

IDENTIFICATION OF EASTERN WOOD WARBLERS

The warblers listed below are generally grouped by song type, either buzzy or "whistled" songs. I have tried to keep together those that sound similar. Most mnemonics are from Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds: Eastern Region* or the National Geographic guide.

A. Warblers with buzzy songs

1. Black-throated Blue Warbler: *beer beer beer beee*, ascending in pitch on last note.
 - a. Blue, black and white; female is brownish with a white "pocket handkerchief" on wing
 - b. Look for in forest understory, rhododendrons and laurel. Flagpole Knob, high elevations. Arrives in May.
2. Cerulean Warbler: *zray-zray-zray-zreeee*, last note is higher. Faster than Black-throated Blue song.
 - a. This warbler looks short-tailed overhead. Look for white belly with black streaks on sides and a narrow breast band. Female is greenish with white wingbars.
 - b. A tree top warbler. Prefers deciduous woods. Arrives late April, early May.
3. Black-throated Green Warbler: *zee-zee-zee-zoo-zee*, fast, sometimes so fast it loses some buzzy quality.
 - a. Black throat with yellow cheeks. Green back and white belly.
 - b. Tree tops, especially hemlocks. Rocky Run, Moonman's River in Albemarle. Local birds seem to arrive in late April.
4. Northern Parula: *zeeeeeee-up!*, ascending, then hiccupping. Alternate song too.
 - a. A small warbler. Looks yellow chested with a blue back and white wingbars. Look for band on chest.
 - b. Tree tops, especially in hemlocks. Arrives late April.
5. Prairie Warbler: *zee-zee-zee-zee-zee-zee-zee*, metallic sounding, up a chromatic scale.
 - a. Look for yellow breast with black streaks on sides, green back with chestnut streaks (hard to see).
 - b. Habitat is key to quick identification: overgrown, brushy fields, usually not at high elevations. Arrives in late April.
6. Blue-winged Warbler: *beeeeeee-bzzzz*, second note lower.
 - a. Yellow with black marking through eye. Whitish wingbars, green back.
 - b. Habitat is overgrown upland pastures. Late April, May.
7. Golden-winged Warbler: *beeee-bzz-bzz-bzz*, last notes lower. Always look for the bird in case it is a hybrid (Brewster's or Lawrence's), which can sound like either of its parents.
 - a. Looks like a chickadee at first. Yellow wing patches.
 - b. Look for in upland overgrown fields with apples, hawthorn. Highland County is good, but the bird has declined significantly.

8. Worm-eating Warbler: rapid, almost buzzing, dry trill. Unmusical. Faster than Chipping Sparrow song.

- a. Brown with head stripes. Breast looks ocher.
- b. Dry upland slopes. Madison Run is good. Seems to arrive in May.

B. Warblers with "whistled" or non-buzzy songs

1. Pine Warbler: slow musical trill. Slower than Chipping Sparrow.

- a. A yellow and green warbler, white wingbars.
- b. Found in pines, of course. I find them more in short leaf varieties. Arrives early, and can be heard singing in late February in some places.

2. Palm Warbler: a buzzy trill.

- a. Yellowish on bottom, brown on top. Some streaking below. Yellow under tail, wags its tail.
- b. Brushy, weedy areas. Near ground. Arrives in April. Seen more often in fall.

3. American Redstart: *zee zee zee zee zwee*, or *teetsa teetsa teetsa teet*, both with a slightly burry undertone. Important to learn the burry quality of the Redstart's songs, because there are several alternate songs. Songs sound "sneezy" to me. Immature male plumaged birds sing too.

- a. Male is striking and unmistakable. Long tail and active habits. Female and young male are marked with yellow, brown above, white below.
- b. Mostly deciduous woods, both in trees and understory. Arrives in May.

4. Yellow-throated Warbler: *tee-ew tew tew tew tew-wi*, dropping in pitch, then last note rising. Sweet sounding.

- a. From below, note white belly with black streaks on flanks, and bright yellow throat.
- b. Likes high trees, usually along rivers in our area. Look in sycamores and pines. Arrives in April.

5. Prothonotary Warbler: *zweet zweet zweet zweet*, with a slightly rolling, burry quality.

- a. Bright yellow with green back. More contrast between head and back than in Yellow Warbler. Long black bill.
- b. Lives in wooded swamps and along large rivers. On lower Shenandoah. Arrives late April.

6. Yellow Warbler: *sweet-sweet-sweet-I'm-so-sweet*, fast and variable.

- a. Yellow all over. Chestnut breast streaks.
- b. Look for in thickets, gardens, hedges. Common. Arrives late April.

7. Chestnut-sided Warbler: *pleased-pleased-pleased-ta-meetcha*, fast, compare song to Yellow Warbler's. Also has a variable alternate song, heard late season and in areas where there are many of these birds around.

- a. Note yellow-green forehead, black through eye, chestnut flanks. Looks stripy.

- b. Habitat similar to Yellow Warbler, but more likely in upland habitats. Arrives early May. Likes clearcuts in mountains.
8. Yellow-rumped Warbler: a trilling warble, sometimes trails off. Variable. Usually if you can't identify the song, it's either a Yellow-rump or a Redstart.
- Note yellow spots on both sides of breast and black markings on breast. Several other warblers have a yellow rump!
 - Breeds in spruces, but found in almost any habitat in migration. Winter and up to about May 12. Recently bred in Rockingham.
9. Black-and-white Warbler: *weese weese weese weese*, high pitched.
- Black and white striped, compare Blackpoll with a white cheek.
 - Climbs on tree trunks like a nuthatch (unlike a Blackpoll). Arrives in April, much earlier than Blackpoll.
10. Bay-breasted Warbler: *teesi teesi teesi teesi*, faster, shorter and higher than Black-and-white.
- Look for extensive chestnut throat and flanks and light spot on ear.
 - In migration, can be seen in any type of trees, but drawn to ornamental spruces if available. Arrives second week of May (so it seems).
11. Cape May Warbler: *seet seet seet seet*, very high and thin, hard to tell from Bay-breast.
- Dominant colors seem to be yellow, green and black when seen. Look for chestnut ear patch. Light rump in fall.
 - Look for in ornamental spruces. Arrives early May. Like Bay-breast, easier to locate in fall migration.
12. Blackpoll Warbler: *ti-ti-ti-ti-ti-ti-ti-ti-ti*, very high pitched, increasing in intensity, then fading. Almost sounds insect-like.
- Black cap and white cheek. Black and white streaked underparts.
 - High in trees. One of the last warblers to pass through. Very common.
13. Common Yellowthroat: *witchity witchity witchity witchity*, loud and clear.
- Black mask, yellow throat and breast, olive back.
 - Usually in moist brushy areas, common. Arrives in April.
14. Kentucky Warbler: *churry-churry-churry-churry*, rolling and loud. Sounds like Carolina Wren, but has a rolling "Spanish R" quality.
- Yellow below, yellow spectacles, and black Pancho Villa mustache.
 - Prefers dense moist deciduous undergrowth. Common, but must really be searched for to be seen.
15. Mourning Warbler: *chirry-chirry-chirry-chirry-chorr(y)*, rolling, with "Spanish R's" as in Kentucky. Usually heard before it is seen.
- Look for combination of yellow belly, black smudge on breast and gray head.

- b. High mountain thickets in cut over areas. Seems to like raspberry thickets. The field guides say that birds of this genus (*Oporornis*, including Kentucky Warbler) are slow moving, which I question. Look in clearcuts in western Highland County. Appears to arrive later in May.
16. Ovenbird: *teacher-teacher-TEACHER-TEACHER*, loud, with increasing intensity. Often heard, seldom seen.
- Brown backed, white undersides, with black streaks. If seen well, look for orange and black head pattern.
 - Lives near the ground in deciduous woods. Arrives in late April.
17. Louisiana Waterthrush: three loud slurred whistles, followed by a descending jumble of notes. Has a distinctive chip note.
- Olive brown back, buffy flanks and streaked white belly. Eyebrow flares behind eye, and larger bill than Northern Waterthrush.
 - Found along mountain streams. Dips like a Spotted Sandpiper. Arrives late March.
18. Northern Waterthrush: *twit-twit-twit-sweet-sweet-sweet-chew-chew-chew*, fast.
- Differs from Louisiana Waterthrush in a narrower eyebrow, and all white underparts.
 - Found in swampy areas on breeding grounds, seems to show up in thickets in migration. Arrives later than Louisiana.
19. Hooded Warbler: *weeta-weeta-wee-tee-o*, variable, the ending is usually the same. Sounds like Magnolia Warbler.
- Male is unmistakable with black hood and throat and yellow face. Female usually has some trace of a hood.
 - Found in dense deciduous undergrowth, slopes. Arrives late April, early May.
20. Magnolia Warbler: *weeta-weeta-weetsee* or *weeta-weeta-wit-chew*, abrupt and fast.
- Boldly colored in black, yellow and gray. Look for the heavy black streaks on the yellow breast. Note the underside of the tail, which looks white with a broad black tip. Note the yellow rump.
 - Likes dense conifers, spruce in our area. Best place for breeding birds is the Locust Spring area in Highland County. Seems more numerous in fall.
21. Canada Warbler: *chip chupety swee-ditchety*, abrupt and explosive.
- Look for gray back, yellow breast and black necklace. Note the spectacles.
 - Found in thick undergrowth, laurel and rhododendron, at high elevations. Active.
22. Connecticut Warbler: *sugar-tweet, sugar-tweet, sugar-tweet*, increasing in intensity.
- Look for white eye ring, yellow belly, gray throat.
 - Found in thickets in migration. More often seen in fall, early October.

23. Wilson's Warbler: short trill, dropping at the end.
a. Yellow with a black cap. Compare female to female Hooded (Hooded has white tail spots; Wilson's does not). Smaller than Hooded Warbler.
b. Usually found in thickets. Uncommon.
24. Nashville Warbler: *seebit-seebit-seebit-titititititi*, two part song, starting out musically, and ending like a Chipping Sparrow.
a. Look for white eye ring on gray head, yellow throat. Compare to Mourning Warbler.
b. Nests in second growth areas, but in migration found in trees as well. Arrives early May.
25. Tennessee Warbler: *ticka ticka ticka ticka swit swit swit chew chew chew*, repeated constantly, unlike Nashville's song. Starts off sounding like a sewing machine.
a. Hard to tell from a vireo from below. More easily identified by song. Lacks wingbars.
b. Found in tops of trees. Arrives in May.
26. Blackburnian Warbler: *teetsa, teetsa, teetsa, titi-szeeeeeee*, last note is so high it becomes inaudible.
a. Appears orange, black and white. Sometimes all you can see from below is the white belly.
b. Active. Prefers to be high in trees: hemlocks, pines, etc. Can be found in mixed woods, but always conifers around. Switzer Dam is a good place for these. Easiest to locate by song.

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