

Yellow-throated Vireo *Vireo flavifrons*



Folk Name: Big Hanger, Yellow-throated Branch-swinging Bird

Status: Breeder

Abundance: Uncommon to Fairly Common

Habitat: Mature, open deciduous woodlands

The Yellow-throated Vireo has been described as the “handsomest of the vireos.” This 5-½-inch bird is best distinguished from the others by its bold, lemon-yellow spectacles, throat, and breast. It has a white belly and two white wing bars. It is primarily found in patches of mature, open deciduous forest. It spends most of its life gleaning insects high in the trees and is seldom found close to ground.

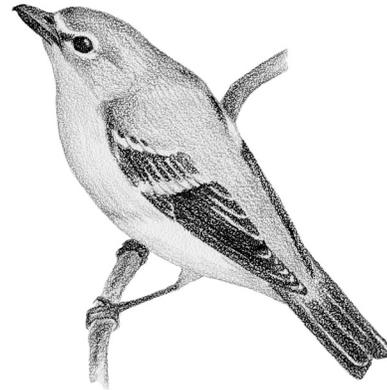
In the late 1800s in Chester County, the Yellow-throated Vireo was reported as a common breeding species and a “very common” bird during migration. R.B. McLaughlin reported spring migrants arriving in Iredell County on April 2, 1885; March 27, 1887; and March 30, 1888. Elmer Brown reported a Yellow-throated Vireo arriving in Salisbury on April 8, 1924.

In 1926, Elmer Brown shared a nest record from Rowan County with C.S. Brimley at the North Carolina State Museum. At the time, this nest was reported to be only the second nest of this species found in North Carolina:

On June 3, 1922 Frank and Harold found the nest of a Yellow-throated Vireo near here. It was about twenty-five feet above the ground in a willow oak, and contained three young birds about ready to leave the nest. A year or two before the preceding date I found a Yellow-throated’s nest, but failed to record the date. This nest must have been thirty-five or forty feet up in a red maple.



Yellow-throated Vireo at Latta Park in Charlotte.
(Will Stuart)



J F M A M J J A S O N D

William McIlwaine’s column published in *The Charlotte News* on April 15, 1928, included the following report: “The yellow-throated vireo and the white-eyed vireo arrived last week [4 April]. And my! they were making a fuss about it. Down along the branch just before you reach the old aviation field in Myers Park that yellow-throated vireo had the echoes ringing. He was glad to get back; and all his world had to hear it.”

During the last week of April 1943, Eddie Clarkson discovered a Yellow-throated Vireo nest in the yard of a home in Charlotte. On May 28, 1946, Will Hon and Jim Layton, active members of the Mecklenburg Audubon Club, “found a nest with young in a low tree overhanging an infrequently used dirt road within the Charlotte city limits. The parent was seen feeding the young.”

Breeding birds face many challenges in successfully raising their young. Rhett Chamberlain provided this report of a nest of a Yellow-throated Vireo:

On May 10, 1953, while in our yard with my son Norman, on a drain clearing project, we were interrupted by scolding notes that sounded much like wrens over in the big hickory tree to the east of the house. Investigation showed a pair of Yellow-throated Vireos excited by the presence of a small snake that lay closely along a lower limb by way of a small cedar into which it dipped. Farther out, on an adjacent limb, the Vireo’s nest was located. The birds moved about from perch to perch, five to ten feet from the snake. Occasionally, one of them would swoop to within a few inches of it with a harsh cry. During these attacks, the snake remained motionless. We dislodged it with a pole and saw that it resembled a young Rat Snake. Norman

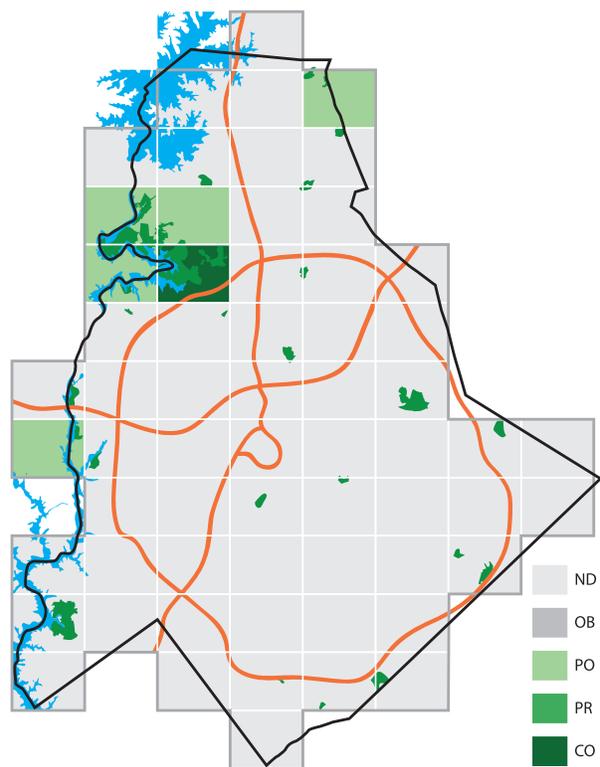
placed a stick across its neck to capture it for full identification. At that point my attention was drawn to one of the Vireos. It had dropped down beside us and was watching every detail of the capture from an open perch about four feet away. It kept an eye “glued” on the snake, turning its head first from one side and then to the other, and left only when we stood up and walked away. The snake proved to be a Gray [Black] Rat Snake. It was 25 inches long. We released it in our trash disposal gulley. As for the Vireo nest, three young left it on May 18, and for the next two or three days added their strong one-note cry to the other natural noises on our hill.

As with the White-eyed Vireo, members of the Mecklenburg Audubon Club discovered a single Yellow-throated Vireo among the carnage of bird carcasses located at the base of ceilometer tower at the Charlotte Municipal Airport on the morning of September 26, 1955. Four years later, Joe and Becky Norwood collected a single specimen of a Yellow-throated Vireo at the base of the WSOC television tower on October 8, 1959.

Our earliest spring arrival date for the Yellow-throated Vireo in the region is a bird Caroline Eastman found at Forty Acre Rock in Lancaster County on March 22, 2014. Our latest fall dates are 15 and 21 October. We have three winter reports that provided no details or documentation and are not verifiable. One bird was reported in Cleveland County on November 22, 2010, and two birds were reported on Christmas Bird Counts: Chester CBC in 1992 and Charlotte CBC in 2006. Our highest one-day count in the region is a tally of 24 birds on the Charlotte Spring Bird Count held on May 4, 1963. This bird has only been found intermittently on this count in recent years.

Recent USGS Breeding Bird Survey trend data for the Yellow-throated Vireo in North Carolina and in South Carolina indicate a fairly steady population. However,

this is not the case in Mecklenburg County. This vireo has become difficult to find in the county over the last two decades as the area has been “built-out.” In fact, breeding was confirmed in only a single block during the recent Mecklenburg County BBA. This serious decline is expected to be magnified as development continues to rapidly expand outward throughout this region.



Mecklenburg County Breeding Bird Atlas:
Very Local (PR/0, CO/1)