

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

Early Season Warblers

POST #70—April 27, 2023

Today's Bogdiversity Thursday Post is full of milestones. We have reached 70 posts in this series AND we have now addressed 200 species! For this post, we are going to profile a group of species that we feature on field trips during May: Warblers.

The five warblers posted below have one thing in common... they are typically the earliest arriving warblers to our region. Of these five species, only one will not end up staying and nesting in the Sax-Zim Bog. Speaking of breeding warblers, we are very lucky to have over 20 species of warbler nesting in the bogs, upland forests, marshes, and mixed forest found throughout the Sax-Zim Bog. There are only a few of the 25 species that regularly nest in northeastern Minnesota that do not nest in the Sax-Zim Bog! While the five species of warbler featured below are arriving right now, the bulk of the warblers and other neotropical migrants that nest in our area will not arrive until May 15-20.

Neotropical migrant may or may not be a familiar word to all folks. Very simply, neotropical migrants are birds migrate south to

tropical regions of Central and South America for the winter from northern regions of North America. These birds then head back north in the spring to northern nesting areas. Birds like Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore Oriole, warblers, flycatchers, and vireos are all considered neotropical migrants. These birds spend most of their lives away from nesting areas and on their wintering grounds or in migration.

To better understand the last point, let's consider Black-and-white Warbler. Black-and-white Warbler's begin arriving in the first week of May. The majority of these birds leave the area by the end of September. So, this species is in our area between 4-5 months. It spends the rest of the year in migration and on its wintering grounds, which could be as many as 8 months away from breeding territories. The reason many boreal breeding birds migrate and expend such great amounts of energy is the amount of food available in the ephemeral ponds, damp woodlands, and scattered wetlands. While we may not enjoy mosquitoes, horseflies, black flies, (insert any biting and flying bug here!), these insects are incredibly abundant and valuable food sources for warblers and beyond.

For early arriving species food might be hard to come (especially when it snows in April and May!). Pine Warbler and Yellow-rumped Warbler both have large, stocky bills for a warbler allowing them to take advantage of a number of different food sources, including suet at bird feeders! Orange-crowned Warblers are nectar feeders and their arrival often coincide with flowing sap on maples, birches, and more. While insects are still

important, many of these species have alternative food sources that help them survive, even under less than desirable conditions.

If you would like to see these species in the Sax-Zim Bog, one of the easiest ways to do so is to join one of our Warbler Wednesday or Saturday Field Trips! Registration is open on our website here: saxzim.org/events.

More information is included about these early arriving warbler species in the photos below!

(Photos below by Sparky Stensaas)



Yellow-rumped Warblers go by a lot of different names. Perhaps you know them as Yellow-rumped Warbler or Myrtle Warbler or maybe you lovingly call them “yumps” or “butterbuts.” Whatever their name, this species is often the first species of warbler to arrive in our area and the last one to leave. This species also frequently overwinters in Minnesota, as surprising as that may be! At this time of year their fresh blues and blacks and yellows pop against the dull brown landscape we have in early spring.



One of the more difficult species to see in the Sax-Zim Bog, Pine Warblers prefer to spend their time during the nesting season very, very high up in old growth conifers like Red Pine and White Pine. Their song is also quite difficult to pick out as it is similar to Chipping Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco, which often nest in similar areas. This handsome warbler is quite large and one of the most robust warblers in our area.



Palm Warblers might have a name that feels out of place when you see them on their breeding grounds. This species loves short, stunted bogs like we find in the Sax-Zim Bog. However, their name refers to their preferred wintering grounds, in regions with palms. A familiar species to many, as they are commonly seen foraging along the ground in parks and beyond during migration.



Of the five warblers profiled today, Orange-crowned Warbler does not nest in our area. Orange-crowned Warblers have a pretty unique distribution: they breed very far north with some reaching the northern coast of Alaska, some breed in the central western US, and there is even a resident population along the west coast from northern Washington to southern California.



Black-and-white Warblers are one of the easier warblers to identify. They have primarily black and white plumage and are the only warbler in the northeast that have black and white undertail coverts. Males and females have different plumages, with males having a primarily black face and females have a primarily white face! These nuthatch-esque warblers are a treat to watch foraging along branches and tree trunks for insects.