

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Coccyzus americanus

As was true for Black-billed Cuckoos, Yellow-billed Cuckoos are late spring migrants whose passage through Ohio frequently continues into the first half of June (Peterjohn 1989a). Hence, some of the possible breeding records and even a few singing cuckoos that were classified as probable breeders may have been late migrants. Despite these potential problems in assigning status to some sightings, Yellow-billeds easily rank as the most widely distributed of our resident cuckoos. They were recorded in 668 priority blocks representing 87.4% of the statewide total.

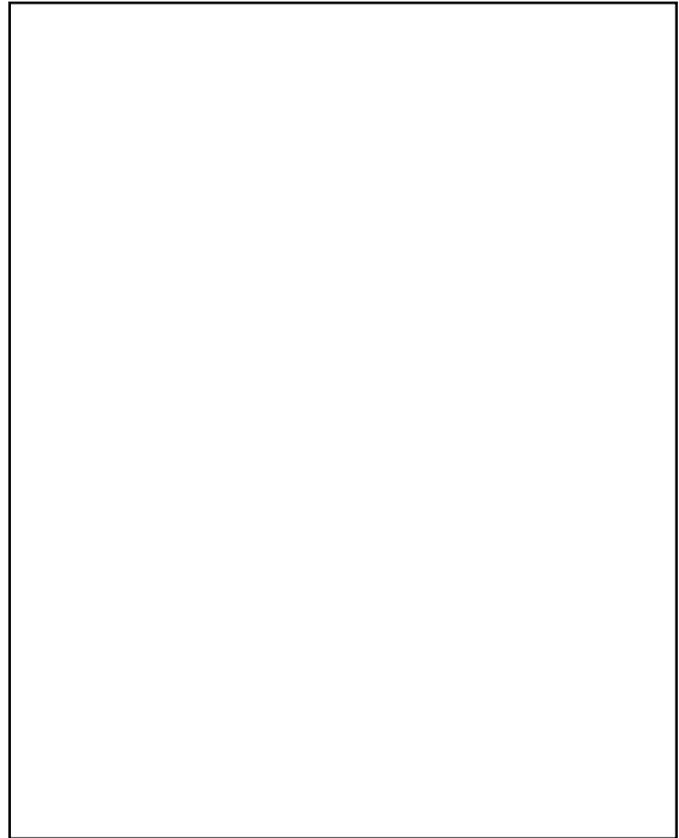
While Yellow-billed Cuckoos were reported from every Ohio county, they were decidedly scarcer within the northeastern counties than in the remainder of the state. They were found in greater than 90% of the priority blocks in the Till Plain, Unglaciaded Plateau, and Illinoian Till Plain regions, reaching a maximum of 97.8% of the blocks in the latter region. They declined somewhat in the Lake Plain region where these cuckoos were found in 84.2% of the priority blocks. The fewest Yellow-billeds occurred within the Glaciaded Plateau region (68.6% of the priority blocks), where they were locally distributed in the northeastern corner of the state west to Lorain County and south through Medina, northern Stark and Mahoning counties.

The relative abundance of these cuckoos on Breeding Bird Survey routes exhibited a similar pattern. Breeding Yellow-billeds were most numerous in the Unglaciaded Plateau region, nearly twice as abundant as in the Illinoian Till Plain and Till Plain regions. The fewest cuckoos were recorded in the Lake Plain and Glaciaded Plateau regions.

This distribution pattern is not readily explained by the habitat preferences of this species. Yellow-billed Cuckoos occupy wooded corridors bordering streams and lakes, open second growth woods, the brushy margins of mature woodlands, and shrub/sapling stage successional habitats (Trautman 1940, Williams 1950). They are most plentiful near water, but are also regularly found in upland areas. Since these habitats appear to be widely distributed within the northeastern counties where Yellow-billeds are relatively scarce, other factors must be limiting the abundance of these cuckoos in this portion of the state.

This statewide distribution has remained relatively constant for the past century. Jones (1903) considered Yellow-billeds to be the more numerous of the two cuckoos with no appreciable change in numbers since Wheaton (1882). During the 1930s, Hicks (1935) cited breeding records from every county, noting they were fairly common to abundant but rather locally distributed. In subsequent years, local declines have been reported from the Toledo area (Campbell 1968), but have not been apparent elsewhere. Their numbers exhibited considerable annual variability that partially masked long term population trends. However, Robbins, C. S., et al. (1986) noted their populations remained fairly stable within Ohio between 1965 and 1979.

Yellow-billed Cuckoos normally place their nests at heights of 3–7 feet in saplings, bushes, and vines. Dense deciduous vegetation is preferred, although a few nests have been discovered in

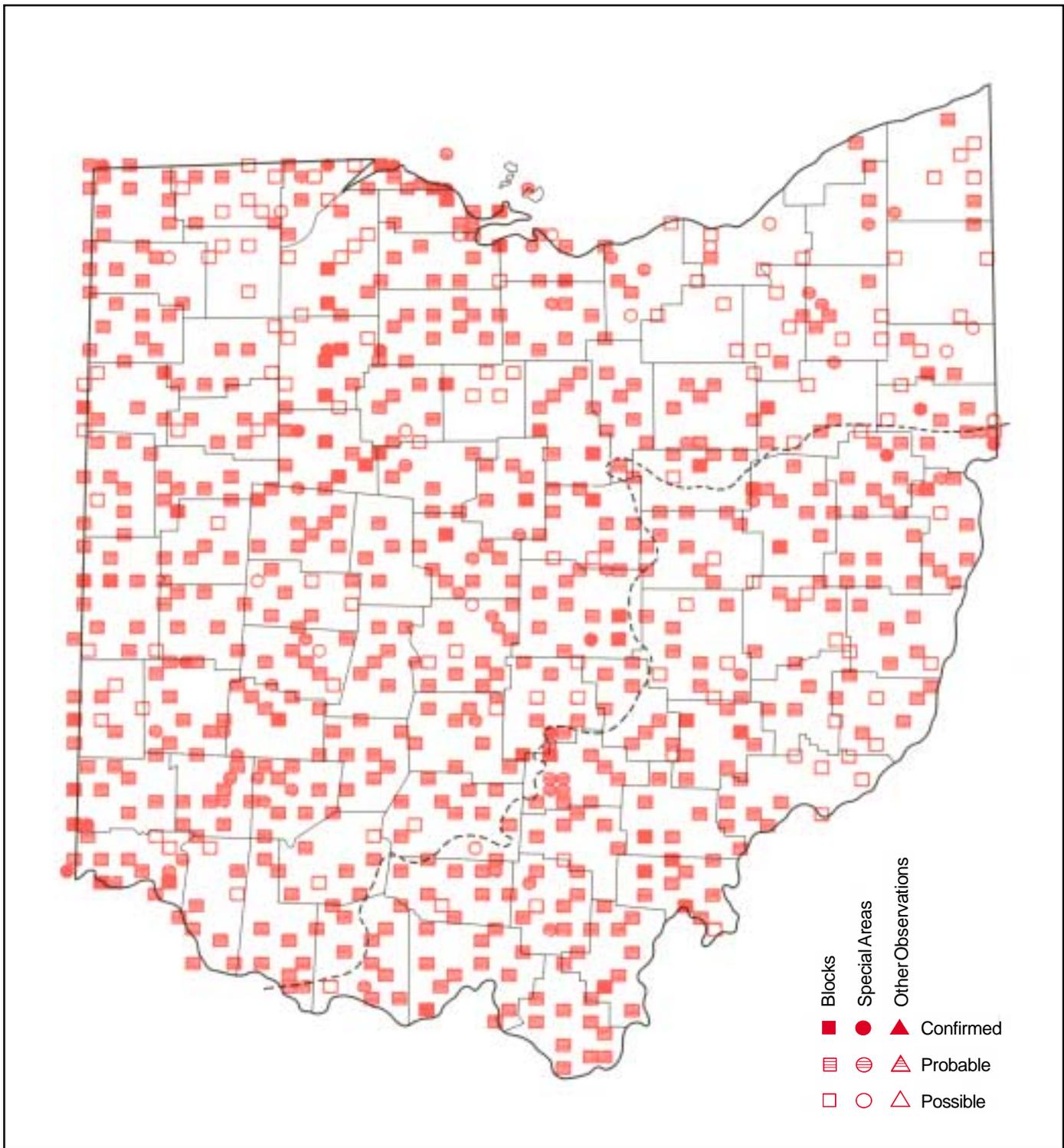


Picture to be added

coniferous trees (Peck and James 1983). The nesting habits of a single pair on Gibraltar Island (Ottawa County) were described by Preble (1957), but whether or not these habits are representative of other pairs remains to be determined.

These cuckoos have a relatively prolonged breeding season within Ohio. The earliest nests with eggs have been reported during the last week of May. However, nests with young have been noted by May 28 (Campbell 1940), indicating nesting activities may be initiated during early May. Most clutches have been discovered between June 1 and July 15, with the young cuckoos fledging in July or early August.

Yellow-billed Cuckoos regularly initiate late nesting attempts. Clutches have been discovered during August on several occasions and there is a record of a nest with eggs through September 20, 1929 at Buckeye Lake (Trautman 1940). The young cuckoos did not leave this nest until October 3. Reports of recently fledged cuckoos during September are not unexpected. Whether these exceptionally late nesting records represent attempts to raise multiple broods in one season, are renesting efforts after earlier unsuccessful attempts, or are the first attempts of individuals that just recently moved into the area has never been established.



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	80	84.2	12.0	<0.1
Till Plain	271	248	91.5	37.1	0.3
Ill. Till Plain	46	45	97.8	6.7	<0.1
Glaciated Plateau	140	96	68.6	14.4	0.3
Unglaciated Plateau	212	199	93.9	29.8	1.1

Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
Total	668	87.4%
Confirmed	51	7.6%
Probable	504	75.5%
Possible	113	16.9%