, Wood Thrushes are frequently found on forest edges and occasionally in suburban areas. Greatest Vermont densities, 30 to 37 pairs per 40.5 ha (100 a), have been recorded at a mixed forest-homestead site (Nicholson 1975, 1978), but densities of 5 to 26 pairs per 40.5 ha (100 a) appear to be more typical of occupied habitats; lowest densities are recorded for mixed coniferous-deciduous sites and at higher altitudes. Although now distributed throughout Vermont, Wood Thrushes were probably once less common in the state's forests. The extensive clearing that accompanied the eighteenth-century sheep-raising boom must have reduced suitable breeding habitat, but whether the species was common or even present in the state before the 1800s is unclear.

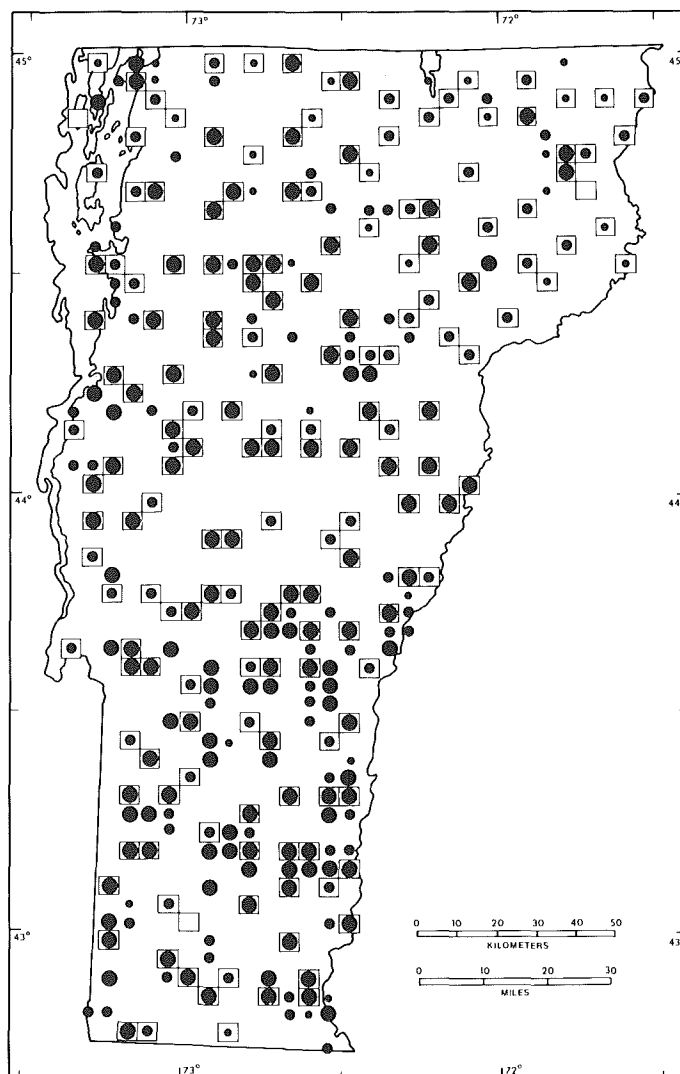
The Wood Thrush's breeding behavior has been intensively studied (Dilger 1956a; Brackbill 1958). Males return to the breeding ground ahead of the females and occupy and defend territories against all conspecifics, male or female. The earliest date of return for Vermont is April 24. Advertising songs are given throughout the breeding period; there are pronounced peaks at dawn and dusk. Conspecifics entering a territory are assailed by high-intensity singing and a spread display (in which the breast feathers are fluffed to maximize the bird's frontal profile) with concurrent crest raising. Invading males usually retreat from the territory, while females are reluctant to leave and are subsequently pursued. Although it may



take three to four days, the courtship pursuit eventually approaches a sedate level, at which point the pair bond is established and nesting may proceed.

Placement of the nest closely resembles that of the American Robin; nest composition is also similar, though typically the Wood Thrush uses more dead leaves and moss instead of mud, and lines the nest with rootlets rather than grass. The Vermont Institute of Natural Science's nest collection contains three Wood Thrush nests decorated with strips of plastic that have been worked in with the dead leaves. Nests are saddled on branches or in crotches of saplings or trees, 2–4 m (6–12 ft) above ground level, rarely at 15 m (50 ft).

Eastern hemlock appears to be a preferred nest tree in Vermont, although other conifers and deciduous trees are also frequently used. Nest building in Vermont has been observed as late as June 8. Nest construction may take 5 to 7 days (Brackbill 1958). Usually 3 to 4 (rarely 2 or 5) blue-green eggs are laid; they are incubated by the female for 13 to 14 days. Since incubation normally starts with the laying of the second egg (Brackbill 1958), hatching may occur over a 2-day period. Vermont egg dates range from May 20 to July 5, but show a marked peak in late May and the first 3 weeks of June. Atlas Project observers had little difficulty locating and confirming this species; most confirmations (57%) were



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 176 (98%)

Possible breeding: 17 (10% of total)

Probable breeding: 58 (33% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 101 (57% 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	53	98	30
North Central	19	100	11
Northeast Highlands	15	94	8
East Central	19	100	11
Taconic Mountains	16	100	9
Eastern Foothills	24	100	14

of adults carrying food for young. Nests with young were recorded from June 12 through July 16 (13 records). Fledgling Wood Thrushes are readily identifiable in the field by their gangly actions and light-tipped wing coverts. Fledglings were noted as early as June 22 and as late as July 16, and a sizeable proportion (32%) of all confirmations were of fledglings. Brackbill (1958) observed that fledglings began to forage for themselves at 17 to 18 days of age (about 4 days after fledging), but remained on the male's territory and were fed until 24 to 27 days of age. Although Wood Thrushes farther south frequently raise second broods, the cluster of Vermont egg dates in early June

seems to indicate that pairs infrequently attempt second clutches in this state. Early July egg dates could easily indicate renesting efforts following the failure of the first attempt.

Although the largest of Vermont's woodland thrushes, the Wood Thrush is by no means the hardiest. Most birds depart from Vermont in mid September for their wintering grounds from Mexico south to Panama, and all are normally gone by mid October.

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