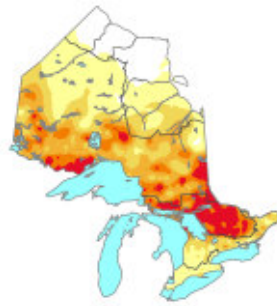


Ovenbird Factsheet

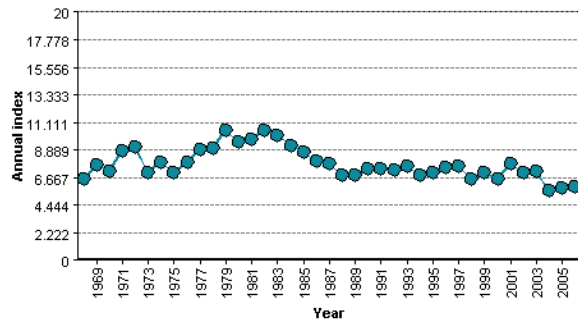
Boreal Bird Toolkit



Ovenbird



Relative Abundance



Breeding Bird Survey Index Trend 1968-2006 (Canada)

Description and biology: The Ovenbird is a large warbler (15cm) with unmarked, uniform olive-grey upperparts and white underparts with black streaks and speckling on the front and sides of breast. On the head, there is a rufous crown bordered by two black stripes and a white eye ring. It is often found foraging in the leaf litter, gleaning insects from the forest floor.

Habitat requirements: The Ovenbird is typically associated with mature, closed-canopy deciduous or mixed woodlands with a substantial amount of leaf litter. In the boreal forest, preferred areas include the mixed forests found on eskers and moraines. A large area of continuous interior forest habitat is crucial to this species for breeding success. The minimum acceptable forest tract size ranges from 100 to 885 ha, depending on habitat quality.

Natural history: The Ovenbird receives its name from the interesting nest it constructs on the ground. The nest has a roof, comparable to a Dutch oven, and is usually made of leaf litter.

Conservation status: The Ovenbird is relatively common in suitable habitat, with an estimated Ontario population of 6 million (4 million in the boreal forest of the Northern Shield). Breeding Bird Surveys reveal the Ovenbird declined significantly by 0.7% per year between 1968 and 2006 across Canada, and by a non-significant 0.1% per year in Ontario. Results from the second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (2001-2005) show the species has increased by 7% over twenty years in the Northern Shield region and by 2% in the Southern Shield region, but declined in southern Ontario. Other studies have noted declining populations. Partners in Flight suggest this species would benefit from regional stewardship.

Environmental threats: The Ovenbird is an “area-sensitive mature forest specialist” so loss of habitat and forest fragmentation are serious threats. Small, fragmented woodlands with a high proportion of edge habitat increase the species’ susceptibility to nest parasitism and may be population “sinks,” leading to further population stress. Forestry practices, electric power corridors, road construction and other forms of development which increase fragmentation and degrade habitat will negatively affect the species.

Conservation opportunities: Ontario’s large population of Ovenbirds highlights the province’s responsibility and opportunity for stewarding this indicator species. While it remains common in suitable habitat in northern Ontario, its declining southern Ontario population highlights the species’ sensitivity to fragmentation of larger woodlands. Maintenance of large tracts of mature forest with closed canopy and a well-developed understorey will benefit this and other interior-specific species. In the boreal forest, protection of interior forest habitat, especially deciduous and mixed woodland, is particularly important.

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.