

Cerulean Warbler

Dendroica cerulea

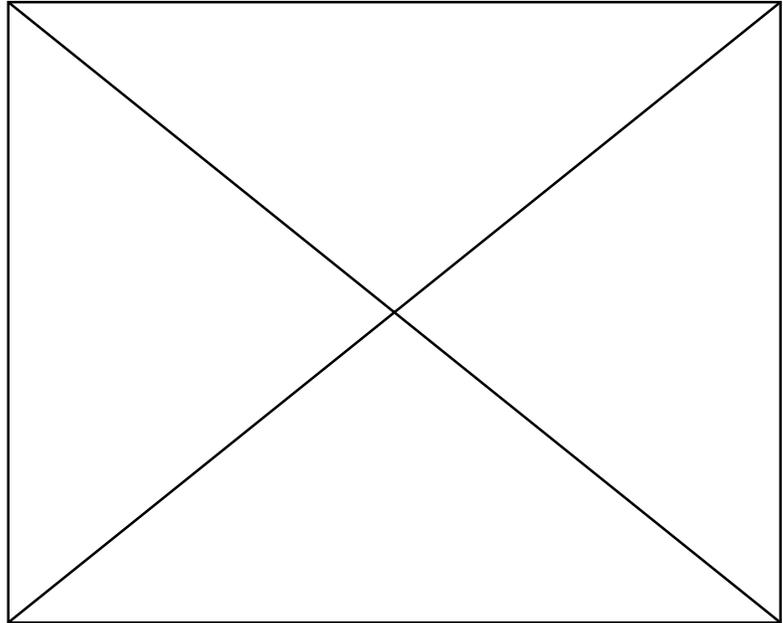
Wherever mature deciduous woodlands occur within Ohio, Cerulean Warblers will be members of the nesting avifauna. Breeding pairs occupy a variety of wooded communities including dry oak–hickory woodlots in western Ohio, the extensive mixed mesophytic forests along the unglaciated Allegheny Plateau, wet beech–maple woodlands in the northeastern counties, and extensive floodplain woods throughout the state. They have been reported from pine and hemlock forests near Cleveland (Williams 1950), but are not normally encountered in these habitats elsewhere in Ohio. These warblers prefer large wooded tracts of at least 50–75 acres, and normally avoid isolated woodlots that are less than 20–25 acres in extent. Territories will be established within the interiors and along the edges of these woodlands, although the interiors may provide the preferred sites.

The current distribution of Cerulean Warblers reflects these habitat preferences. During the Atlas Project, this species was found in 387 priority blocks (50.7% of the statewide total) within 81 counties. They were most frequently noted along the entire Allegheny Plateau where mature woodlands are still widely available, with representation in 88.7% of the priority blocks in the Unglaciated Plateau region and 67.1% of the Glaciated Plateau blocks. Along this plateau, they proved to be locally scarce only near large urban centers in the northeastern counties. Their representation declined to 43.5% of the Illinoian Till Plain blocks where they were not recorded from portions of Hamilton, Butler, and Warren counties. These warblers were locally distributed in the Till Plain and Lake Plain regions (24.0 and 21.1% of the regional priority blocks respectively), reflecting a scarcity of suitable habitats within these intensively farmed regions. The fewest records came from the western tier of counties and the heavily farmed plains of Clark, Champaign, Madison, and Fayette counties, although this species was locally absent wherever agricultural practices have eliminated most woodlands.

The relative abundance of Cerulean Warblers exhibits a similar pattern. These warblers are most numerous along the entire Allegheny Plateau, declining somewhat within the Illinoian Till Plain region (Peterjohn 1989a). Decidedly fewer Ceruleans are reported elsewhere. This pattern of relative abundance is not evident on Breeding Bird Surveys since this species and many other woodland–interior birds are not adequately censused by these surveys within Ohio.

Cerulean Warblers have been widespread summer residents within Ohio during historic times. Hicks (1935) cited breeding records from every county. He noted they were common along the Allegheny Plateau where Ceruleans were frequently the “most numerous woodland warbler”, while they were absent only in areas where all suitable forests had been eliminated. During subsequent years, their numbers have declined somewhat along this plateau, particularly near large urban areas and within counties experiencing extensive strip mining. Even in suitable

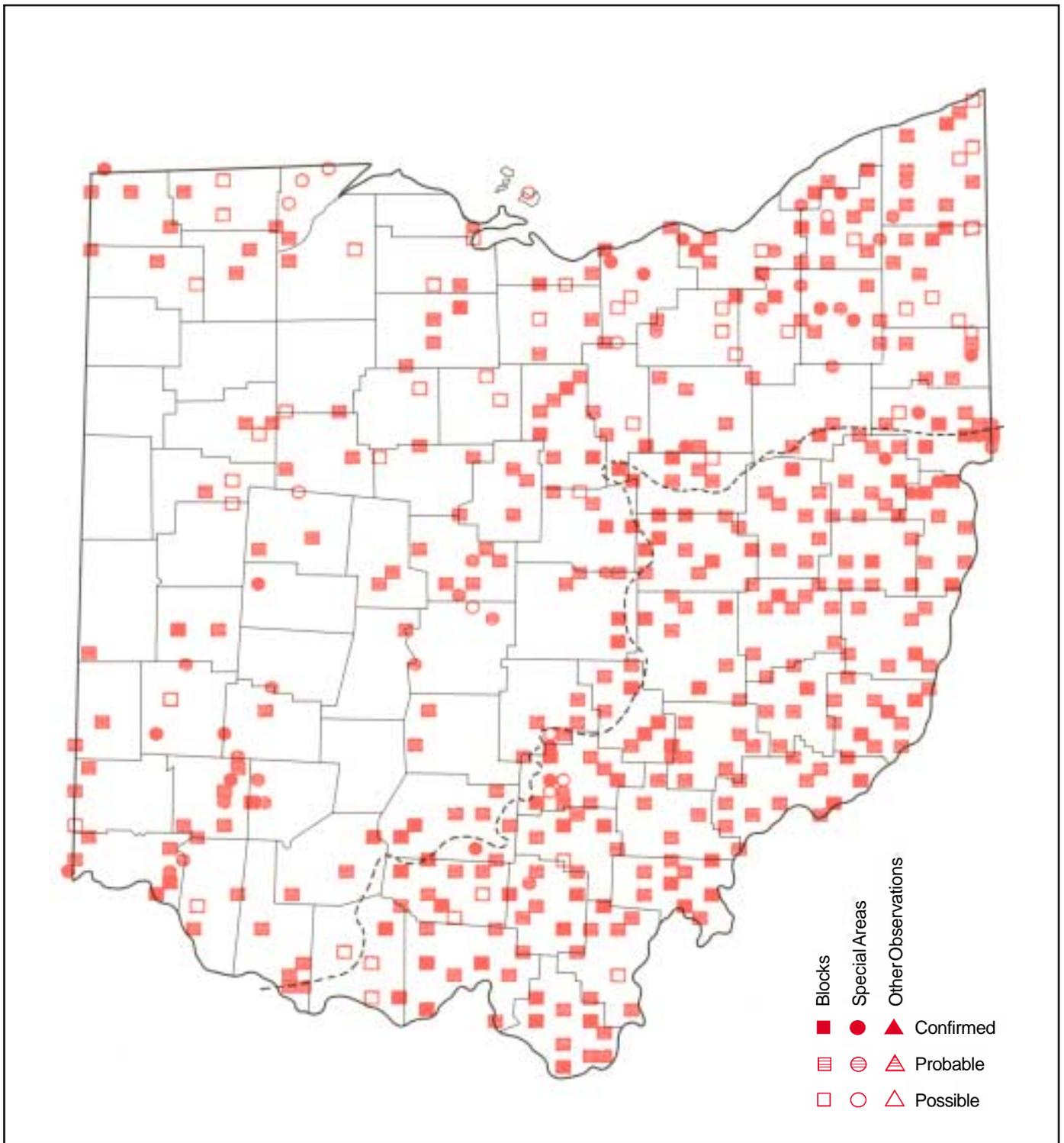
habitats, they are no longer the most common woodland warbler. Their numbers have substantially declined within the farmlands of western and central Ohio (Peterjohn 1989a). These declines were evident as early as the 1930s in the Toledo area (Campbell 1940, 1968) and became more widespread during subsequent years. This trend continued during the 1980s as woodlands were being rapidly converted into farm fields.



Picture to be added

This species occupies the canopies of tall trees and is very difficult to observe among the foliage. Only the singing males are conspicuous, and most Atlas Project records pertained to territorial individuals (probable breeders comprised 64.9% of all reports). While Cerulean Warblers were confirmed in 91 priority blocks, the “30” code provided confirmation in 75 of these blocks (including 51 and 17 blocks in the Unglaciated Plateau and Glaciated Plateau regions respectively). The remaining confirmed records included 5 active nests in 5 blocks and reports of adults carrying food for young warblers in 10 blocks.

Most Cerulean Warbler nests are placed at heights of 30–60 feet among the outer branches of tall trees (Peck and James 1987). Little information is available on their nesting chronology in Ohio. Nest construction is apparently most prevalent during May, but will continue into early June. The few published egg dates are June 4–17, although clutches are undoubtedly produced during the second half of May in southern Ohio (Peterjohn 1989a). Recently fledged young have appeared as early as June 18 (Williams 1950), but most are observed between June 25 and July 15. Renesting attempts may produce young warblers into the second half of July, but whether or not pairs regularly try to produce second broods is unknown.



Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	20	21.1	5.2	0.1
Till Plain	271	65	24.0	16.8	<0.1
Ill. Till Plain	46	20	43.5	5.2	0.2
Glaciated Plateau	140	94	67.1	24.3	–
Unglaciated Plateau	212	188	88.7	48.6	0.7

Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
Total	387	50.7%
Confirmed	91	23.5%
Probable	251	64.9%
Possible	45	11.6%