

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*



Folk Name: Je-dit

Status: Winter Resident

Abundance: Fairly Common to Common

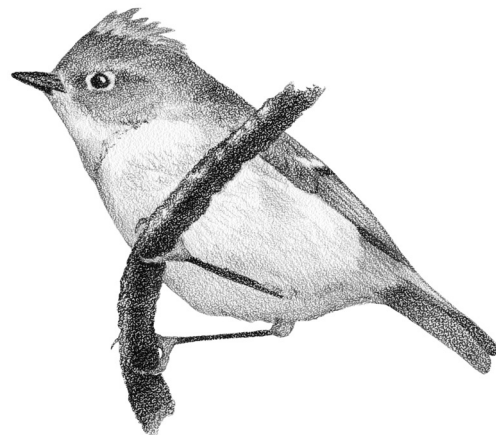
Habitat: Coniferous forests or mixed hardwood forests

The Ruby-crowned Kinglet averages half an inch larger than its golden-crowned cousin. It is olive green above and buffy below. It has no eye stripe, rather it has a white eye-ring. It has two white wing bars and one black. The female lacks a colorful crown, but the male has a bright ruby-red crown that is especially visible when the bird is agitated. When the male is calm, the red crown can be quite difficult to see. Ruby-crowned Kinglets are often heard before they are seen. Their call is a sharp *je-dit, je-dit*. In this region, Ruby-crowned Kinglets are a bit less common than Golden-crowned Kinglets during the winter.

Both of our kinglets are regularly observed foraging along the end of tree branches and periodically flicking their wings. They survive the winter by foraging in mixed-species flocks in search of spiders, insects, arthropod eggs, and an occasional seed or berry. A few have been observed feeding on the berries of winged sumac (*Rhus copallina*) at prairie restoration sites in Mecklenburg County. Ruby-crowned Kinglets are occasionally seen visiting backyard suet feeders in the winter.

Ruby-crowned Kinglets do not nest in the Carolinas. They nest in the coniferous forests of New England and north throughout most of Canada, and in parts of the West. Most generally arrive here in October. Most leave by April in the eastern part of our region and by early May in the west. Our earliest fall arrival date is one bird found at Riverbend Park in Catawba County on September 3, 2005. Judy Walker found one at Reedy Creek Nature Preserve on 6 September in 1993. H. Lee Jones saw and heard an “exceptionally early” bird on 8 September in 1968. Joe and Becky Norwood collected a specimen that had hit a local television tower during migration on October 2, 1959. Our latest spring departure date is a group of three very late migrants reported by Judy Walker at Freedom Park in Charlotte on May 29, 2010. We have no records from the months of June, July, or August. Our peak count is 166 individuals tallied on the Southern Lake Norman CBC in December 1994.

Both the Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Golden-crowned Kinglet rank in the top 50 birds found on the Charlotte and the Southern Lake Norman Christmas Bird Counts when averaged over a recent 20-year period and indexed per party-hour. Occasionally in the spring, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet will let loose its bubbly, musical breeding song while it is still here on its wintering grounds. This



song has been described as “remarkably sweet and melodious and is rated by some as both louder and more varied than that of the canary.”

A member of the North Carolina Bird Club contributed this experience for readers of the *Statesville Record and Landmark* on January 13, 1941:

One morning while I was frying bacon for the family breakfast there was a loud thud on the near-by window pane. On opening the window, I found a little olive-gray bird crouching on the sill, somewhat dazed by his encounter with the pane. I took him in my hands, for it was none other than a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. First I noted the white eye-ring, then the white wing bars and the wing and tail feathers edged with pale buff, but no vermilion



Ruby-crowned Kinglet. (Jim Guyton)

crown-patch. On the top of his head there was a bald spot with some pin feathers growing out of it—no vermilion. I rubbed them with my finger. They were stiff and stubby. I concluded that he was a young bird whose ruby crown had not yet grown

out. While the bacon burned, I measured him. Yes, he was exactly 4 ½ inches long. After this experience it will be hard to go back to the field glass method of identifying birds.