

Mourning Warbler

Geothlypis philadelphia



Wearing a dark gray cloak reminiscent of traditional bereavement, the Mourning Warbler is an inconspicuous, and yet relatively common bird of Vermont's regenerating woodlands. Its bright yellow underside plays against the supposition of sadness, although its skulking behavior can make observation of the bird difficult. Mourning Warblers breed in much of the northeastern United States, westward through the Great Lakes states into North Dakota, and across south-central Canada from northeast British Columbia to Newfoundland (Pitocchelli 1993). The southern edge of Vermont coincides with the southeastern edge of the bird's breeding range. An isolated population nests in West Virginia.

Mourning Warblers return to Vermont in late May to early June, a bit later than other warblers and well after trees have leafed out. They occur in second-growth forests with dense tangles of low vegetation and canopy cover of 48 to 77 percent (Cox 1960). Nesting sites are near forest clearings, such as those created by logging, fire, roads, hiking trails, and wetlands (Pitocchelli 1993). Nichols (1985) noted that breeding habitat in Vermont included dry hillsides with pin cherry and blackberry, as well as dense jewelweed and nettles along the margins of bogs and swamps. In the White Mountains of New Hampshire, Mourning Warblers appeared in a new clearing within 2 years, became abundant in 5 years, and declined in 7 to 10 years (DeGraaf 1991).

A typical clutch in Vermont includes 4 to 5 eggs (Nichols 1985) and incubation is completed in about 12 days. Nest building was observed during the atlas on 13 June. Two nests with eggs were reported, one on 14 June and one on 4 July. Most atlas confirmations resulted from observation of newly fledged young ($N = 27$), which were observed between 19 June and 23 July. Mourning Warblers perform a distraction display when tending young. Such behavior was witnessed by atlasers on 23 June, 5 July, and 13 July. Although Mourning Warblers can be difficult to see, at the height of breeding season males sing for several minutes at a time from perches of varying heights (Cox

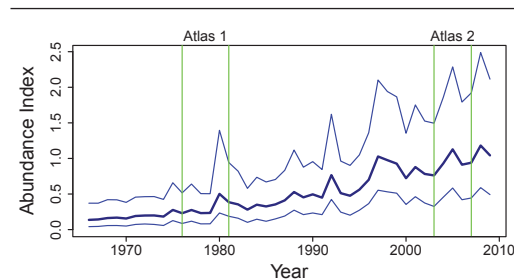
1960), which makes detection easier for those who recognize the song.

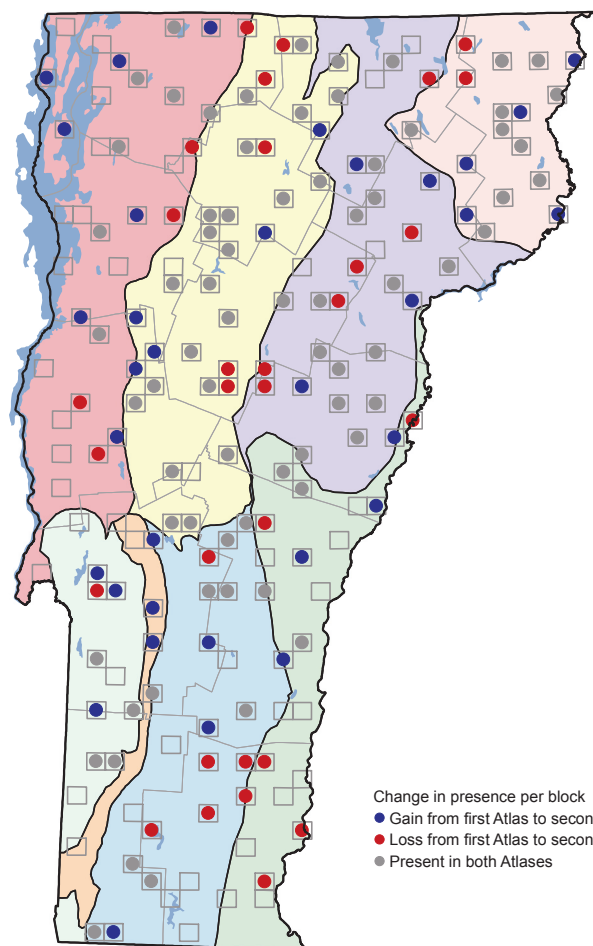
Nichols (1985) noted in the first atlas account that, once an observer learns the Mourning Warbler's distinctive song, the bird becomes surprisingly common. The first atlas recorded the bird in 57 percent of Priority 1 blocks statewide. During the second atlas, the number of blocks where Mourning Warbler was found increased by 4 percent statewide, with the largest increases occurring in the Taconic Mountains and Vermont Valley. The mosaic of gains and losses is likely the result of localized changes in habitat availability, as birds colonize new gaps in the forest and retreat from openings that become reforested.

Breeding Bird Survey data for Vermont showed a significant increasing trend of 4.1 percent per year from 1982 to 2007. During this same period, populations in Maine, New York, and New Hampshire were stable, but the BBS documented a significant, 1.8 percent per year decline in Ontario (Sauer et al. 2011). The second atlas in New York revealed a 4 percent increase in block occupancy (McGowan and Corwin 2008), while occupancy increased by an impressive 83 percent in Pennsylvania (Wilson et al. 2012).

Peterson (1957) questioned whether Mourning Warbler populations were truly increasing, suggesting that

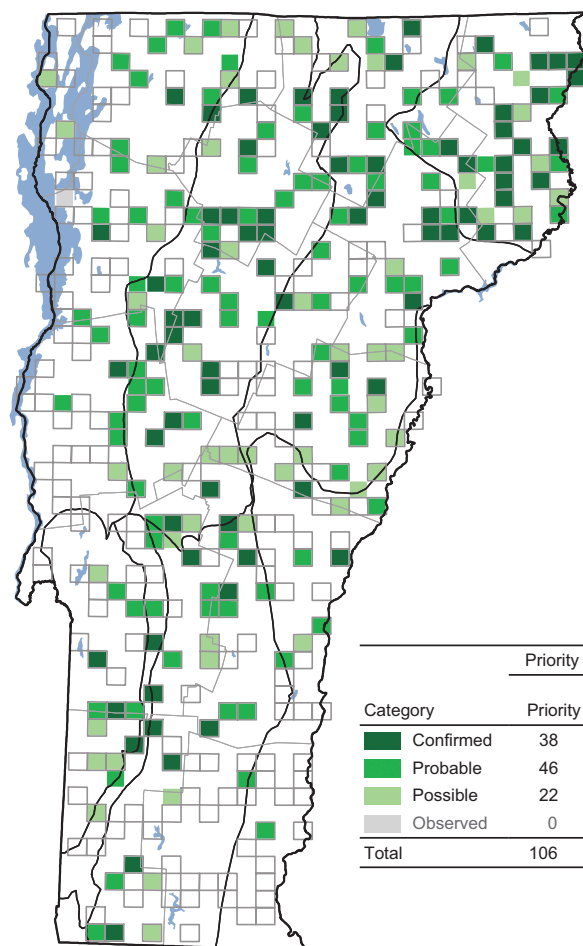
RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	12	14	+ 2	+ 17
Northeastern Highlands	12	15	+ 3	+ 25
Northern Green Mountains	28	28	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	21	20	- 1	- 5
Southern Green Mountains	16	14	- 2	- 13
Southern Vermont Piedmont	8	6	- 2	- 25
Taconic Mountains	5	7	+ 2	+ 40
Vermont Valley	0	2	+ 2	+ 200
Totals	102	106	+ 4	+ 4



Category	Priority Block Count	
	Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	38	76
Probable	46	83
Possible	22	48
Observed	0	0
Total	106	207

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	35	13
Northeastern Highlands	83	15
Northern Green Mountains	83	26
Northern Vermont Piedmont	67	21
Southern Green Mountains	48	13
Southern Vermont Piedmont	27	5
Taconic Mountains	52	5
Vermont Valley	37	1

early naturalists who did not observe the birds had simply missed them, and Nichols (1985) pondered this as well. Nevertheless, it is likely that this forest-dwelling warbler has increased since the time of Audubon and Wilson, when agriculture dominated the landscape. The Mourning Warbler evolved to exploit ephemeral clearings in the forest, whether natural or human-made, and moves into new areas of preferred habitat whenever they become available (Saunders 1938, Pitoccelli 1989). As one of the few warblers to benefit from clear-cut logging, min-

ing, wildfires, and woodland fragmentation, the Mourning Warbler is secure in Vermont and should continue to thrive.

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