

Yellow Warbler

Dendroica petechia

One of Ohio's most numerous breeding warblers, Yellow Warblers were widely encountered during the Atlas Project. They were recorded in 721 priority blocks (94.4% of the statewide total), with nearly equal representation in every physiographic region. Breeding pairs were most widespread in northern and eastern Ohio where they were found in 95.8–100% of the priority blocks in the Glaciated Plateau, Unglaciated Plateau, and Lake Plain regions. Their representation declined to 88.9% of the Till Plain blocks as these warblers became locally scarce within intensively farmed portions of the western and central counties. This species was found in 82.6% of the Illinoian Till Plain priority blocks where breeding pairs proved to be locally scarce in Brown and Clermont counties.

The relative abundance of Yellow Warblers on Breeding Bird Surveys exhibits a different pattern. They are most numerous in the Glaciated Plateau region, particularly the northeastern counties where their preferred habitats are plentiful. Fewer breeding warblers occur in the Unglaciated Plateau, Illinoian Till Plain, and Lake Plain regions, although Yellow Warblers become locally plentiful in suitable habitats such as the extensive marshes bordering western Lake Erie (Peterjohn 1989a). The fewest breeding Yellow Warblers are found in the Till Plain region where only negligible numbers occur on these surveys.

Yellow Warblers have always been common and widely distributed summer residents in Ohio. Jones (1903) considered them to be the commonest summer warbler in the state and Hicks (1935) described them as common to locally abundant residents in every county. He assigned a similar status to their abundance within the unglaciated counties during the 1930s (Hicks 1937). Their numbers have reportedly increased in the Cincinnati area since the early 1940s (Kemsies and Randle 1953). Similar increases have not been evident elsewhere, and some populations within the farmlands of western and central Ohio probably experienced local declines during these same years as a result of habitat destruction. The loss of suitable habitats through secondary succession may have contributed to local declines in unglaciated Ohio (Peterjohn 1989a). Overall, their statewide numbers have probably remained fairly stable in recent years which is also true for their continental populations between 1965 and 1979 (Robbins, C. S., et al. 1986).

Breeding Yellow Warblers prefer to occupy damp brushy habitats. The brushy borders of ditches, streams, lakes, and marshes as well as shrub-dominated wetlands host the largest numbers of nesting pairs (Trautman 1940). While these warblers prefer habitats characterized by shrubby thickets interspersed with herbaceous cover, they also occupy dense brushy habitats with few openings. Yellow Warblers are not restricted to these habitats, however, and their adaptability in the selection of nesting habitats accounts for their widespread distribution in Ohio. Breeding pairs are also regularly noted in damp young woods with dense shrubs and saplings, brushy woodland edges, mesic fallow fields becoming dominated by brushy vegetation, shrubby corridors along fencerows and railroads, orchards, and even shrubs adjacent to residences (Trautman 1940, Williams

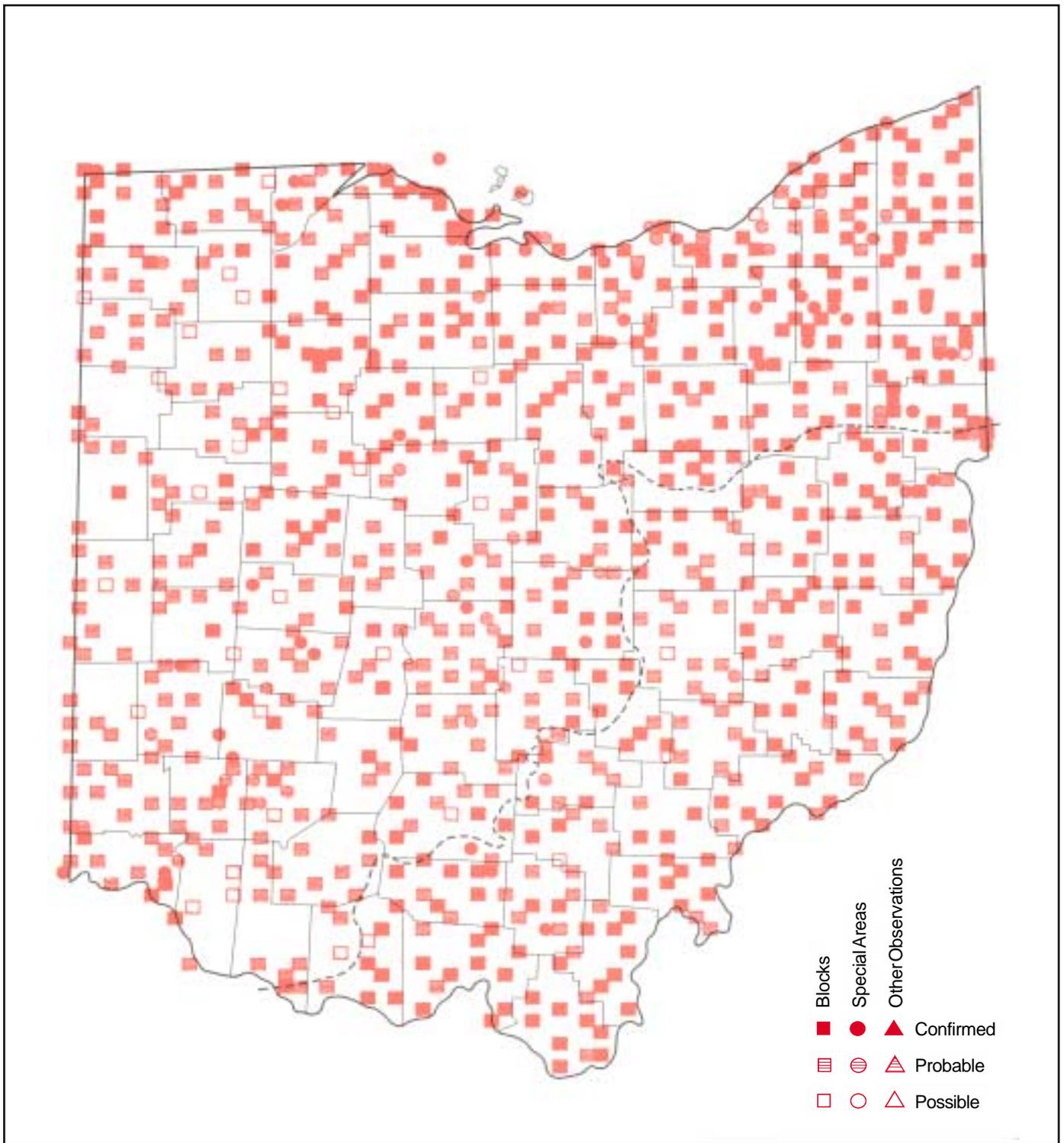


Mike Williams - ODNR Photographer

1950). Habitats adjacent to standing water may be preferred, but pairs may be found in dry upland sites miles from any water.

Within Ohio, nest construction is most prevalent during May. These nests are normally placed at heights of 3–8 feet in shrubs and saplings. Trautman (1940) cited an exceptional nest located 50 feet high in a sycamore tree, and Williams (1950) also noted occasional nests up to 40 feet above the ground. The first clutches are produced by May 12–15 and most pairs are incubating eggs before the end of May. Recently fledged young have been reported as early as May 25 (Trautman 1940), but most appear during the second half of June and early July. Successful pairs regularly attempt to raise two broods. These late attempts are responsible for clutches into the first week of July and reports of recently fledged young through July 25.

Of the 721 records of Yellow Warblers in priority blocks, 386 (53.5%) pertained to confirmed breeders. The “30” code was used to confirm breeding in 199 priority blocks, primarily in the Unglaciated Plateau, Glaciated Plateau, and Till Plain Regions. Adults carrying food for young warblers were observed in 79 blocks, active nests were discovered in 69 blocks, there were 23 reports of recently fledged young, and the distraction displays of adult warblers were noted in 12 blocks. Most of the remaining records were of probable breeders, primarily territorial males and pairs in suitable habitats.



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	91	95.8	12.6	4.6
Till Plain	271	241	88.9	33.4	0.9
Ill. Till Plain	46	38	82.6	5.3	3.2
Glaciated Plateau	140	140	100.0	19.4	12.0
Unglaciated Plateau	212	211	99.5	29.3	6.0

Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
Total	721	94.4%
Confirmed	386	53.5%
Probable	305	42.3%
Possible	30	4.2%