

## Yellow Warbler

*Dendroica petechia*

The Yellow Warbler, by virtue of its boisterous, incessant song and brilliant plumage, is one of the most well-known members of the Parulinae in Vermont. The species displays a decided preference for moist, shrubby habitats and may be abundant in alder thickets and swamps. On upland sites Yellow Warblers tend to be replaced by Chestnut-sided Warblers, although their habitats overlap.

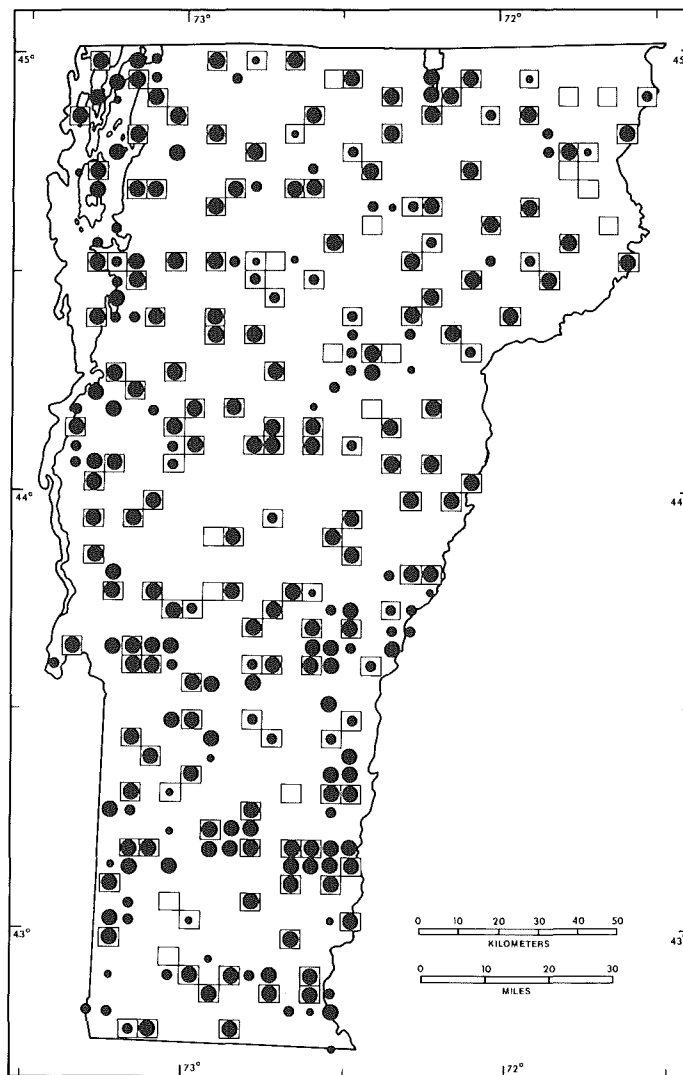
The Yellow Warbler was found in all but 16 of the priority blocks. The apparent blanks on its distribution map may be a consequence of scanty coverage in inaccessible blocks rather than of actual discontinuities in its range. The species' preferred habitat is least widespread in the Northeastern Highlands, where extensive coniferous growth dominates the landscape and population densities are, as a consequence, lower. The Yellow Warbler is, and apparently always has been, one of Vermont's most abundant breeding species. Perkins considered it the most common warbler in the state in 1901. Greatest densities recorded on recent Vermont territory mapping studies are 24 pairs per 100 ha (10 pairs per 100 a) (Breault and Farrar 1972) along a rural stream border. Greater densities probably occur in shrubby, swampy forest habitats that are still uncensused because of their inaccessibility. Yellow Warblers are regularly found on all U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird Survey routes run in the state, and the species is second only to the Chestnut-sided Warbler as the most abundant *Dendroica* warbler tallied annually.

One of the first warblers to return in the spring from its wintering grounds in southern Mexico and northern South America, male Yellow Warblers may arrive on territories in southern Vermont in the first week of May. By mid May females are busy constructing nests under the attentive eyes of territorial males. Defended territories may range in size from 0.06 to 0.4 ha (0.15 to 1.95 a) (Brewer 1955), but foraging occurs regularly well outside the area actually de-



fended against intruding males (Kendeigh 1941). From 3 to 6 (average 4) glossy gray-, green-, or blue-white eggs, wreathed on the large end with brown, are laid in the nest. The nest may be wedged in a crotch 1–18 m (2 to 60 ft)—usually 1.8–2.4 m (6–8 ft)—above the ground. The nest is constructed of plant down, mosses, and fine grasses bound with spider webs, and is lined with plant down and hair. The Yellow Warbler is one of the most frequent hosts to Brown-headed Cowbird eggs (Friedmann 1963), although the female displays a novel response to such parasitism. Upon discovering a cowbird's egg(s) in her nest, the female warbler may build a second nest atop the entire clutch and lay a new set. Such layering of nests has been repeated up to five times in response to persistent parasitism (Wallace and Mahan 1975). Alternatively, the warbler pair may abandon the entire clutch and start a new nest elsewhere. Nonetheless, it is not uncommon to see a pair of Yellow Warblers working overtime to feed a young cowbird twice their size.

Normal incubation takes 11 days and is the sole responsibility of the female. Egg dates for 23 Vermont nests extend from May 23 to June 30. The nestling period is 9 to 12 days; young are tended by both parents. Vermont nestling dates are concentrated in mid June, indicating that most nest initiation and egg laying takes place in the latter half of May. Nestlings have been found



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

TOTAL 163 (91%)

Possible breeding: 8 (5% of total)  
 Probable breeding: 24 (15% of total)  
 Confirmed breeding: 131 (80% 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	19.0
Green Mountains	48	89	29.5
North Central	17	89	10.4
Northeast Highlands	11	69	6.8
East Central	17	89	10.4
Taconic Mountains	16	100	9.8
Eastern Foothills	23	96	14.1

as early as June 5. Four fledging dates fall between June 30 and July 9.

Yellow Warblers waste little time on the breeding grounds. Southward migration appears to be initiated as soon as the young are independent. Most local birds leave in July and early August. Although Yellow Warblers may be found occasionally in flocks of migrants into mid September or, exceptionally, to October 26, these late birds are probably migrants en route from more northerly latitudes.

The Yellow Warbler has one of the widest ranges of any North American passerine. The species breeds from northern South America north to Newfoundland in the east

and to central Alaska in the west. Within this tremendous range it occurs from sea level to timberline in a wide gradient of seral communities. Population declines in the southwestern U.S., where clearing of riparian habitats has eliminated the species from large tracts of its original range, have evoked recent concern (Tate and Tate 1982). Elsewhere in its extensive range it continues to thrive, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird survey data (Robbins 1982b) show a 2.5% annual increase among Yellow Warblers in the Northeast. Certainly no decline is evident in Vermont.

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