

Species	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Vesper Sparrow										r		
Dark-eyed Junco		c	c	a	a	o			r	c	c	a
Tree Sparrow		a	a	c	c					o	c	c
Chipping Sparrow				c	c	u	u	e	c	o		
Field Sparrow		o		r	c	c	c	c	c	c	o	u
White-crowned Sparrow					r					u		
White-throated Sparrow		c	c	c	a	c	o	r		c	a	o
Fox Sparrow			r	u	c					r	r	r
Lincoln's Sparrow					u					o	r	
Swamp Sparrow		o		u	c	o	o			u	a	u
Song Sparrow		c	c	a	a	c	a	a	c	c	a	c
Snow Bunting										o	u	

## ORCHARD ORIOLES IN MASSACHUSETTS

Richard Forster, Wellesley

The Orchard Oriole (Icterus spurius) has always been an uncommon bird in Massachusetts although it is present annually during migration and has nested each year in this state. In the last decade, however, there has been a marked increase in numbers for this species.

The increase of the Orchard Oriole is somewhat comparable to that of other Southern birds that have moved northward in recent years, such as the Tufted Titmouse (Parus bicolor), Cardinal (Cardinalis cardinalis) and Mockingbird (Mimus polyglottos), all of which have increased greatly in Massachusetts and New England.

The northward movement of the Tufted Titmouse is discussed by Deborah Howard (1966). Beddal (1963) gives a more complete study of the range expansions of all of these species and suggests three reasons for their recent movements:

- 1) a reforestation of a generally deforested area.
- 2) a warming of the climate in the North.
- 3) population pressures within the traditional ranges of these species.

The history of the Orchard Oriole is roughly parallel to that of the afore-mentioned species. It differs in that the Oriole is a completely migratory species, whereas the Tufted Titmouse and Cardinal are non-migratory, and the Mockingbird is but partially migratory in its range.

TOTAL DISTRIBUTION

The Orchard Oriole occurs as a summer resident throughout the eastern United States to the southern Ontario border, with the exception of northern New England. The range extends westward to include the Plains States. In the South it breeds commonly, but to the North it gradually decreases, occurring as a nesting bird only locally. This species reaches the northeastern edge of its range in Massachusetts, although it does occur as a straggler in northern New England and in Nova Scotia. Forbush (1927) stated that the Orchard Oriole was a rare and local breeding bird, and as recently as 1955 (Bailey; Griscom and Snyder) its status remained unchanged.

MIGRATION

Spring migrants arrive in Massachusetts usually during the first week of May. Migration continues to the end of May with the majority of migrants noted during the third week. There are a few records in April of birds that have come north with other Southern species during storms of southern origin. The earliest record is of a bird recorded on 17 April.

The southward migration begins shortly after breeding and is all but unnoticeable. There are no definite "waves" reported, but a few individuals are occasionally seen in August. There are about a half dozen reports for September, the latest of which is 30 September.

## VOICE

The territorial song of the Orchard Oriole is quite distinctive. The melodic line resembles that of the Purple Finch (Carpodacus purpureus), but with the quality of a Bobolink (Dolichonyx oryzivorus). In this respect the song is similar to that of the House Finch (Carpodacus mexicanus). The typical song ends with a rising "wheer." This distinctive song affords the birder the best means of locating an Orchard Oriole within an area where it is present.

## NESTING

The Orchard Oriole starts building its nest in late May. The nest is somewhat similar to the Northern Oriole's nest, except that it is bulkier and not so deep. It is initially constructed of green vegetation, although in time the nest turns brown and becomes more conspicuous. The young hatch about mid-June, and breeding is usually completed by mid- to late July.

## DISTRIBUTION IN MASSACHUSETTS:

### A. Cape Cod and Southeastern Massachusetts

This region includes all of Cape Cod and the mainland from the Plymouth area southwest to the Rhode Island state line. The region is typically low and rolling, with Pitch Pine (Pinus rigida) and Scrub Oak (Quercus ilicifolia) throughout. There are many fields which have become overgrown with Juniper (Juniperus communis) or Red Cedar (Juniperus virginia). Away from the coast are deciduous woods of Red Oak (Quercus rubra) and various maples and other hardwoods.

The coastal area of this region contains the type of habitat that the Orchard Oriole prefers, yet for a long time it was only rarely reported. In the early 1960s it was reported more regularly than in any other previous period. It was first found nesting on Cape Cod in 1963 at Harwichport. Young were found in the nest, and they were subsequently photographed. Individuals were found in the Provincetown-Truro area in 1964, but no nest was found. In 1965 a nest of the Orchard Oriole was found in Chatham, and others were present in 1966 although no nest was found that year.

On the mainland adjacent to Cape Cod the same pattern existed. There were an increasing number of reports in the early 1960s, and a definite nesting record was established in 1965 at Westport. Pairs or singing males have been noted in several areas, especially Marshfield and Plymouth, but no nest has been found. During this same period of time, the Orchard Oriole was reported regularly in spring from Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, but no nesting birds have yet been located on the Islands.

### B. Eastern Massachusetts

In eastern Massachusetts I include the area adjacent to the coast and extending inland for about 25 miles. This is primarily a lowland area interspersed with fields, farms, orchards and mixed woodlands. It is due to the nature of the terrain in this area that the Orchard Oriole has been most often recorded here during the historical period.

The occurrence of the Orchard Oriole in this area can be discussed in terms of two distinct time periods: 1937-1952 and 1952 to the present. Throughout the former period, approximately five birds were reported each year, and usually two or three pairs nested. The figures remained relatively constant during this period. However, in 1952, a total of 17 individuals was reported, and from then to the present, there has been an average of more than 10 birds per year. Nesting records have increased, and at present 5 or 6 pairs nest each year. This increase has been most pronounced during the last three years.

### C. Connecticut Valley

The Connecticut Valley is the area that includes the lowlands immediately adjacent to the Connecticut River in Central Massachusetts. The remainder of Central Massachusetts is mountainous and, as such, precludes the appearance of the Orchard Oriole.

From 1937 to the present time, the occurrence of the Orchard Oriole has been fairly constant, with only a slight increase in the early 1960s. One to four birds were usually reported, but recently as many as six have been seen. Two or three pairs may be breeding in the area now, whereas in the past only one pair was occasionally found nesting. This recent increase has occurred in the southern Connecticut Valley with few, if any, reports from the Worcester Plateau between eastern Massachusetts and the Valley.

#### D. The Berkshires

The Berkshires are the predominantly mountainous area in the far western portion of the state. There is a small river valley in the extreme southern part where the only breeding record was established in 1945. Because of the lack of suitable habitat here, the Orchard Oriole is a very rare bird and very unlikely to increase. It may be present in the southern Berkshires each year, but there are few reports to prove it. (There is also a definite scarcity of observers in this part of the state.)

#### SUMMARY

Throughout the 1940s the Orchard Oriole remained somewhat constant in numbers in Massachusetts. The beginning of the 1950s showed a slight increase that continued and became most pronounced during the early 1960s. The fact that the Orchard Oriole did not increase significantly in the Connecticut Valley is anomalous. Either this species did not increase there, or there was an increase, but it was not noticed and reported by observers. The latter is probably the case, and future reports may bear it out.

The Orchard Oriole may breed in the same area for several years in succession. This is most notable in Wayland, where it has nested almost annually since 1887. Destruction of the original habitat and increased development of the distinctly rural area have interrupted and threatened this tradition, but the Orchard Oriole has adapted well. It has also adapted to the Cape Cod area that it had shunned for many years. The same is true in Wellesley, where it has become established in a characteristically suburban area. The adaptability of this species probably plays a major role in its recent increase in the state. The recent increase in Orchard Orioles follows a pattern quite similar to those of the other Southern species previously mentioned. The oriole and the other species have apparently all extended their ranges northward because of population pressures in the more southerly portions of their ranges.

#### Bibliography

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