

Notes from “Warbler Warm-up”
By Matt Valencic and Kelly Kozlowski

Things to consider:

- Bird with a friend. You will see more and learn more.
- Take advantage of the Spring bird walks. Listen to the leader and the birds and minimize ‘visiting’ during the walk.
- If you don’t know the bird, **describe out loud what you are observing** before looking at the field guide. Try to identify 3 field marks to solidify ID (e.g. rusty cap, yellow eye brow, tail wagging = Palm Warbler)
- If you really want to get good, buy **The Warbler Guide** and study it. (by Tom Stephenson and Scott Whittle)
- Reduce the discomfort of ‘**Warbler Neck**’ by learning to bend backwards at your hips/waist before looking up into the treetops.
- Start learning warbler songs by learning the songs of our 6 **Most Common** NE Ohio breeding warblers:
 American Redstart / Blue-winged Warbler / Louisiana Waterthrush / Ovenbird / Pine Warbler / Yellow Warbler.
 You can hear bird songs at www.allaboutbirds.org Type in the common name of the bird and look for sounds.

What about eye rings

- **Complete strong:** Canada, Chestnut-sided, Connecticut, Nashville, Ovenbird, Magnolia
- **Complete weak:** Yellow, Common Yellowthroat female
- **Partial white** (eye arcs): Parula, Tennessee, Kirtland’s
- **Partial yellow** (eye arcs): Pine, Orange-crowned
- **Strong white:** Nashville
- **Strong yellow:** Canada

Eye Lines

- **Black line thru eye:** Blue Winged and Cape May
- **Distinct eyeline but not black:** Blackpoll, Tennessee & Prairie

Rump patch

- **Yellow rump patch:** Yellow-rumped and Magnolia

Dark Heads

- All dark head, nape & throat: Mourning and Parula

Yellow Heads

- Prothonotary, Blue-winged and Yellow

Which Warblers are visually easy?

- ***American Redstart*** (male) – mostly black with orange markings
- ***Black-and-white Warbler*** – all black and white stripes, even on crown of head
- ***Blackpoll*** – All black and white strips EXCEPT black cap
- ***Common Yellowthroat*** (male) – mostly yellow with black mask
- ***Ovenbird*** – walking on the ground – orange & black head stripes and spotted flanks)
- ***Prothonotary Warbler*** – Bright golden-yellow with blue-gray wings – usually foraging low, near water.
- ***Worm Eating Warbler*** – brown with black head stripes and black eyeline.

Grouped by color

- **Black and White:** Black-and-white, Blackpoll
- **All yellow or mostly yellow:** Yellow and Wilson’s

Which Warblers are easy to overlook?

- **Tennessee Warbler** is drab, gray with olive back, eye-line not always apparent. What to look for: Short tail, pointy bill, distinctive song (we'll get to that).
- **Orange-crowned Warbler** is drab brown/gray, with no apparent orange crown, no wing bars, subtle blurry streaking on breast/flanks. What to look for: Pointy bill, pale yellowish or whitish supercilium, faint/split eye-ring.
- **Pine Warbler** is variably yellow, plain face with broken eye ring. What to look far: Wide wing bars, habitat (coniferous trees), song (trill like junco or chipping sparrow).

Who would you expect to see ON the ground?

- **Connecticut** slow-moving (skulking) on the ground
- **Ovenbird** ground dwelling and ground nesting
- **Northern Waterthrush** – edge of still or slow-moving water

Who would you expect to see NEAR the ground?

- **Common Yellowthroat** – skulker, wet, marshy habitat with lots of cover.
- **Louisiana Waterthrush** – Clean, gravel-bottom streams in ravines
- **Prothonotary** – water's edge along logs and foraging in low shrubs

What about unique behaviors?

- Walking along tree branches and trunk (Black-and-white)
- Walking on the ground in the open (Ovenbird, Waterthrushes)
- Walking on the ground, skulking (Connecticut, Wilson's, Common yellowthroat, Mourning)
- Treetops, foraging (gleaning) worms off the surface of leaves (Cerulean, Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided, Blackpoll, Bay-breasted, Cape May)
- Flycatching – sit on an exposed branch and catch insects like a flycatcher (Yellow-rumped Warbler)

Warblers with some unique characteristic

- **Under-tail white with black tip** and **facial pattern** of Magnolia Warbler
- **Mask** of the Common Yellowthroat (male)
- **Black cap** of Wilson's Warbler
- **Hood** of the Hooded Warbler
- **Black throat, contrasting bright yellow face** of male Black-throated Green Warbler
- **Dark blue back, black throat, white belly** of male Black-throated Blue Warbler
- **Tail wagging** of the Palm Warbler
- **Striped head and body** of Black-and-white Warbler

What is song quality?

- **Trilled Song:** Northern Parula
- **Partly trilled song:** Wilson's
- **Buzzy song:** Blue-winged
- **Clear:** Prothonotary
- **Partly buzzy song:** Black-throated Blue
- **Complex song:** Redstart
- **Very high-pitched song:** Bay-breasted, Blackpoll

Birding by habitat: Even though many warblers are just passing through NE Ohio on their way north, some still seek-out their preferred habitat, such as:

Black-and-white Warbler – Mature deciduous and mixed forest. Migrant traps.

Black-throated Blue – Mature deciduous woodlands with a thick understory, often in hilly terrain. (Swine Creek Valley Shelter area)

Canada Warbler – Not much is known. Often forages in shady, low canopy.

Cerulean Warbler – Forests with tall deciduous trees and open understory, such as wet bottomlands and dry slopes. (Swine Creek Valley Shelter Area, - along small creek near picnic pavilion and follow trail to the other side of the Swine Creek)

Chestnut-sided Warbler – Early successional deciduous woods. Migrant traps.

Louisiana Waterthrush – Breeds along gravel-bottomed streams flowing through hilly, deciduous forest. (West Woods along the stream to Ansel’s Cave. Holden Arboretum Stebbin’s Gulch.)

Magnolia Warbler – Breeds in small conifers, especially young spruces, in purely coniferous stands or mixed forest. Migrant traps.

Mourning Warbler – Thick understory in disturbed second-growth forested areas with moderately closed canopy. Migrant traps.

Nashville Warbler – Second-growth deciduous or mixed forest with shrubby undergrowth. Migrant traps.

Northern Parula – Mature forests along streams, swamps and other bottomlands. (Along the Upper Cuyahoga River – canoe access at Eldon Russell Park)

Northern Waterthrush – Breeds in thickets near slow-moving streams, ponds, swamps and bogs. (Along the Upper Cuyahoga River – canoe access at Eldon Russell Park)

Pine Warbler – Pine or mixed-pine/deciduous forest. (LaDue Reservoir, in clusters of pine trees along Valley Road).

Yellow-throated Warbler – Breeds in pine forest, sycamore swamps and riparian woodlands. Migrant traps.

NE Ohio Probable and Confirmed Breeding Warblers!

According to the Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in Ohio (2016), 20 warbler species have been documented as ‘probable’ or ‘confirmed’ breeders in NE Ohio but several are only found in very specific habitats. **Bold underlined** are *most likely* to be found breeding in NE Ohio (still present, singing, in June and July).

American Redstart / Black-and-White / Black-throated Blue / Black-throated Green / **Blue-winged** Canada / **Cerulean** / Chestnut-sided / **Hooded** / **Louisiana Waterthrush** / Magnolia / Mourning / Nashville / Northern Parula / **Northern Waterthrush** / **Ovenbird** / **Pine** / **Prothonotary** / **Yellow** / Yellow-throated

8 Most Common Breeding Warblers in NE Ohio – Habitat and song mnemonics

American Redstart – Moist, deciduous, second-growth woodlands with abundant shrubs. (Along the Upper Cuyahoga River, downstream from Eldon Russell Park.) **Song**: Clear, short, even-tempo

Black-throated Green Warbler – Coniferous and transitional coniferous-deciduous woodlands. **Song**: Buzzy- zee, zee, zee, zee, zee, zoo, zee

Blue-winged Warbler – Forest/field edges, often shaded by large trees. (Eldon Russell Park, east end of large field near parking lot) **Song**: Bee-buzz

Common Yellowthroat – Wet, marshy areas with tall vegetation and bush’s. “Any wet spot with a bush!” **Song**: “Witchity, witchity, witchity, witch”

Hooded Warbler – Dense, shrubby understory in deciduous woods, like thickets that develop after a large tree falls and creates an opening in the forest. Grape tangles. **Song:** Loud, clear, musical notes. Wawee, tawee, tawee, teeoo.

Ovenbird – Breed in large, mature broadleaf or mixed forests where leaf canopy inhibits undergrowth and provides deep leaf litter. (West Woods east of Ansel's Cave). **Song:** Loud, clear "Teacher! Teacher! Teacher!"

Prothonotary Warbler – Cavity nester in wooded swamps and other bottomland forests. (All along the Upper Cuyahoga River. Artificial nest cavities can be seen at Eldon Russell Park along the river trail.) **Song:** Series of clear, high-rising notes. "Tsweet, tsweet, tsweet, tweek, tsweet!"

Yellow Warbler – Scrubby deciduous plant and thickets, especially near water. **Song:** Loud, clear, "sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet, a little bit sweet". (Maple Highlands Trail from Tare Creek to Rt. 528; Ladue Reservoir along Valley road; Eldon Russell Park)

"Migrant Traps" in NE Ohio: Warblers 'drop' into these locations after flying during the night. They feast on all kinds of insects/caterpillars, rest, and usually continue north that same night. Be there first thing in the morning for the most activity.

- **West Geauga Commons** - on Rt 306 near Fairmont. Drive to back parking area and walk trail behind basketball court all the way along the river.
- **Swine Creek Valley Shelter Area** – parking lot area and follow trail past shelter and across the creek.
- **The West Woods** – Trail along Silver Creek and along the entrance road into the park (lots of 'edge' and thickets). Trail to Ansel's Cave for the Louisiana Waterthrush (a warbler).
- **The Rookery** - Timberdoodle Trail and area around shelter house.
- **Eldon Russell Park (Upper Cuyahoga River canoe access)** – Duane Ferris Trail when you enter park. If you have a canoe, paddle downstream in May for outstanding migrant viewing. You can also walk south (downstream) along the river from the canoe launch for about ¼ mile, then take trail up into the woods and back to the entrance road.
- **Headland Beach State Park** – take the entrance road to the right, all the way to the last parking area. Follow trail to the dunes area and on to the lighthouse. Migrants all along this trail and sometimes on the beach.
- **Chagrin River Park** (3100 Reeves Road, Willoughby – Lost Nation Rd. exit off Rt 2) – This entire park is excellent during spring migration. Walk as many trails as you have time, especially in the morning hours.
- **Wendy Park / Whiskey Island** – take Wendy Park/Edgewater Park exit off Rt. 2 then first right on the round-about, all the way back to the park. The Cottonwood Trees are a real draw to warblers before they fly across the lake to Canada.
- **Cleveland Lakefront Nature Preserve** – MLK Jr. exit off I-90. A Cleveland MetroParks property and very good for warblers in May. As you walk through the turnstile into the preserve, the areas immediately right and left as far as you can see are typically the best for warblers.