

**Warblers are the gems of spring, almost every color one can imagine. Several ground-dwelling species are yellow, a few of the rare ones have dark hoods, several have black throats, the females are largely duller to nest sit, small groups like tail-bob waterthrushes add diversity and interest while others are quite unique. Warblers are small, they vocalize well and migrate.**



One of my favorites is the American Redstart, this shot having both the male (right) and female. The red or yellow panes are flashed around to spook bugs and then the warbler snatches them out of the air. You might notice the male is wet, a result of having bathed at the drip. This is why photographers try to shoot before the subject hits the water.



This is a male Black-and-white Warbler & you can barely see a black throat. The vast majority, especially after March, is females and immatures and lack the black throat. These and the kinda similar Yellow-throated Warblers work the bark for insects, both having cryptic coloration for protection.



One of the more common warblers in April is the Black-throated Green, and a species that can range from the ground to high in the canopy. Other species with black throats are gray and blue, plus the Black-and-white Warblers. The trick is to make sure it's a Black-throated Green, as the similar Townsend's and also Hermit Warblers are similar.



One of the “yellow” warblers that feed low in the shrubs is the Blue-winged Warbler. They have a black eyeline for quick identification and are often upside down, hanging from the tip of the limb. This is the meristem, often with nutritious plant snacks, plus small invertebrates there to feed on it. Buffet!



My favorite bird the Golden-winged Warbler was seen here once in April, a male feeding in the late afternoon. It is a species renowned for hybridizing with Blue-winged Warblers, creating fertile hybrids and thus many bizarre crosses. Note the chickadee face with whom they often forage.



This tough ID slipped in and could easily have gone unnoticed. It's a Cape May Warbler female, a little like a winter yellow-rump but w/ some distinct yellow on the face. These and several other species are West Indian migrants and don't hit the Texas Coast very often.



Finally, a male of the garnet and gold (FSU) thus Cape May Warbler. This is a very eastern warbler but with ample east winds they can get blown over to our shores. This was also my “spark” bird, the chance meeting in a forest on St. George Island at 18. It turned me on to warblers and hasn’t let up.



The chickadee-headed Blackpoll Warbler also emanates from the West Indies like the Cape May but since they nest west to Alaska, some occasionally will pass this far west on their “way up North.” [As the song sez.] These are quite unmistakable but the females are best told by those flesh-colored legs.





One of many peoples' favs is the Blackburnian Warbler, almost oriole-like up front with the orange. They prefer the canopy and seldom get very low in brush and such. They're late migrants, almost as many here in May as April. Many of these Canadian warblers don't have loud songs.



Very early in April there were several Cerulean Warbler records, a scarce & beautiful species that breeds as close as East Texas. Note the necklace across the chest (oops) and the blue – an unusual color for birds. Females are quite difficult for the beginner to ID, like several other lady warblers.



A little late was an Orange-crowned Warbler, dull green all over with a bit of a grayer head. These are winter residents throughout the South, especially in the Valley. Down there the winter resident (snowbirds) put marshmallows on bare limbs and they are summarily attacked by these, Verdin and tits.



One warbler without the family name attached is the Common Yellowthroat, a skulking midget of thick cover – especially wetlands. Males have a black mask like the Loan Arranger, so look for them on the banks. [Ignore that.] A wren-like forager, these are often found with Marsh and/or Sedge Wrens.



Hooded Warblers are one of the early migrants, along with Kentucky. They work the ground for a myriad of arthropods and leave the vertebrates to the larger hunters. They are carnivores (Fords, Chevys, etc.) but these warblers are insectivores. Carnivores (seriously) are taken from roots like “carne” (in Spanish), but I’m not sure if it’s “caro” in Latin or possibly a Greek word.



Kentucky Warblers are less common than Hoodeds but both are migrants in late March and early April (mostly). Their black on the head is sorta where Hoodeds have their yellow, and vice versa. Both breed south almost to the Gulf Coast, with only a few other species of warblers.



Another southern breeder is the Louisiana Waterthrush, so early we actually have late February records! It has a larger bill than Northern, pink legs and a clear, white throat. Both waterthrushes bob their rear ends up and down like Spotted Sandpipers, a trait practiced by several other birds worldwide.



Northern Waterthrush are more common than Louisianas – except this year! This one could be IDed by the yellowish underside, smallish bill, yellow eye stripe and darker-than-pink legs. The nesting area is huge, all the way North to Alaska (there we go again!).





Northern Parula have been here since mid March and they nest almost from the Gulf Coast well into Canada. The bluish back and yellow throat is about all you need, but the male's ascending whistle helps up in the canopy. The crescents (white) above and below the eyes are an interesting field mark.



Mrs. Prothonotary Warbler has the telltale berry stain on her forehead which is often on the throat as well. Don't ask me why it's so commonly seen in this species, but we've all seen it. Their wings and tail are almost solid gray, odd for a warbler, IMHO. These nest locally, such as at Brazos Bend, and join a club of three yellow ground warblers in the South.



The fast-flying Tennessee Warbler was in my yard every day of April, often in flocks it may have traveled over the Gulf with. A green back & gray head is all you need to ID this “middle migrant,” truly an April bird. Females are similar but with a greenish head – not the same gray head.



The Yellow-breasted Chat skulks through bushes eating everything from the arthropods to juicy berries. Look at that bill! This bird is a little dingy, likely a female, but always an exciting bird to watch. A scrubby habitat preference makes them less recorded than most warblers.



A real crowd pleaser is the Blackburnian Warbler, also a late migrant that is common in early May. They are a treetop warbler, coming down to drink at drips or natural water sources. There are untold numbers of these in the taiga forest of Canada, spilling out down the Appalachians in October.



‘Scuse the poor quality but this is the best Magnolia Warbler I got this April. These are ponderously slow feeders, hopping slowly from limb to limb, with a lot of time peering around. I am pretty skeptical of whether a Magnolia has ever housed the nest of the Magnolia Warbler, given their breeding grounds.



In very early dawn's low light, this Worm-eating Warbler visited my drip & drank up. The "Whimbrel" head flashes its three stripes and the tawny color allows it to hide in the woods. Their long bill is used to shake arthropods out of the meristem much like the Blue-winged Warbler.



An unusual spring migrant on the Coast is the Wilson's Warbler. They are a really yellow bird but with a black "French" cap. Their call's a kissing sound that helps find them easily in fall when they're common. The species forages from about six to ten feet up, a mid-range feeder for a warbler.





One of the best vocal mimics in the world, this Yellow-breasted Chat sneaks through the undergrowth until she finally hopped out in plain sight. Clickity click! Huge for a warbler, it can tackle large spiders and even some animals with backbones. They are one of the true hard birds to photograph in the US.



The Yellow Warbler is a golden sunbeam from April ten for a good month. The garnet stripes highlight their color and their bright chip (like a redstart) is icing on the cake. This is a species with a huge summer and winter range and breeds in some areas like mangroves with a fully garnet head.



Finally, those brown male “myrtles” of winter get their breeding plumage of summer & look like a million dollars. Their abundance in the South becomes long songs across Canada from May - August. They are nowadays a Yellow-rumped Warbler, with our eastern bird being the “myrtle.”



A wonderful migrant of early spring is the Yellow-throated Warbler, often a bug-hunter on bark with its longish bill. Their song is heard in oak and pine as descending then ascending, finishing in a hurried burst. This is a species that sometimes winters or summers in unexpected places, like your yard!