Tennessee Warbler

Oreothlypis peregrina

Never a common or widespread breeding species in Vermont, the Tennessee Warbler's occurrence is best categorized as rare and sporadic. Vermont occupies the extreme southern periphery of this species' extensive breeding range, which is almost entirely restricted to Canada's boreal forest zone. Tennessee Warblers breed regularly from southeastern Yukon Territory east to Newfoundland and southward from south-central British Columbia to northern Minnesota, New York's Adirondack Mountains, central Maine, and Nova Scotia.

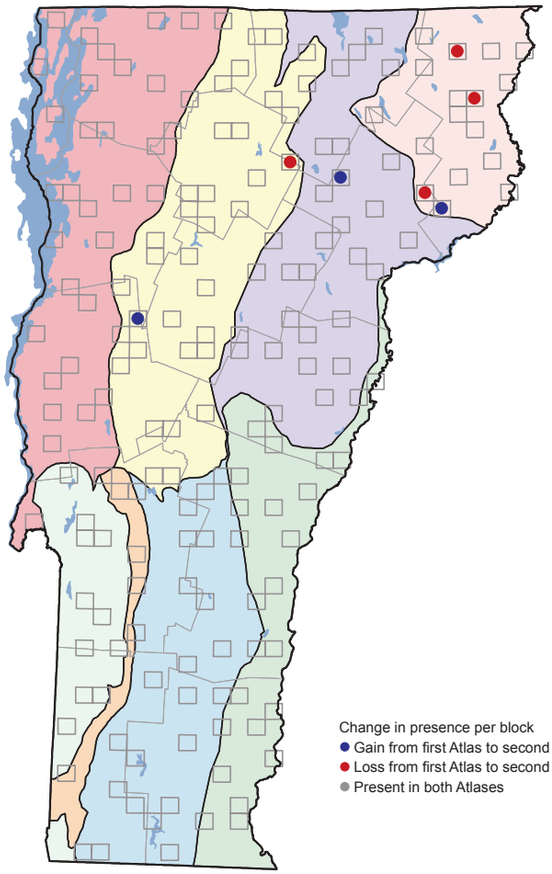
The scarcity of breeding-season reports in Vermont (summarized in Oatman 1985), and their scattered distribution in time and space, suggest that nesting is periodic and opportunistic. Determination of the species' breeding status is confounded by its well-documented tendency to disperse southward from breeding sites in early to mid-summer (Rimmer and McFarland 1998). The species delivers its loud, staccato song from conspicuous perches and is difficult to miss. Singing males encountered in the northeastern United States south of known nesting areas from late June to late July, however, are most likely early southbound migrants that failed to breed successfully (Rimmer and McFarland 1998).

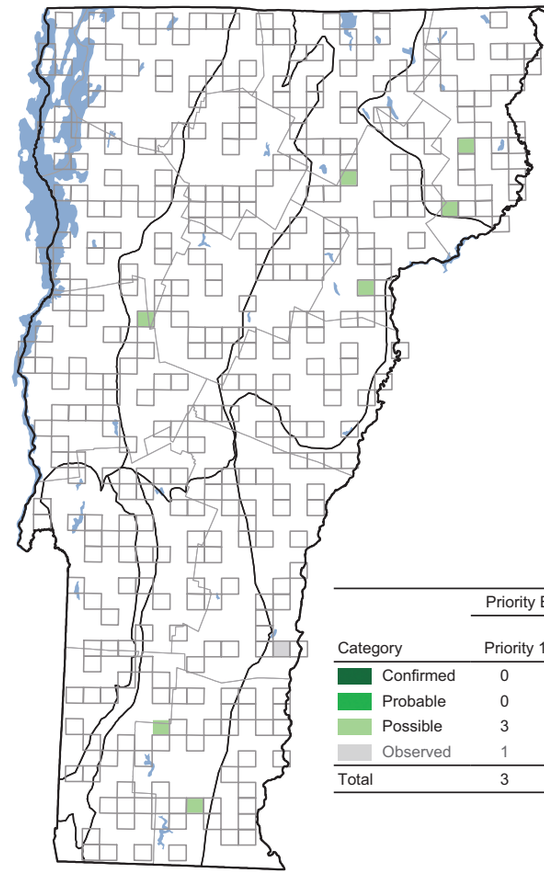
The Tennessee Warbler is most closely associated with forests or coniferous bogs dominated by spruce, fir, and tamarack, punctuated by openings with grasses or sedges, dense willow-alder thickets, and deciduous saplings (Rimmer and McFarland 1998). The species also uses early to mid-successional habitats following logging operations. In Vermont, the majority of historic and recent breeding season records have been obtained in lowland spruce-fir forests of the Northeastern Highlands (Oatman 1985, Murin and Pfeiffer 2002), although sporadic nesting has been confirmed as far south as Windham County (Oatman 1985).

The second atlas confirmed the Tennessee Warbler's continued scarcity as a breeding species in Vermont, and further indicated that it may not currently breed in the state at all. The first atlas recorded Tennessee Warblers on 6 blocks, including 4 Priority 1 blocks from the two northeastern-most biophysical regions and 1 breeding confirmation on a Southern Green Mountains non-priority block. The second atlas yielded a similar result, with 7 total records, all of singing males that were encountered only once and thus categorized as possible breeders. Only two birds were found outside of northern Vermont, both in the extreme Southern Green Mountains, and one of these was recorded on the late date of 21 July.

Regionally, the distribution of Tennessee Warbler appears to have changed little during the last quarter-century. Second-generation atlases in both New York and Ontario showed an overall stable trend, with only minor distributional changes over twenty-five years (Crins 2007, Peterson 2008). The species has experienced range-wide declines in abundance, however, especially during the past three decades. Breeding Bird Survey data over the twenty-eight-year period from 1982 to 2007 reveal dramatic downward trends at all geographic levels. In the Atlantic Northern Forest (Bird Conservation Region 14), Tennessee Warblers declined at a significant annual rate of 6.0 percent. In Maine, the only northeastern state with adequate BBS data for the species, populations declined significantly at 5.8 percent per year (Sauer et al. 2011). These regional declines reflect the species' tendency to parallel fluctuating populations of lepidopteran larvae, particularly spruce budworm, on which it is a well-known specialist (Rimmer and McFarland 1998). Tennessee Warbler populations respond numerically to periodic outbreaks of this forest caterpillar, which last peaked in Vermont from 1975 to 1983 (VDFPR 1985).

It is likely that the Tennessee Warbler has always been a tangential member of Vermont's breeding avifauna, and





Category	Priority Block Count: Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	0	0
Probable	0	0
Possible	3	6
Observed	1	1
Total	3	6

CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northeastern Highlands	3	1	- 2	- 67
Northern Green Mountains	1	1	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	1	+ 1	+ 100
Southern Green Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	4	3	- 1	- 25

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	0	0
Northeastern Highlands	5	33
Northern Green Mountains	1	17
Northern Vermont Piedmont	3	33
Southern Green Mountains	1	17
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	0
Taconic Mountains	0	0
Vermont Valley	0	0

that its current status reflects historical population levels in the state. An extended hiatus in regional spruce budworm infestations and curtailment of large-scale logging in northern Vermont have likely reduced overall habitat suitability for Tennessee Warbler. Future breeding is expected to be rare and intermittent. Conservation efforts for this species are more appropriately directed outside Vermont, towards management of Canada's boreal forests and protection of winter habitats in Latin America.

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