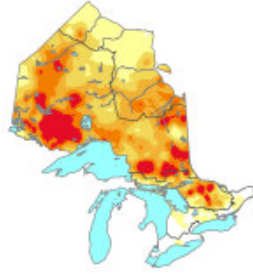


Blue-headed Vireo Factsheet

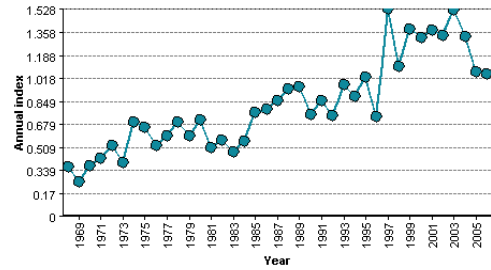
Boreal Bird Toolkit



Blue-headed Vireo



Relative Abundance



Breeding Bird Survey Index Trend 1968-2006 (Canada)

Description and biology: The Blue-headed Vireo is a large vireo (12.5-15cm) with a slate-grey head and white “spectacles,” olive-green back, white underparts with yellowish sides, and two white wing bars. It moves slowly through the forest, foraging at mid-height, picking insect prey off branches and leaves.

Habitat requirements: The Blue-headed Vireo uses both deciduous and coniferous forests, preferring older, more extensive mixed-forest tracts with a well developed understorey. It will, however, breed in pure conifer stands, and less frequently woodlands comprised largely of deciduous species. It attaches its delicate nest to a small tree or shrub.

Natural history: Previously, this species was considered a subspecies of the larger “Solitary Vireo” complex which has since been split into three separate, distinct species. The Blue-headed Vireo is the most easterly and brightly-coloured of the three species. This vireo was among the species that increased its breeding range the most in the twenty years between the first and second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas projects. The Blue-headed Vireo’s breeding range nearly doubled province-wide over two decades, surpassed only by the rapidly-increasing populations of the Canada Goose and House Finch.

Conservation status: Of the North American and world population, 55% breed in Canada’s boreal forest. Breeding Bird Surveys reveal that the Blue-headed Vireo increased significantly by 3.5% per year between 1968 and 2006 across Canada, and during the same time period increased by a significant 2.2% per year in Ontario. Results from the second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (2001-2005) show the species has increased significantly by 72% over twenty years in the Northern Shield region and by a significant 94% in the adjacent Southern Shield. Partners in Flight suggest this species would benefit from continental stewardship.

Environmental threats: Forest fragmentation and habitat loss, notably clearcutting practices, reduce the amount of extensive forest preferred by this species. While the species will occur in isolated or fragmented forests, its breeding success in such habitats can be reduced.

Conservation opportunities: The maintenance or restoration of expansive forest habitat, notably mixed or coniferous, is beneficial to this species. Recent population increases in Ontario likely reflect maturation of conifer plantations in the south, and possibly forest infilling in parts of the Canadian Shield. While the species appears to be generally increasing across its range, extensive forestry practices which reduce or fragment suitable habitat are expected to be detrimental.

Boreal Bird Toolkit:

Toolkit and factsheet: © Wildlife Conservation Society Canada and G.G. Beck Ecological Consulting 2008

Breeding Bird Survey: courtesy Canadian Wildlife Service, volunteers & coordinators; www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/mgbc/trends

Abundance map and point count data: courtesy *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario, 2001-2005*; www.birdsontario.org

Photo: © Tim Stewart. See toolkit for literature cited.