

T11.1 FACTORS INFLUENCING BIRDS

The composition of Nova Scotia's avifauna is influenced by the following factors:

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT GROUPINGS

Tufts¹ recognized two life zones in the province, based on climatic and forest features. There is a transition here from warmer, mainly deciduous forests, featuring birds such as Least Flycatcher, Veery, and Black-throated Blue Warbler, towards cooler, mainly conifer forests with species such as Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Blackpoll Warbler, and Pine Grosbeak. However, it is not practicable to draw lines on a map to distinguish such zones, because forest cover within the province changes from conifer to deciduous or mixed stands, and back, over short distances. Likewise, birds of edge situations occur side-by-side with forest birds almost everywhere. However, open lands, and especially farmlands, within the province are restricted geographically, and the birds of these habitats comprise a separate grouping from those of forest and edge, as do those of freshwater wetlands, coastlines, and marine areas. Erskine² recognized three main distribution patterns among the breeding birds of the Maritimes: those that reach their northern breeding limits here, those that reach their southern breeding limits here, and (much the largest group) those of which both northern and southern breeding limits lie outside our province. Members of all three groups breed in Nova Scotia, and birds of most or all habitat groupings occur in each of them.

SEASONALITY

Most birds which breed in Nova Scotia depart in winter, and some others that breed farther north occur here only as migrants or in winter. This applies in all the geographic and habitat groupings in varying degrees. Vast assemblages of migrating shorebirds and other birds of marine habitats provide some of the most prominent avian spectacles in

Nova Scotia during their non-breeding seasons. Migrant birds of freshwater wetlands and open lands are less obvious, and transients associated with forests and edge pass through inconspicuously, though in substantial numbers. Wintering birds, excepting those of marine habitats, are generally few in number and occur in much lower diversity than at other seasons.

GEOGRAPHY

Nova Scotia is a peninsula, with adjoining islands, that forms the easternmost part of the North American continent south of Labrador. It is neither isolated, so that many birds have been unable to reach it, nor so small that too few niches exist to accommodate the full variety found on the mainland. No breeding birds widespread in adjacent New Brunswick are absent in Nova Scotia, although many are scarcer here. The province also receives many vagrant birds from the west that came to rest here to avoid being blown out to sea, as well as others brought up the East Coast storm track from more southern areas.



Associated Topics

T11.2 Forest and Edge-habitat Birds, T11.3 Open-habitat Birds, T11.4 Birds of Prey, T11.5 Freshwater Wetland Birds and Waterfowl, T11.6 Shorebirds and other Birds of Coastal Wetlands, T11.7 Seabirds and Birds of Marine Habitats

References

- 1 Tufts, R.W. (1986) *Birds of Nova Scotia*, 3rd ed. Nimbus Publishing & Nova Scotia Museum, Halifax.
- 2 Erskine, A.J. (1992) *Atlas of Breeding Birds of the Maritime Provinces*. Nimbus Publishing & Nova Scotia Museum, Halifax.

Additional Reading

- Flemming, S. (1989) Avifaunal Survey of Kejimikujik National Park/Seaside Adjunct. Internal Report.
- Saunders, G. (1991) *Wildlife of Atlantic Canada and New England*. Nimbus Publishing, Halifax.