

Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata*



Folk Name: (none)

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Uncommon to Fairly Common

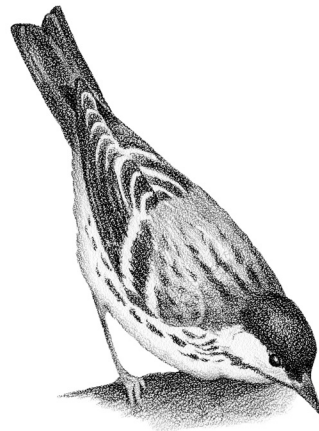
Habitat: Forest canopy

The Blackpoll Warbler is a spring and fall migrant in the Carolina Piedmont. In the spring, it may be more often heard than it is seen. The male has a distinctive thin, high-pitched, staccato *tseet, tseet, tseet* song that grows rapidly in intensity and then quickly decreases. It is one of the highest-pitched warbler songs, and it often becomes hard to hear, as one grows older. This warbler is one of the last to move through this region during spring migration. John Trott went so far as to say that its song “announces the end” of spring migration in the Piedmont. The Blackpoll Warbler used to be one of our most common fall migrants, but numbers have declined in recent years.

In spring, the male Blackpoll Warbler is strictly a black-and-white bird, that looks much like the Black-and-white Warbler, but unlike it, the Blackpoll has a prominent white cheek and a distinct black cap. South Carolina birder Jay Shuler provided this description: “By wood warbler standards, blackpolls are very plain, far beneath Redstarts, Myrtle Warblers, and Black-throated Green Warblers. In simple black and white plumage, he resembles a page of the news, the other migrants as colorful as the comic strips.”

Scientists recently made an amazing discovery about the Blackpoll Warbler. They mounted geolocators in tiny backpacks on several birds and used satellites to track and map their fall migration. They confirmed that each fall, many of these small songbirds, “weighing the equivalent of three teaspoons of sugar,” fly nonstop across the entire Atlantic Ocean from northern North America to Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Greater Antilles—an astonishing distance of at least 1,500 miles. This is one of the longest nonstop flights of any songbird ever recorded. The birds rest there and then fly further south to spend their winter in northern Venezuela and Colombia, South America. In the spring, Blackpoll Warblers return to their northern breeding grounds along a more westerly path. They cross the Caribbean Sea and fly to the southeastern United States, and from there, they move northward over land.

Blackpoll Warblers are almost never missed on Spring



Blackpoll Warbler during spring migration. (Jim Guyton)

Bird Counts conducted in this region. Our peak one-day tally is a count of 48 on the Charlotte SBC conducted on May 7, 1983.

Spring migrants move through between 21 April and 6 June. Fall migrants have been recorded from 3 September through 23 October.

Scientists warn that the Blackpoll Warbler population is rapidly declining throughout its North American breeding range.