

Common Yellowthroat

Geothlypis trichas

From an atlaser's perspective, the Common Yellowthroat is the ideal bird: widely distributed and abundant in shrubby habitats, a persistent singer with a distinctive appearance and song (*whichity, whichity*), and quick to perform a feisty distraction display at the most minor of threats to nearby nest and young. It breeds from Newfoundland to the Northwest Territories, south to Florida and, in scattered locations, into Mexico. Common Yellowthroats are far hardier than their size would suggest. Although most leave Vermont in September to migrate to the southeastern Piedmont or across the Gulf of Mexico to Central America, a few linger well into early winter.

The Common Yellowthroat is found in thickets, cattail marshes, alder swamps, and beaver meadows. Elevation seems to pose no limit to them, and they may occur above tree line (Ellison 1985). In Vermont, northbound males begin arriving in numbers in early May. Females arrive on the breeding grounds a few days later (Stewart 1953). Nest building is well under way by late May. Nests are often in moist habitats but seldom over water. Upland nests may be on the ground, but in areas with a tendency to flood, nests are generally in the crotch of a shrub, below the shrub canopy. Nest building, completed by the female, takes 4 to 5 days, but second nests may be constructed in half that time. Nest building was noted between 22 May and 16 June ($N = 17$). Nests with eggs have been recorded as early as 5 June and as late as 13 July ($N = 11$). Nestlings were found from 19 June to 28 July ($N = 13$). Growth and development of the nestlings is phenomenally rapid, and the nesting cycle can be completed in only three weeks. In the course of 8 days, the altricial young increase in mass fivefold, transforming from naked and helpless chicks to mobile fledglings. Both parents feed and care for the brood, a behavior that accounted for 45 percent of breeding confirmations. Populations in the Midwest are often double-brooded (Hofslund 1959), and it is assumed that Vermont populations are as well. Fledglings were reported from 4 June until 13 August (109 records).

Common Yellowthroats were found in every atlas block, in both atlases. They have apparently been com-

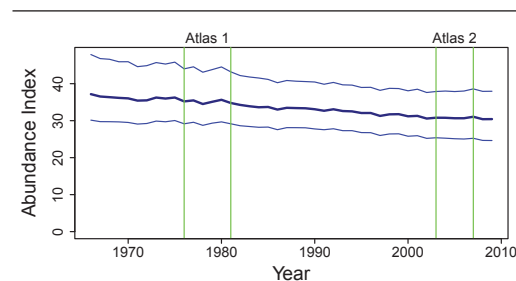


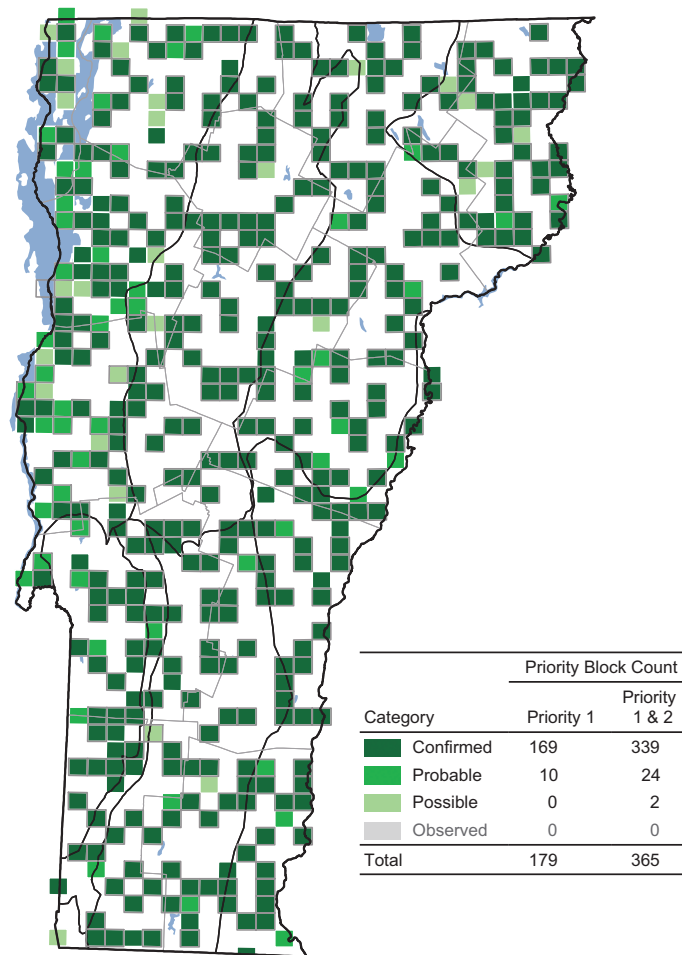
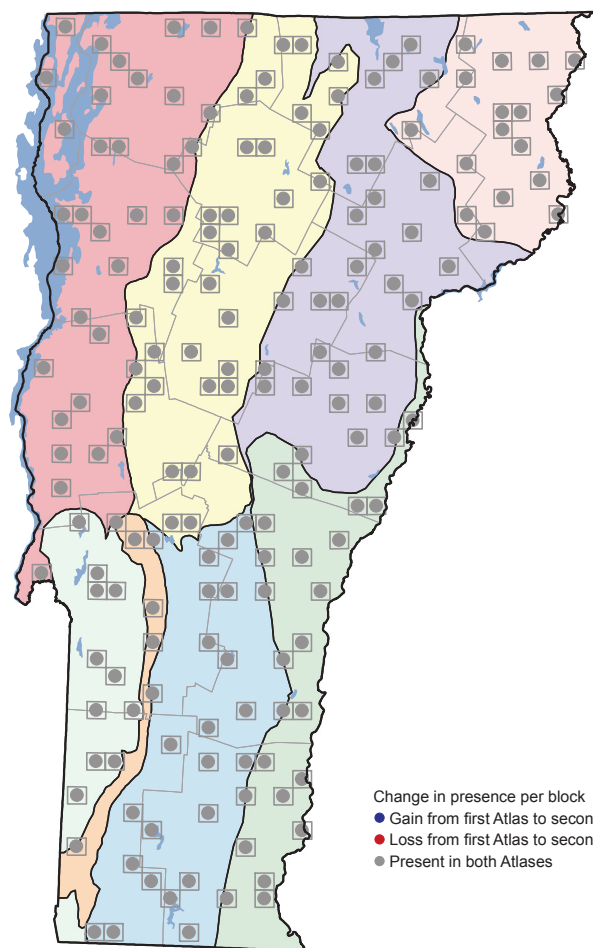
mon in Vermont since at least the late nineteenth century, when most of the forested land was cleared for pasturage (Ellison 1985). They may have become even more abundant after these pastures were allowed to revert to spirea thickets during the decline of the sheep and dairy farming industries. Even today, however, when most of the state's forests have been re-established, the Common Yellowthroat continues to be the state's most abundant and widely distributed warbler.

As in Vermont, Common Yellowthroats were found in nearly every block in the New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Maryland atlases. Breeding Bird Survey data indicate significant population declines of 0.9 percent per year range-wide from 1982 to 2007, but numbers in Vermont have been stable during the same period (Sauer et al. 2011). Monitoring of forest birds, however, revealed a 10.5 percent annual increase in the Common Yellowthroat population in Vermont between 1989 and 2006 ($p < 0.10$; Rimmer et al. 2007).

Although Common Yellowthroats may have been more abundant before Vermont's forests regrew, the species continues to thrive due to the persistence of wetlands, marshes, and shrubby growth along streams. Any

RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	33	33	+ 0	+ 0
Northeastern Highlands	17	17	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	35	35	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	30	30	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	27	27	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	21	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	179	179	+ 0	+ 0

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	100	20
Northeastern Highlands	100	10
Northern Green Mountains	100	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	100	18
Southern Green Mountains	100	15
Southern Vermont Piedmont	100	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	100	2

declines are likely from the loss of upland second-growth shrublands and old pastures, not the result of population declines in the shrub wetlands and marshes. Barring some dramatic change in the occurrence of these natural communities, Common Yellowthroats are likely to continue to live up to their name in Vermont.

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