

Blackburnian Warbler *Setophaga fusca*



Folk Name: Hemlock Warbler

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Rare to Uncommon

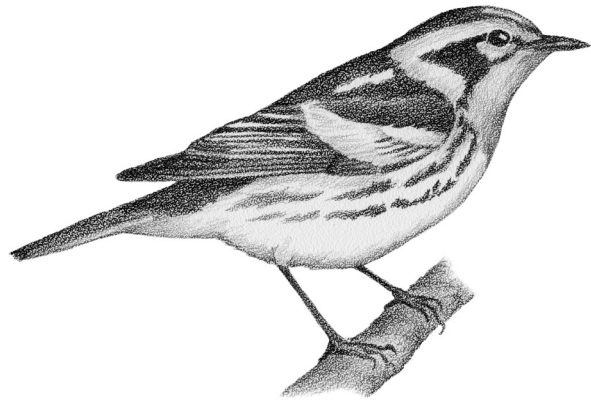
Habitat: Forest canopy

The spring male Blackburnian Warbler is a striking bird whose extraordinary appearance has inspired many beginners to become enamored with the pastime of birding. When sighted through a good pair of binoculars, in very good light, the all-too-often brief view of this black-and-orange-faced songbird can be simply stunning. Perhaps William McIlwaine said it best when, in 1928, he christened the Blackburnian Warbler “the most beautiful of all the warblers.”

Blackburnian Warblers breed in the conifer forests of North Carolina’s mountains and in boreal forests of the far north. They are a regular but often hard to find spring and fall migrant throughout the Carolina Piedmont. Leverett Loomis collected Blackburnian Warblers in Chester County on August 8, 1888, and October 22, 1888. William McIlwaine sighted his life bird Blackburnian Warbler in a tree in the front yard of Mr. P.S. Gilchrist on Park Avenue in Charlotte in the spring of 1928. McIlwaine reported the following migration dates for this species to the Bureau of Biological Survey: May 8, 1929; May 15, 1930; and October 6–7, 1930.

Maurice Stimson reported a male in full breeding plumage in Cool Spring Township in Iredell County on April 30, 1932, and he had a male singing there on 10 May. Charlie Sellers reported one on May 12, 1940. Grace Anderson reported a Blackburnian Warbler in Statesville on May 22, 1943. John Trott sighted a male in Stanly County on May 5, 1945.

Mecklenburg Audubon Club members collected the body of an immature Blackburnian Warbler on September 26, 1955, after it collided with the ceilometer tower at the municipal airport on the night before. Sarah Nooe collected a specimen dead on a Charlotte street on October 6, 1955. Joe and Becky Norwood collected a single Blackburnian Warbler out of a total of almost 400



songbirds killed in October 1959 after striking a television tower in east Charlotte.

The Blackburnian Warbler has been reported on about half of all Spring Bird Counts conducted in this region. Our earliest spring arrival date is 1 April, and our latest spring date is 29 May. Our earliest fall arrival date is 8 August, and our last departure date is 22 November. The peak one-day count we have on file for this species is only seven birds.



Blackburnian Warbler in fall plumage. (Jim Guyton)