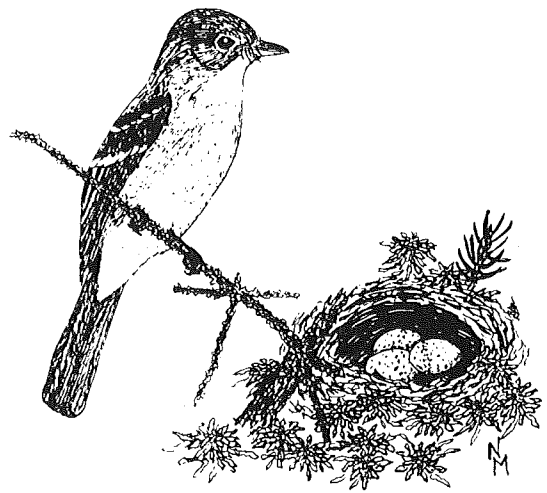


Yellow-bellied Flycatcher

Empidonax flaviventris

The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher's breeding range lies largely in Canada, extending as far northwest as Mackenzie, with the southern edge dipping into the U.S. in the northeastern and north central states; isolated breeding has occurred in the mountains of Virginia (AOU 1983). In Vermont, the Yellow-bellied is near the southern limit of its normal breeding range. The Yellow-bellied is one of Vermont's latest-appearing spring flycatchers: migrants begin to arrive during the third or fourth week of May (an early date is May 6) and continue coming well into June. It is on the move early in the fall, with southbound individuals turning up in late July or early August; a migrating juvenile bird was banded at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science's banding station on July 27. Most of these birds move on in late August or early September; some stragglers stay until the third week of September. Yellow-bellied Flycatchers winter in Mexico and Central America south to western Panama (AOU 1983).

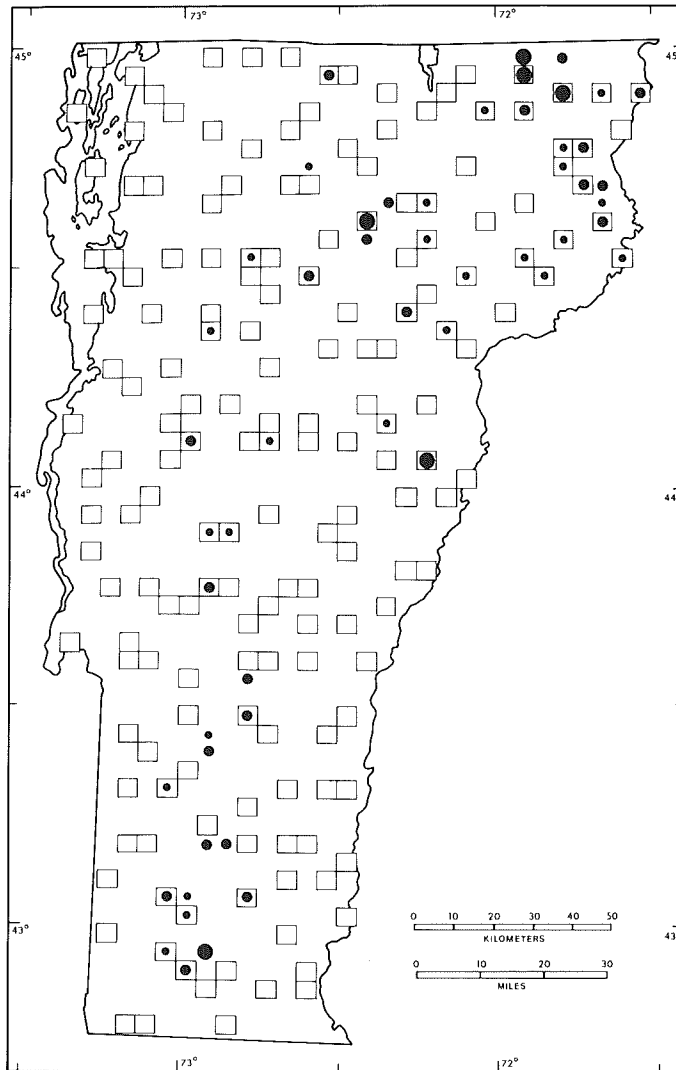
The breeding habitat of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher consists of boreal forest and coniferous bogs or swamps. Yellow-bellied Flycatchers have been found in mountain habitats described as spruce forest (Eaton and Curry 1924); deep woods at elevations of 762–1,067 m (2,500–3,500 ft) (Howell 1901); and shady slopes carpeted with mosses (Bull 1974). In addition, the species has been observed during the summer at various high elevation sites in the southern part of Vermont (RVB, Summer 1980), and has been heard singing at elevations of 853 and 1,006 m (2,800 and 3,300 ft) on Camels Hump in northern Vermont (ASR, C. Shultz). Smith (1946) reported that these flycatchers were heard singing on the slopes of Mt. Mansfield and were commonly heard on Camels Hump as well. Preferred wetland areas include spruce-tamarack or spruce-fir bogs with small openings or widely scattered trees and a ground layer of sphagnum moss and bog shrubs (Walkin-



shaw and Henry 1957b). Wetland habitats in Vermont where Yellow-bellied Flycatchers have been heard singing include Peacham Bog and Bear Swamp (in Wolcott). Common to all habitats are mosses of various types carpeting the ground.

Among members of the genus *Empidonax*, this flycatcher is easiest to identify by plumage, but it is difficult to locate. A reclusive, inconspicuous bird, it is frequently overlooked. Its two primary vocalizations closely resemble the notes of other flycatchers. The song is a *kill-ink* or *pee-wick* repeated several times a minute, and the call is a much sharper *kill-ink* or *pee-wick*. During migration, Yellow-bellieds are silent.

Nests are located on the ground on the side of a mossy hummock or amid the roots of a fallen tree. A Vermont nest discovered by Eaton and Curry (1924) on Kirby Mountain (Addison County) was tucked into a hummock of moss, roots, leaves, and stones left when a spruce tree uprooted. A Michigan nest in a spruce-tamarack bog was located at the base of a black spruce "sunken into sphagnum moss with no overhead cover" (Walkinshaw and Henry 1957b). The nest is a rather bulky cup of moss and rootlets, lined with grasses and rootlets. Vermont nesting information for Yellow-bellied Flycatchers is scant. One egg date is June 20 for a clutch of 4 eggs; eggs are white, sparsely dotted with light brown (especially about the large ends). Three to 4 eggs is the usual clutch



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 39 (22%)
 Possible breeding: 21 (54% of total)
 Probable breeding: 14 (36% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 4 (10% 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 | 15 | 28 | 38 |
| North Central | 6 | 32 | 15 |
| Northeast Highlands | 14 | 88 | 36 |
| East Central | 3 | 16 | 8 |
| Taconic Mountains | 1 | 6 | 3 |
| Eastern Foothills | 0 | 0 | 0 |

size (Bent 1942). New York egg dates range from June 10 to 27 (Bull 1974). A fledgling date for Island Pond is July 12.

These flycatchers feed low in the canopy or near the ground, picking up ants, caterpillars, flies, small hemipterans, other insects, and spiders. Flying ants make up a good portion of the diet, at least in certain areas (Forbush 1925). Yellow-bellieds are fond of mountain ash berries and possibly of other fruits (Stickney 1942).

Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were not found breeding in the Champlain Lowlands or the Eastern Foothills during the Atlas Project. The highest occurrence was in the Northeast Highlands, a region of coniferous forests and

bogs. The occurrence in the North Central region is explained by the region's numerous pockets of boreal wetlands, and that in the Green Mountains indicates the region's suitable spruce or spruce-fir habitat at higher elevations. Few pockets of boreal vegetation occur in the Taconic Mountains or in the East Central region, as is reflected in the lower occurrence of the species in those regions. The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher is secretive, and its nests are difficult to locate; all 4 priority block confirmations were of adults carrying food to the nest.

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