Species Status Assessment

Common Name: Olive-sided flycatcher **Date Updated:** January 5, 2024

Scientific Name: *Contopus cooperi* **Updated By:** Jed Hayden

Class: Aves

Family: Tyrannidae

Species Synopsis *(a short paragraph which describes species taxonomy, distribution, recent trends, and habitat in New York):*

Olive-sided flycatcher occurs across northern North America, breeding in high elevation spruce-fir northern hardwood forest, typically near standing water. Formerly known as *C. borealis*, this species is characteristic of a lowland boreal forest. In New York, where the population reaches the southeastern edge of the range, this flycatcher is restricted to the Adirondack Mountains, the Tug Hill Plateau, and the Catskill Mountains. Wintering occurs in the northwestern portion of South America.

The Breeding Bird Atlas in New York documented a 34% change in occupancy between 1980-85 and 2000-05. Both long-term (1966-2010) and short-term (2000-2010) trends documented by the Breeding Bird Survey are significantly negative in New York, in the Eastern region, and across the range. Glennon (2010) notes that olive-sided flycatcher is of significant conservation concern in the Adirondacks due to its low occupancy rates and relatively high rates of local extinction.

I. Status

a. Current legal protected Status

i. **Federal:** Not listed **Candidate:** No

ii. New York: Not listed

b. Natural Heritage Program

i. Global: S4

ii. New York: S3B **Tracked by NYNHP?:** No

Other Ranks:

-NYS 2025 SGCN Status: High Priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need
-New York Natural Heritage Program: Watch List
-Partners in Flight Priority I
-USFWS: Species of Conservation Concern
-SARA (Species at Risk Act): Threatened
-COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada): Threatened
-IUCN Red list: Near Threatened
-Northeast Regional SGCN: Watchlist

Status Discussion:

Olive-sided flycatcher is an uncommon to rare breeder across the Adirondacks and Tug Hill Plateau, rare and local, primarily at high elevations, in the Catskills and Rensselaer Hills. As a migrant, it is rare to uncommon.

II. Abundance and Distribution Trends

Region	Present?	Abundance	Distribution	Time Frame	Listing status	SGCN?
North America	Yes	Declining	Declining	1966-2023	None	No
Northeastern US	Yes	Declining	Declining		None	Yes
New York	Yes	Declining	Declining		None	Yes
Connecticut	Yes	Unknown	Unknown		None	Yes
Massachusetts	Yes	Declining	Declining	1966-2013	None	Yes
New Jersey	No	-	-			-
Pennsylvania	No data	Unknown	Unknown		None	Yes
Vermont	Yes	Declining	Declining	1976-2007	None	Yes
Ontario	Yes	Declining	Declining	1966-2015	Special Concern provincially Threatened nationally	No
Quebec	Yes	Declining	Declining	1973-2012	Special Concern	No

Column options
Present?: Yes; No; Unknown; No data; (blank) or Choose an Item
Abundance and Distribution: Declining; Increasing; Stable; Unknown; Extirpated; N/A; (blank) or Choose an item
SGCN?: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item

Monitoring in New York *(specify any monitoring activities or regular surveys that are conducted in New York):*

A State Wildlife Grants project was completed in 2009 to quantify the status and habitat requirements of low elevation and high elevation boreal forest birds (Glennon 2010). The olive-sided flycatcher was one of 12 focus species during this project, which began in 2003 and continues today (Glennon 2023).

Trends Discussion *(insert map of North American/regional distribution and status):*

Breeding Bird Survey data for the United States show a significant long-term declining trend of 2.6% per year for 1966-2010 and a significant short-term declining trend of 1.8% per year for 2000-2010. The long-term and short-term trends in New York are each 8.0% per year, indicating a 97% loss from 1966 to 2010, although caution is advised due to low sample sizes (Sauer et al. 2011). The second Breeding Bird Atlas documented a decline in occupancy of 34% from 1980-85 to 2000-05. The number of blocks with confirmed breeding records dropped from 33 blocks during the first Atlas to 16 blocks during the second Atlas, a change of 52%. Losses in the Catskill Mountains were severe, with the species now absent from Greene County and the Delaware Hills of Sullivan County (Peterson 2008).

Paul Smith's College has conducted point counts for 12 boreal species at 59 sites in the Adirondack Park from 2007-2023. Occupancy modeling showed a consistent pattern of decline for olive-sided flycatcher. This species had an occupancy rate of 41% and a local extinction rate of 30%. Occupancy rates continued to decline through 2023 (Glennon 2023).

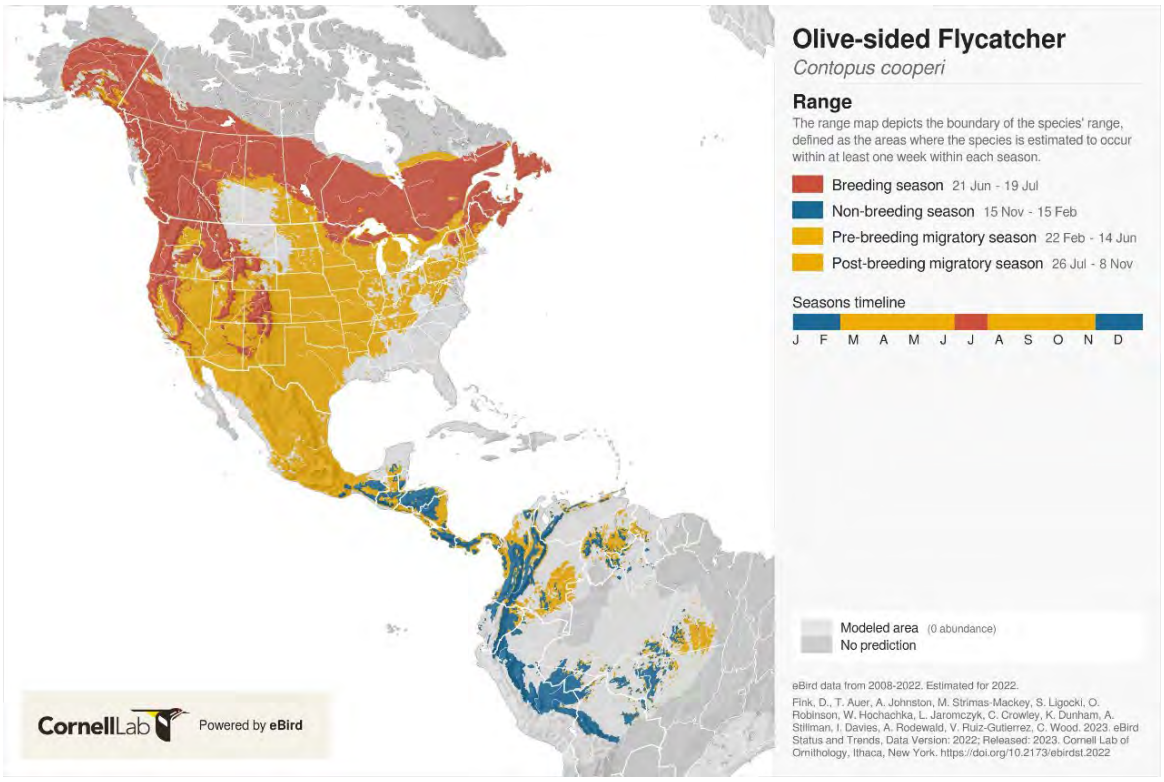

Figure 1. Olive-sided flycatcher distribution (eBird).

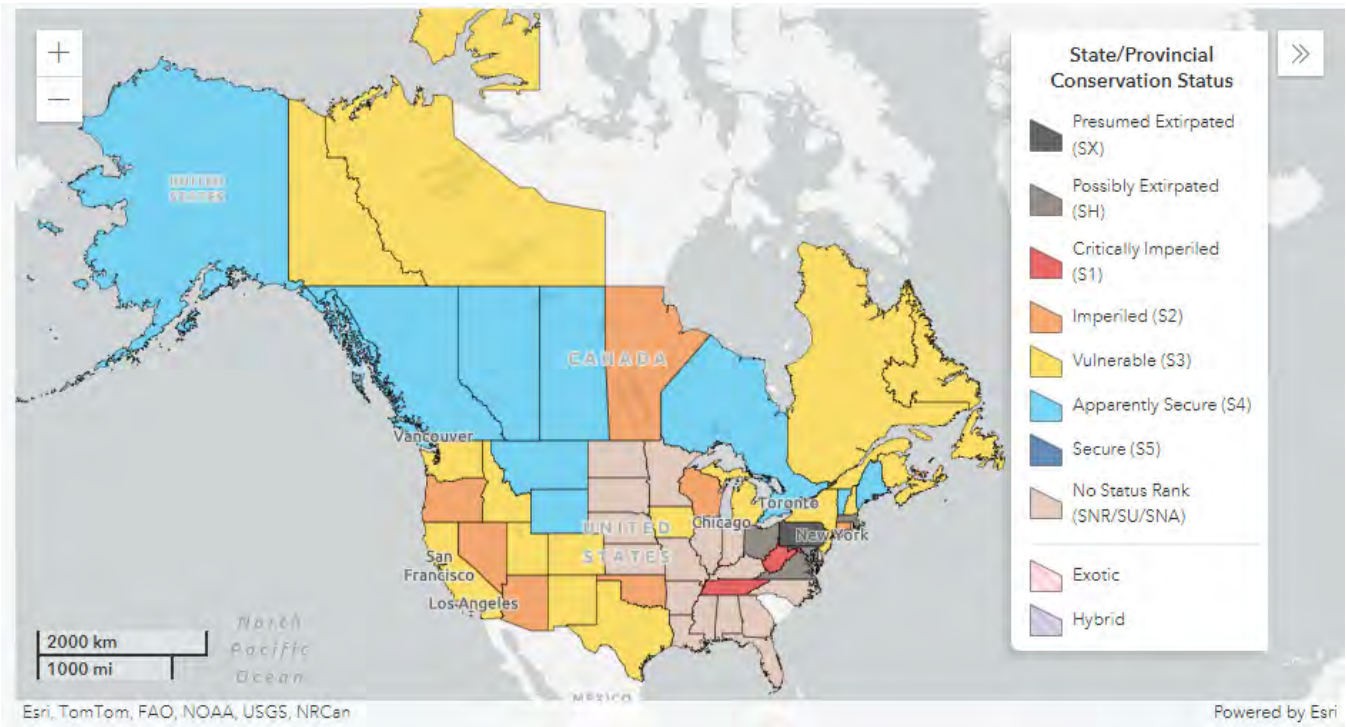

Figure 2. Conservation status of the olive-sided flycatcher in North America (NatureServe 2024).

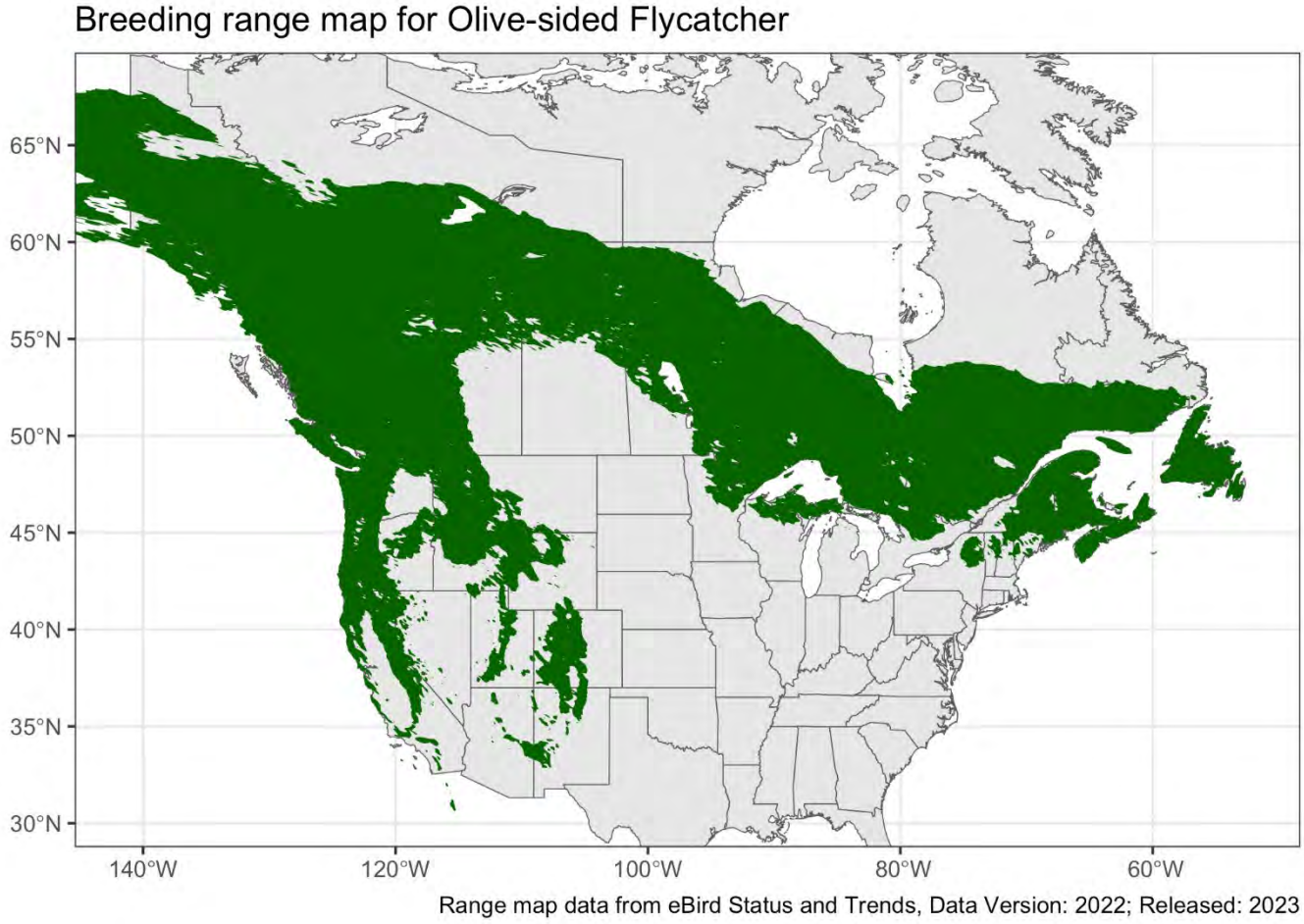

Figure 3. Breeding range of olive-sided flycatcher (eBird).

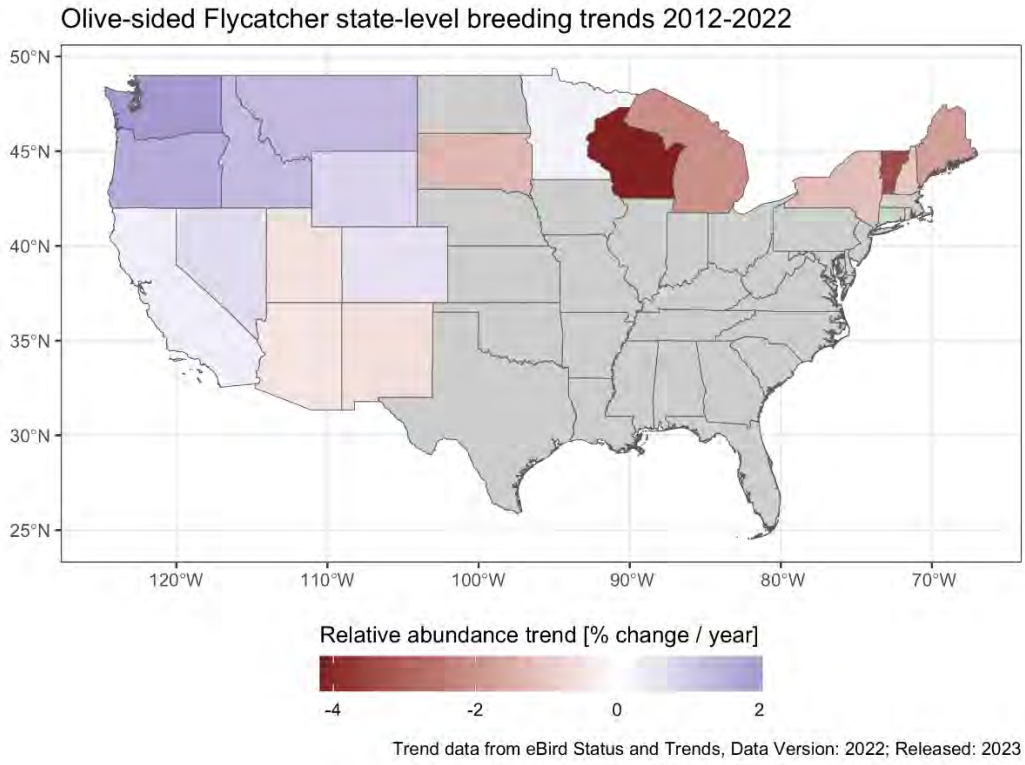

Figure 4. Trends, by state, of Olive-sided flycatcher (eBird).

III. New York Rarity *(provide map, numbers, and percent of state occupied)*

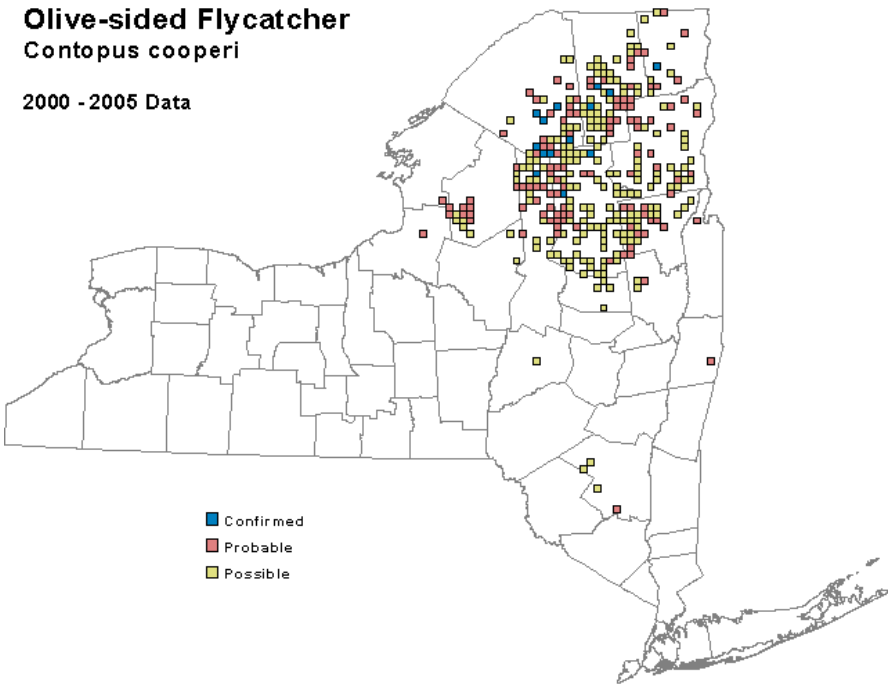

Figure 5. Olive-sided flycatcher occurrence in New York State during the second Breeding Bird Atlas

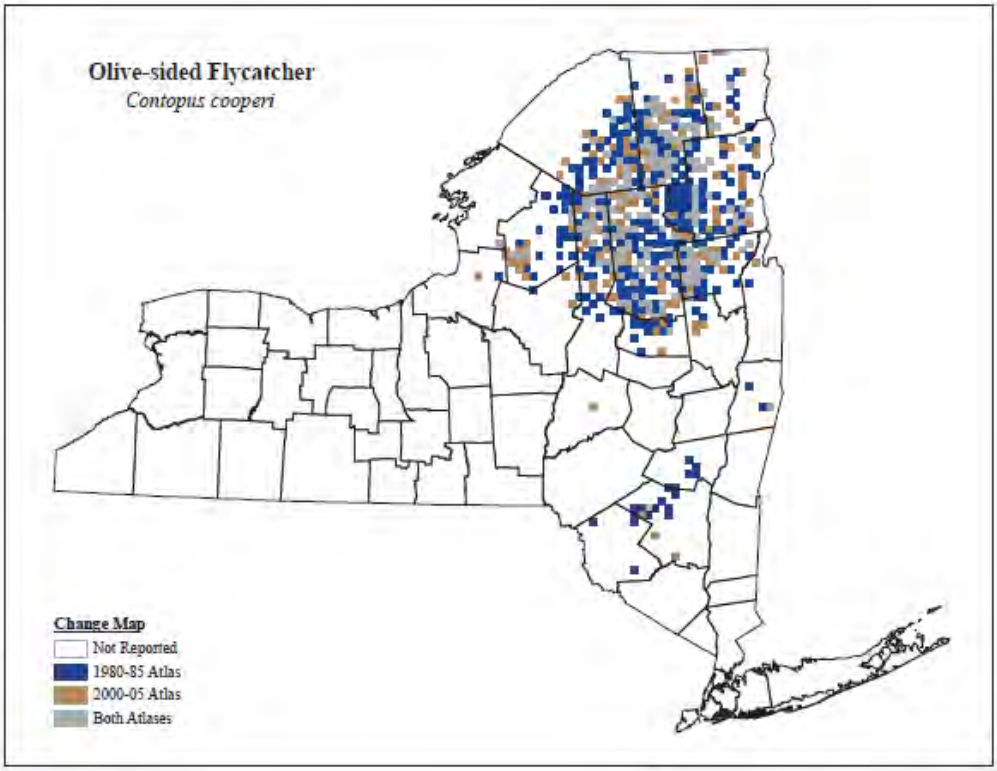

Figure 6. Change in olive-sided flycatcher occurrence in New York State between the first Breeding Bird Atlas and the second Breeding Bird Atlas (McGowan and Corwin 2008).

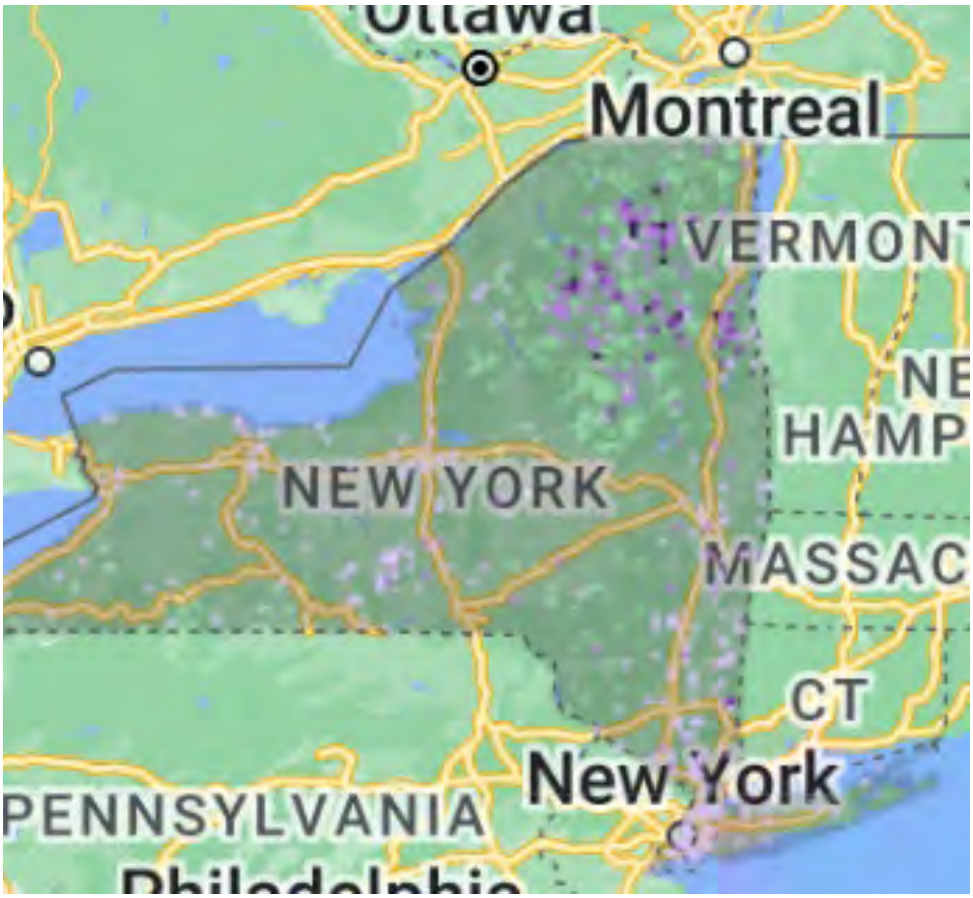

Figure 7. Breeding Bird Atlas 3 records of olive-sided flycatcher in New York (BBA-eBird).

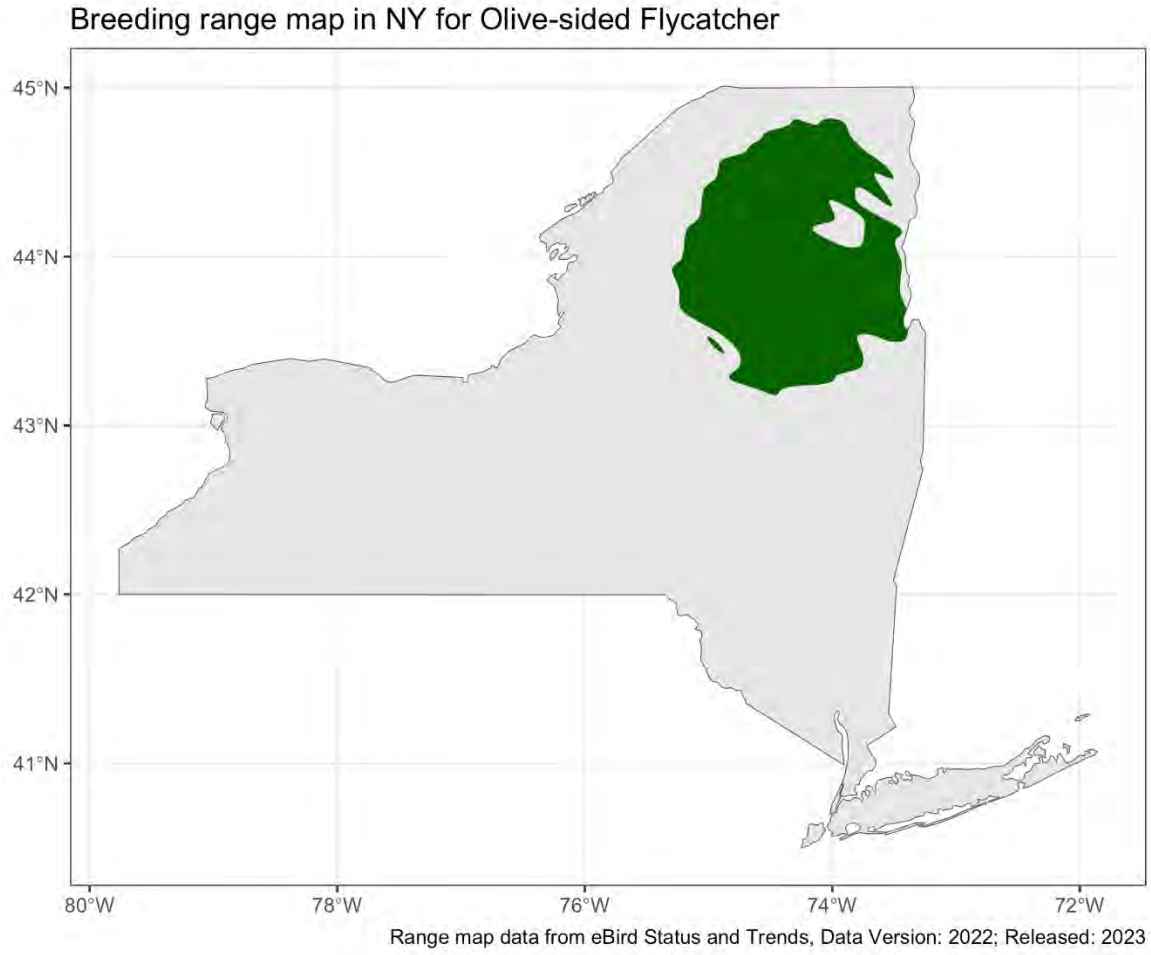

Figure 8. New York breeding range of olive-sided flycatcher (eBird)

Details of historic and current occurrence:

In New York, where the population reaches the southeastern edge of the range, this flycatcher is restricted to the Adirondack Mountains, the Tug Hill Plateau, and the Catskill Mountains.

The first BBA (1980-85) documented occupancy in 316 blocks, 9% of the survey blocks statewide (Andrle and Carroll 1988). The second BBA (2000-2005) documented occupancy in 267 blocks, 6% of the survey blocks statewide, a decrease of 2% since the first atlas.

The third BBA (2020-2025) is currently underway and utilizes a different number and layout of survey blocks across New York, making direct comparison with the first two Atlases difficult. There were 5,333 blocks in the first and second BBA's and there are 5,710 blocks in the current BBA, of which 1,815 are considered priority blocks. To date, Olive-sided flycatchers have been documented in 81 priority blocks, 4.1% of all priority blocks statewide during the third BBA (NYS BBA III Overview, 2024).

New York's Contribution to Species North American Range:

Percent of North American Range in NY	Classification of NY Range	Distance to core population, if not in NY

1-25%	Disjunct	

Column options
Percent of North American Range in NY: 100% (endemic); 76-99%; 51-75%; 26-50%; 1-25%; 0%; Choose an item
Classification of NY Range: Core; Peripheral; Disjunct; (blank) or Choose an item

IV. Primary Habitat or Community Type *(from NY crosswalk of NE Aquatic, Marine, or Terrestrial Habitat Classification Systems):*

- **a.** Mixed Northern Hardwoods
- **b.** Riparian
- **c.** Conifer Swamp Forest
- **d.** Mixed Hardwood Swamp
- **e.** Spruce-Fir Forest and Flats
- **f.** Mountain Spruce-Fir Forests
- **g.** Boreal Forested Peatland
- **h.** Open Acidic Peatlands
- **i.** Wet Meadow/Shrub Swamp

Habitat or Community Type Trend in New York

Habitat Specialist?	Indicator Species?	Habitat/ Community Trend	Time frame of Decline/Increase
Yes	No	Increasing	~ last 30 years

Column options
Habitat Specialist and Indicator Species: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item
Habitat/Community Trend: Declining; Stable; Increasing; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item

Habitat Discussion:

Olive-sided flycatcher is a lowland boreal forest bird, breeding in coniferous or mixed deciduous forests, favoring edges and openings created by sphagnum bogs, burned over forest, swampy lake edges, and beaver meadows (Altman and Sallabanks 2000). Glennon (2010) found that olive-sided flycatcher showed a preference for floating bogs primarily, as well as grounded bogs, conifer swamps, and open river corridors. Peterson (2008) describes the favored habitat in New York as mountain tarns and quaking bogs, swampy lake shores, marshy streams, river backwaters, and beaver meadows surrounded by a forest of black or red spruce mixed with balsam fir, tamarack or eastern hemlock. Most records from the Catskills are from above 1500 feet (Peterson 1988). The habitat used by olive-sided flycatcher has remained stable in New York over the past 20 years, perhaps even increasing due to the increase in beaver populations.

V. Species Demographic, and Life History:

Breeder in NY?	Non-breeder in NY?	Migratory Only?	Summer Resident?	Winter Resident?	Anadromous/ Catadromous?
Yes	-	-	Yes	-	-

Column options
First 5 fields: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item
Anadromous/Catadromous: Anadromous; Catadromous; (blank) or Choose an item

Species Demographics and Life History Discussion *(include information about species life span, reproductive longevity, reproductive capacity, age to maturity, and ability to disperse and colonize):*

From Altman and Sallabanks (2000): Both sexes breed in first breeding season after hatching. One brood is raised per season. Overall annual productivity of this species is among the lowest of any North American songbird. There is no information on lifetime reproductive success.

Few data on adult productivity and survivorship. Recent MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) data from two southwestern U.S. stations estimated survivorship of adult breeders at 0.87 (± 0.088 SE; n = 55 individuals captured).

VI. Threats *(from NY 2015 SWAP or newly described):*

From Altman and Sallabanks (2000):

Limiting factors for olive-sided flycatcher are conjectural and need study, especially on wintering grounds, and especially in light of significant population declines. Suggested limiting factors on breeding grounds include habitat loss through conversion to nonforest, alteration of habitat from forest management practices (e.g., some types of harvest, fire suppression), reduced availability and acquisition of food resources, and impacts on reproductive success from nest predation (Altman 1997). Maturation of the forest, particularly in areas where forest management is prohibited has probably also led to a loss of suitable habitat because the required openings are no longer present (Post 2006). Limiting factors on breeding grounds are likely exacerbated by the fact that the genus *Contopus* has the lowest reproductive rate of all passerine genera in North America. Thus, high survivorship is essential to maintain stable populations, but concern about habitat loss on wintering grounds makes high survivorship problematic.

Osborne et al. (2011) showed that the effects of mercury can be exacerbated in boreal species that use high-acid habitats such as peatlands.

At sites in the Adirondack Park, olive-sided flycatchers are more likely to colonize larger, more connected wetlands at higher latitudes, and more likely to disappear from smaller, more isolated wetlands at more southern locations (M. Glennon, pers. comm.).

Olive-sided flycatchers may have evolved to depend on natural disturbances, particularly forest fires, that create forest openings and naturally patchy habitat with abundant edge. Thus, fire suppression policies of last 50–100 yr may have reduced suitable habitat, especially for breeding (Hutto 1995).

Another potential limiting factor is availability of prey. This flycatcher shows high degree of specialization for flying insects, particularly hymenopterans. As a long-distance neotropical migrant, olive-sided flycatcher is vulnerable to climatic and environmental changes during migration. On breeding grounds, extreme weather (rain, snow, cold temperatures) that depresses activity, or reduces availability, of flying insects could delay reproductive activities or affect nestling survival. Overall, declining bee populations are a threat to this species as well as other insectivorous birds.

As a boreal species, olive-sided flycatcher is susceptible to habitat shifts due to climate change (Field et al. 2007, Jenkins 2010) long-lived boreal ecosystems in the eastern U.S. will be among the most vulnerable to predicted changes in climate (Field et al. 2007). Olive-sided flycatcher was classified as “moderately vulnerable” to predicted climate change in an assessment of vulnerability conducted by the New York Natural Heritage Program (Schlesinger et al. 2011). Spraying of pesticides has been

suggested, but not documented, as a potential threat on breeding grounds because it is detrimental to the food supply (Finch 1992).

Habitat loss or alteration on wintering grounds is suspected as one potential factor limiting populations (Altman 1997). Forests in foothills of the Andes Mountains have been extensively deforested (Robbins et al. 1992); 85% of Andean montane forests have been altered (Orejuela 1985).

Threat Level 1	Threat Level 2	Threat Level 3	Spatial Extent	Severity	Immediacy	Trend	Certainty
1. Residential and Commercial	1.1 Housing & Urban Areas	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
5. Biological Resource Use	5.3 Logging & Wood Harvesting	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
7. Natural System Modifications	7.1 Fire & Fire Suppression	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
9. Pollution	9.2 Industrial & Military Effluents	9.2.5 Mercury	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
9. Pollution	9.6 Excess Energy	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
11. Climate Change	11.1 Habitat Shifting & Alteration	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.

Table 1. Threats to New York State population of olive-sided flycatcher.

Are there regulatory mechanisms that protect the species or its habitat in New York?

Yes: ✓ **No:** **Unknown:**

If yes, describe mechanism and whether adequate to protect species/habitat:

Olive-sided flycatcher is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Most habitat is protected from development within forest areas of the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves. The Freshwater Wetlands Act provides protection for wetlands greater than 12.4 acres in size under Article 24 of the NYS Conservation Law. The Adirondack Park Agency has authority to regulate smaller wetlands within the Adirondack Park.

Describe knowledge of management/conservation actions that are needed for recovery/conservation, or to eliminate, minimize, or compensate for the identified threats:

Forest harvest practices that retain snags and live trees (potential nest trees) help provide suitable habitat. In some areas, creation of forest openings could provide or improve habitat where such openings have become uncommon due to suppression of forest fires and maturation of the forest.

Ownership of lands in the "boreal core" of the Adirondacks—the northwest portion—falls into a large and diverse group of categories, ranging from parcels that are specifically protected to those that are undergoing active forestry. The effect of logging on olive-sided flycatcher and other boreal birds is unknown, making land protection opportunities of this region of the Adirondacks a priority (Glennon 2010).

The NY Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS; NYSDEC 2005) states the need for a management plan for high-altitude conifer forest birds that incorporates the results of the 2004 State Wildlife Grant study on boreal forest birds (Glennon 2010). Conservation actions following IUCN taxonomy are categorized in the table below.

Action Category	Action	Description
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.0.0.0 Direct Habitat management	Site/Area management
C.6 Design and Plan Conservation	C.6.5.0.0 Conservation Planning	Resource and Habitat Protection
C.10 Institutional Development	C.10.2.0.0 External support and organizational development	Alliance and Partnership Development

Table 2. Recommended conservation actions for olive-sided flycatcher.

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