



## What are Shrubland Birds?

Shrubland birds (a.k.a. scrub-shrub birds) are a group of species that breed in or depend upon early successional areas with low, thick woody growth. They typically nest in thick cover on the ground up to about 10 feet high depending upon the species. They are primarily songbirds but also include species such as grouse and woodcock. Twenty one of the forty one species in New England show long and short term population declines. Priority species in Vermont include golden-winged warbler, eastern towhee (pictured above right), field sparrow, brown thrasher, chestnut-sided warbler and more.



The golden-winged warbler (left) is a regional species of concern that nests on or near the ground in open areas with patchy shrub cover and dense herbaceous vegetation. Typical nesting habitat in Vermont on old field/pasture in the Champlain Valley (below).



## What are shrubland habitats?

Often called “thickets” or areas of “brush,” they are technically early successional habitats. Most of these habitats require disturbance and may include utility rights of ways, old fields, rough pasture, and young forests. Naturally occurring shrub habitats would include shrub swamps or beaver pond wetland complexes and forests disturbed by wind, insect outbreaks, fire, etc. In general these habitats have little or no tree canopy and dense shrubs and saplings within 10 feet of the ground. In the forested northeast, silviculture is considered to have the best potential for habitat improvement but a number of these species prefer other shrubland habitats (e.g. old fields) which warrant management attention.

## Habitat shape & size is important

Even today, many consider this group of species to be “edge” species but in fact, most shrubland birds avoid edges and, with a few exceptions, prefer large (> 2.5 acre), blocky patches of habitat. Thus, landowners and land managers should focus attention on large management units instead of just the “edges.” Certain high priority species and game species (grouse and woodcock) require and are most successful in larger management areas of 20 acres or more.

**Wetland Shrublands (right) will support birds such as alder and willow flycatcher, snipe, woodcock, common yellowthroat and yellow warbler (below).**



**Young Forests (left) will support most shrubland bird species and many other types of wildlife. Typical birds of these habitats are chestnut-sided warbler, white-throated sparrow, grouse (below), woodcock, mourning warbler, dark-eyed junco, etc.**



## What can I do?

Shrubland birds are found across the state and offer a great opportunity for management for almost any landowner. Forests and reverting agricultural land (e.g. old pasture) can be managed to provide habitat for this declining suite of species. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has various programs available that can provide the help of a professional resource manager and funding assistance for habitat improvement practices to help you meet your goals. Vermont NRCS has a strong focus on early successional habitats, including shrublands, due to their importance in the region. NRCS partners with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department and the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation to work with private landowners to improve habitat and forest management on their lands.

**For more information visit the NRCS web site - <http://www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov/>  
Or call your local USDA Service Center in the phone book under U.S. Government, Agriculture Dept.**