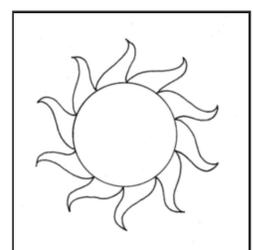
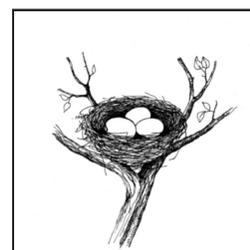
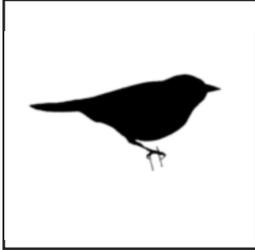




Warblers

Order Passeriformes
Family Parulidae



If butterflies were birds, they would be called warblers. **These are active, tiny, vibrantly-colored birds belonging to the large Family Parulidae.** If you are lucky enough to be birding in spring woodlands while they are migrating to their northern nesting sites, you are in for a treat. Any other time of year? Good luck. **Even the most accomplished birders struggle with warblers once the males have molted out of their jewel-like plumage.** But they are worth effort. Find one in your binoculars, momentarily still in the treetops, and you will be aptly rewarded.

A staggering **thirty-some different warblers breed in Pennsylvania.** Three of those are rare breeders in the state. Seven other species simply migrate through our Commonwealth. **Large numbers of migrating warblers begin arriving in late March and continue through mid-May,** depending on the species. Once the leaves have opened they become increasingly harder to spot in the tree-tops they love to haunt.

Though they are called warblers, most have songs that sound more like thin buzzing. *Zeeee-up, zoo-zee, zweet, zweet,* and *weese* are common sounds.



American Redstart
Setophaga ruticilla

If you have ever seen a **tiny bird that looks somewhat like a Baltimore oriole,** you may have seen an American redstart. The arrangement of the colors is not quite the same, but there are few other birds that are **vibrant orange and black.** The male redstart is sleek black with bold orange markings on the wings and tail. The underbelly is white. **Females have greenish plumage with yellow patches.**

They are **active little birds that flutter down through the tree branches,** hover over leaves while searching for insects by running across limbs and darting into mid-air to grab their prey. In Pennsylvania the **redstart is more common in our forested counties,** finding less suitable habitat in open meadow and farmland.

Almost all warblers are arboreal, rarely coming down out of the upper tree canopy, where they feast on insects, though they will go where the insects are and some warblers drink flower nectar. Exceptions include the ovenbird and the waterthrushes. These warblers live, feed and nest on the ground or in very low-growing shrubs and trees.



Ovenbird

Seiurus aurocapillus



Ovenbirds are sometimes **confused with woodthrushes**, with whom they **share similar plumage, behavior, and preference for the open forest floor.**

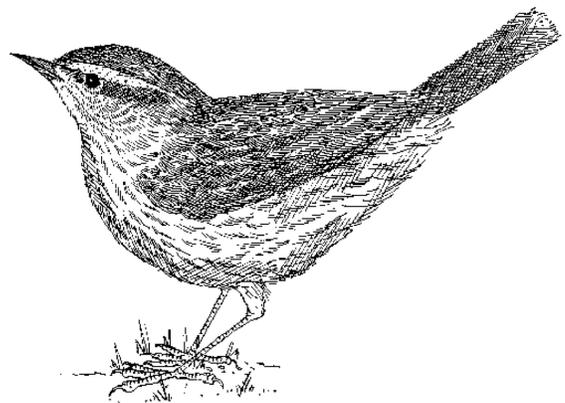
Ovenbirds are **plumper-looking than many warblers** and spend most of their time **walking through the leaves kicking up leaves** rooting for insects, slugs, snails and such.

They are olive-brown above with a **dark-streaked breast and orange & black stripe on their head.** Their stirring call of *Teacher! Teacher! Teacher!* rises in volume as the male repeats the phrase. The ovenbird builds a **dome-shaped nest** out of grasses and other plant matter hidden **on the ground.**

Like the ovenbird, the **Louisiana waterthrush** (*Seiurus motacilla*) - at right - **prefers the ground.** They are shy birds, but if you are **streamside** you may see one stepping from stone to stone **upending wet leaves with its beak** as it hunts for caterpillars, snails, small crustaceans and a wide variety of insects.

When you see a waterthrush their **plumage may remind you of a wood thrush, but their behavior probably looks more like a sandpiper's** as they bob up and down. Their long toes and large feet they help they move through soft, waterlogged soil.

Waterthrushes mate in spring and build a **nest in a hole along a wooded streambank**, camouflaged by tree roots or vegetation.





**Black-Throated
Blue Warbler**
*Dendroica
caerulescens*

These warblers prefer the **deep woods**, especially the understory of both deciduous and mixed forests **near streams**.

The male is one of the most attractive of the warblers with a **silky black throat and sides contrasted against deep blue upper body plumage**. The breast is creamy white. Females have just a hint of blue on the greenish-gray body.

Males and females feed at different heights, sometimes picking insects out of spider webs. Their nests are usually built into the thickets of an evergreen like mountain laurel or rhododendron.

Like most warblers, they suffer losses from predation by larger birds, exhaustion during their long migrations and loss of nesting habitats - especially through the fragmentation of forests.



**Common
Yellowthroat**
Geothlypis trichas



Another warbler that nests on or near the ground is the common yellowthroat. A **small, but chubby, vibrantly colored bird** found in cattail marshes, old meadows, forest edges or wet fields. Yellowthroats have a bold **raccoon-like black mask and bright yellow throat**.

In spring and summer their *witchity, witchity, witchity* song helps you locate this widespread warbler. Despite their prevalence, destruction of wetlands can have a serious affect on these beautiful birds. Their **ground nests** are built from dried leaves and grasses and lined with soft vegetation. Like all warblers, yellowthroats feed heavily on insects, but will also eat spiders and even small seeds.



Both male and female chestnut-sided warblers are beautifully marked with **yellow caps, black face markings and chestnut sides**. Their song resembles the yellow warbler's *tsee, tsee, tsee*.

They like overgrown fields and the undergrowth of small trees for both hunting insects and building nests. Thanks to their preference for open brush, the population of these warblers has actually grown in numbers as our forests have been logged and been replaced by brushy undergrowth.

Nests are often placed in bramble bushes and **woven from the bark of grapevines**.



**Chestnut-sided
Warbler**
Dendroica pensylvanica



Yellow Warbler
Dendroica petechia

Of our common Pennsylvania warblers, **the yellow warbler is probably the most wide-spread**. They are fairly tolerant of human activity and the likeliest to nest in a park or garden, though woodland edges would be preferred. Lots of warblers are yellowish, but none as yellow as this warbler. The **male's yellow breast is streaked with red** – the female's is plain. The call a *tsee tsee tsee*, used to stake out territory and stay in contact with the female.

The yellow warbler has the unwelcome reputation of being **one of the most parasitized birds by the opportunistic brown-headed cowbird**. The warblers will repeatedly build a new nest on top of the cowbird eggs in an effort to start anew. Yellow warblers have just a brief stay in our state, arriving in April or May and winging south by late July or August.



**Black & White
Warbler**
Mniotilta varia

During hunting forays the **black and white warbler** might be mistaken for nuthatches or brown creepers. They **often cling to the trunk of a tree creeping around the bark crevices** in search of insects. Both sexes have bold black and white streaking on their bodies and heads.

These warblers feed at lower heights and actually **nest on the forest floor** in a depression of leaves. When the chicks fledge they will climb a tree and continue to be fed by the parents.



Black-throated Green
Dendroica virens



Cerulean Warbler
Dendroica cerulea

Pennsylvania is also a regular breeding site for **black-throated green warblers** (above), **bluewinged warblers** (*Vermivora pinus*), **golden-winged warblers** (*Vermivora chrysoptera*), **Nashville warblers** (next page), **northern parula warblers** (next page), **magnolia warblers** (next page), **yellow-rumped warblers** (next page), **Blackburnian warblers** (*Dendroica fusca*), **yellow-throated warblers** (*Dendroica dominica*), **pine warblers** (*Dendroica pinus*), **prairie warblers** (*Dendroica discolor*), **cerulean warblers** (at top left), **worm-eating warblers** (*Helmitheros vermivorus*), **Kentucky warblers** (*Oporornis formosus*), **mourning warblers** (*Oporornis philadelphia*), **hooded warblers** (next page), **Canada warblers** (*Wilsonian canadensis*), the **northern waterthrush** (*Seiurus noveboracensis*), and **yellow-breasted chat** (*Icteria virens*).



Cape May Warbler
Dendroica tigrina

The **blackpoll** (*Dendroica striata*), **prothonotary** (*Protonotaria citrea*) and **swainson's warblers** (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*) are considered rare breeders in the state. While the **Tennessee** (*Vermivora peregrina*), **orange-crowned** (*Vermivora celata*), **Cape may** (bottom left) **bay-breasted**, (*Dendroica castanea*) **palm** (*Dendroica palmarum*), **Connecticut** (*Oporornis agilis*) and **wilson's warblers** (*Wilsonia pusilla*) are seen during spring and fall migrations.



Magnolia Warbler
Dendroica magnolia



Northern Parula
Parula americana



Nashville Warbler
Vermivora ruficapilla



Hooded Warbler
Wilsonia citrina



**Yellow-rumped
Warbler**
Dendroica coronata



A Simple Review of Warblers



Warblers are **small, round birds with songs and calls as varied as their colors**. But though they are called warblers, they are not known for warbling songs. Instead, most wheeze, whistle and chirp.

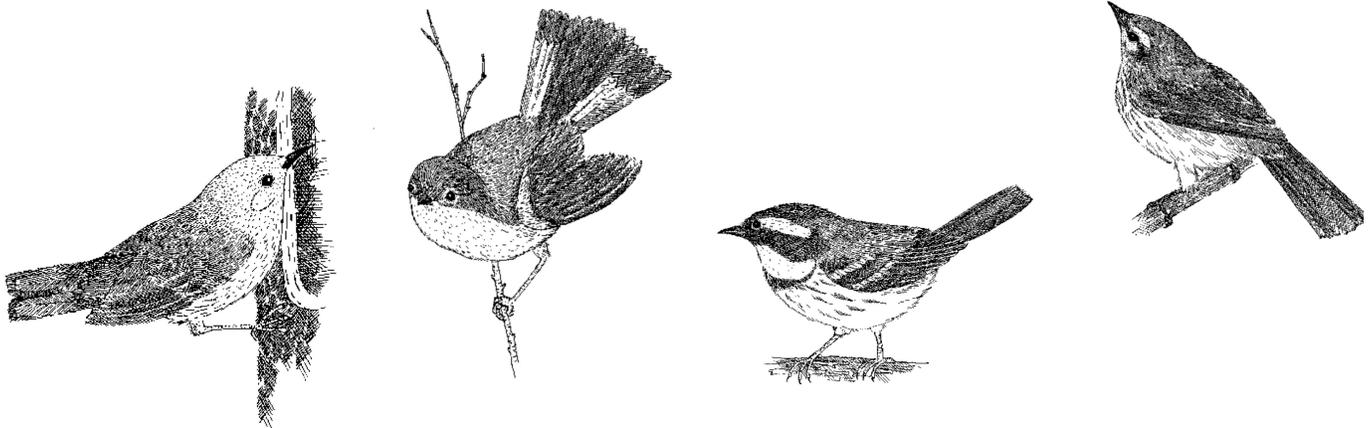
Sometimes a group of warblers is called a “bouquet” of warblers, sometimes a “confusion” of warblers. If you know anything about these lovely little birds, both names seem about right. They are considered the **jewels of the forests**. So many warblers come in so many beautiful colors and patterns they seem like flowers. But **in the fall when the males have molted** their bright plumage they are among the most **confounding birds to identify**. Even the best birdwatchers struggle.

There are many different species of warblers that live in or visit Pennsylvania. Some live high in the trees, others in the understory and a few at ground level. Their **tiny, pointed bills are perfect for gleaning insects off foliage**. And when you do catch sight of one high above you it will probably be pulling small insects or spiders from the underside of a leaf. The warblers have learned that bugs often seek refuge on the shaded underside of a leaf during the heat of the day.

Lots of warblers **use spider webs in their nests**. One warbler, the cerulean warbler, even takes its spider web with it when it leaves its old nest and prepared to build a new one.

Preferred habitats can include mixed deciduous and evergreen woodlands. The **black-throated blue warbler** especially likes woodlands with brushy undergrowth **like mountain laurel plants** – our state flower.

American redstarts look a bit like a small Baltimore oriole. They often flash their orange wing patches and fan their tail to stir insects up. Redstarts **flutter around tree limbs like butterflies**.



While most warblers feed on almost exclusively on insects and small spiders, the **Cape May warbler will feed on sap** too. Their tongue is shaped almost in a tube so they can drink the liquid. Even though all warblers make some sort of noise, probably none sing like the **black-throated green warbler**, which has been **observed singing over 400 songs in just one hour**.

The **common yellowthroat** may not sing as much as the black-throated green, but they do have a recognizable song. In the **marshlands** where yellowthroats like to live you can often hear a loud "**wichity-wichity-wich**," coming from these beautiful yellowthroated warblers with the **black face mask**.

Our largest warbler is the yellow-breasted chat. Their bill is plumper than most warblers and their tail is longer too. Chats act like mockingbirds during breeding season when they hover over the ground while slowly flapping their wings and hanging their feet down. And they have even been known to **mimic other bird songs**.

The **yellow warbler** is probably the **most widespread warbler in our state**. Because they are so common they seem to be parasitized by brown-headed cowbirds more than any other warbler. But if a cowbird does lay an egg in warbler's nest, the female warbler seems to know there is a strange egg in her nest. She will then build a new nest right on top of the old one and begin again.