

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Dendroica coronata

Arriving in early to mid-April, the Yellow-rumped Warbler, with its distinctive chip note and yellow rump, is the vanguard of spring warbler migration in Vermont. A common and widespread North American warbler, the species breeds across the boreal forest from Alaska to Labrador, southward throughout the Rocky Mountains, and to northeastern Minnesota and West Virginia. Disjunct resident populations also occur in the mountains of western Mexico and in Guatemala. Formerly considered two species—the Myrtle Warbler in the North and East, and Audubon’s Warbler in the West—the Yellow-rumped Warbler was reclassified as a single species in 1973 (AOU 1998, Hunt and Flaspohler 1998). At the time of this publication, however, the American Ornithological Union was reconsidering the classification of the distinctive subspecies. In Vermont this warbler was historically considered to be boreal, found only at high elevations and in the northeast portion of the state. Then, as abandoned agricultural land reverted to white pine, the species became widespread throughout the state (Ellison 1985).

The Yellow-rumped Warbler nests in a variety of coniferous forests including montane and lowland spruce-fir, spruce bogs, mixed woodlands, and in tall pine plantations. It is most uniformly distributed on mesic sites that contain mature stands of spruce and balsam fir, often in more open areas or woodland edges (Letourneau and LaFontaine 1996, Hunt and Flaspohler 1998). The yellow-rumped utilizes several feeding techniques—fly catching, foliage gleaning, skimming of water insects and, during migration, fruit eating—and forages in a variety of microhabitats (Hunt and Flaspohler 1998). Its cup-shaped nest is generally built on a side fork saddling a main branch, 1.2 to 15.2 meters (4 to 50 feet) off the ground (Baicich and Harrison 1997). The nest itself is composed of twigs, bark, moss, lichens, and rootlets, then lined with hair and feathers. At several high-elevation sites throughout Vermont from 2003 to 2007, Yellow-rumped Warblers initiated nests between 17 May and 6 July ($N = 35$; Rimmer and McFarland unpubl. data). Mean clutch size was 3.97 ± 0.79 ($N = 35$); the latest hatch date was 21 July.

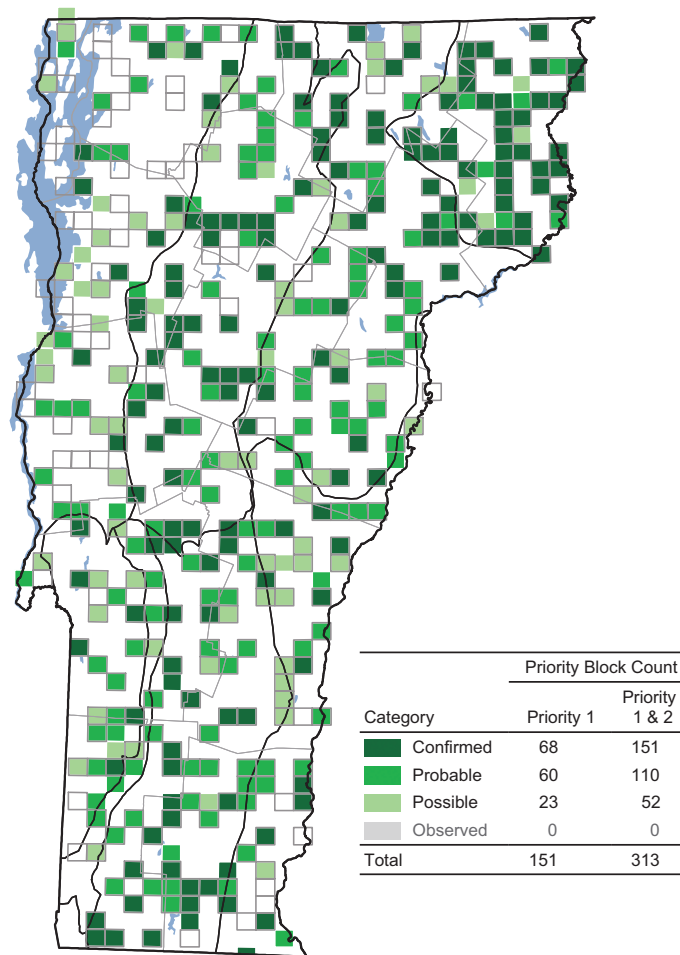
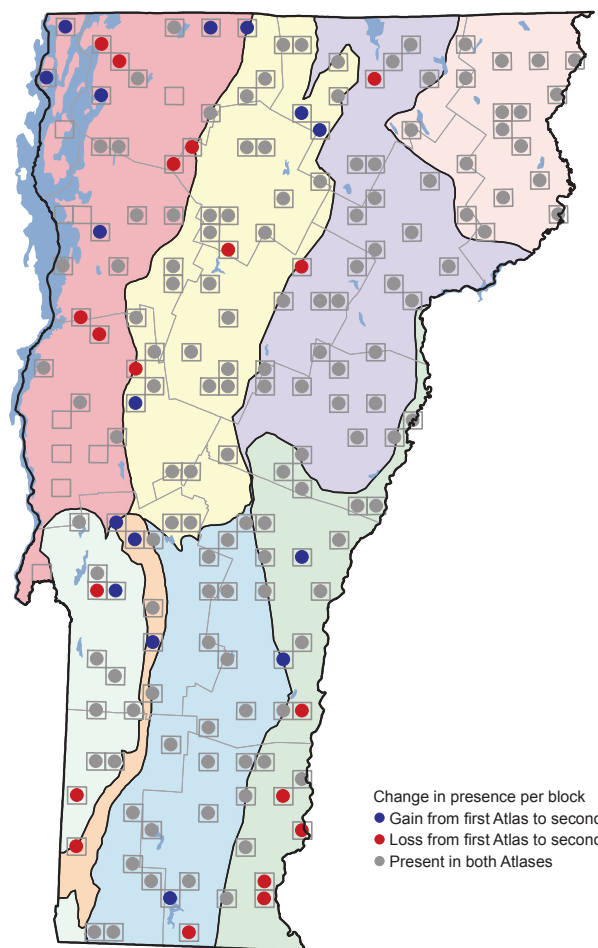


Fledgling dates were between 15 June and 2 August. Incubation averaged 11 to 12 days ($N = 57$); mean nestling period was $11.49 \text{ days} \pm 1.20$ ($N = 48$ nests).

The Yellow-rumped Warbler was reported in 84 percent of the priority blocks during the atlas; the highest proportions of occupied blocks were in the Green Mountains and Northeastern Highlands. The range expansion noted in the first atlas did not persist into the second atlas. There was a slight decrease in overall block occupancy since the first atlas due to a small range contraction in the Northern and Southern Vermont piedmonts and the Taconic Mountains. This shift is reflected in abundance data from the Forest Bird Monitoring Program, which documented non-significant annual decreases of 7.0 percent between 1989 and 2010. The distribution of the Yellow-rumped Warbler continued to be patchy in the Champlain Valley, where it was detected in 53 percent of the priority blocks during the atlas. Ellison (1985) noted that the Yellow-rumped Warbler was the most likely boreal warbler to breed in the Champlain Valley.

The second atlases of Ontario, New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland showed marked increases in Yellow-rumped Warbler distribution (Cadman et al. 2007, McGowan and Corwin 2008, Ellison 2010, Wilson et al. 2012). Despite the precipitous decline of other wood-warblers in recent years, Breeding Bird Survey data indicate that, from 1982 to 2007, Yellow-rumped Warbler populations increased non-significantly in Vermont by 1.8 percent annually and were stable range-wide (Sauer et al. 2011).

Yellow-rumped Warbler is stable both in range and population and does not appear to be of conservation concern in the forested Northeast (Birdlife International



CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	18	18	+ 0	+ 0
Northeastern Highlands	17	17	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	32	33	+ 1	+ 3
Northern Vermont Piedmont	30	28	- 2	- 7
Southern Green Mountains	26	26	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	19	16	- 3	- 16
Taconic Mountains	10	9	- 1	- 10
Vermont Valley	2	4	+ 2	+ 100
Totals	154	151	- 3	- 2

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	53	12
Northeastern Highlands	100	12
Northern Green Mountains	93	19
Northern Vermont Piedmont	95	20
Southern Green Mountains	98	18
Southern Vermont Piedmont	82	11
Taconic Mountains	90	6
Vermont Valley	87	2

2009). Moreover, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists the Yellow-rumped Warbler as a “species of least concern,” due in part to their extremely large range, population size, and apparent ecological plasticity. Nonetheless, continued monitoring of boreal forest should track any potential future effects of development and climate change on habitat availability. The Yellow-rumped Warbler’s relatively broad habitat requirements may be its key to future success in Vermont.

BRENDAN COLLINS