

Connecticut Warbler *Oporornis agilis*



Folk Name: (none)

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Very Rare to Rare

Habitat: Deciduous forests (often moist)

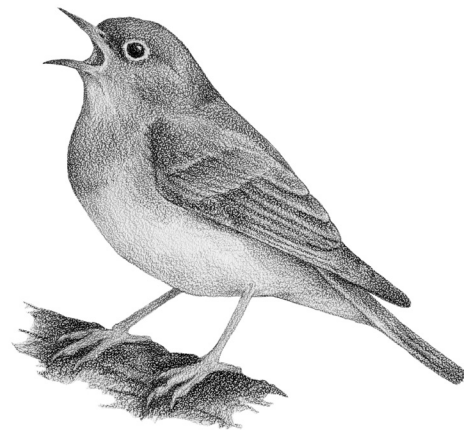
Undoubtedly, small numbers of Connecticut Warblers migrate through the Carolina Piedmont each spring and fall. Despite careful searches, these birds are seldom seen. This warbler is renowned for its elusive nature. It prefers to skulk along the ground in densely vegetated, often wet, areas, making it a very difficult bird to find. In fact, we have only about two dozen reports of Connecticut Warbler from the Central Carolinas. Fortunately, its presence here has been confirmed by both specimen and photograph.

Leverett Loomis took a single specimen of Connecticut Warbler on May 10, 1889, in Chester County. Gabriel Cannon sighted a male at Spartanburg on May 20, 1932. Biologists with the Perrygo Expedition collected a single Connecticut Warbler on October 4, 1939, south of Statesville in Iredell County. Grace Anderson reported a sighting of a Connecticut Warbler in Statesville in 1947. Anderson wrote: “My first record for this warbler, spent a week in my yard during the latter part of May.” She later corresponded with Dr. Alexander Wetmore of the U.S. Biological Survey about her discovery.

The first Connecticut Warbler recorded in Mecklenburg County was a fall migrant seen by Charles Moore on September 19, 1962. A Connecticut Warbler was reported on the Stanly Spring Bird Count held April 26, 1969. This bird was described as the first for that area; unfortunately, no details of this sighting were published. H. Lee Jones flushed a Connecticut Warbler from a poison-ivy thicket near an old rock quarry in Charlotte on May 27, 1971.



Connecticut Warbler in collection at UNC Charlotte.
(Leigh Anne Carter)



Jones wrote: “It was observed briefly walking Ovenbird-like on a fallen tree trunk.” He was able to view it twice and was also able to complete a detailed sketch of the bird in his field notebook using colored pencils. Today, Jones, who is now a professional ornithologist living in Belize, still possesses his original notebook filled with his Charlotte bird records and his field sketch of this rare warbler.

Elizabeth Clarkson reported a Connecticut Warbler migrating through Charlotte on August 24, 1972. It was moving through her garden at Wing Haven. Gail Kerr found a dead Connecticut Warbler that had flown into a window at her house on Linda Lake Drive in Charlotte on May 20, 1977. She took the specimen to Dick Brown at UNC Charlotte and he prepared it as a study skin and deposited it in the University’s zoological collection.

David Wright found an adult male in Charlotte on October 6, 1984. Wright recorded a full page of details on this bird. His journal entry begins with “[a]t last after many years of searching!” and it provided comprehensive identification and observation details as well. Wright wrote: “Bird responded after flushing to screech owl tape and spishing—quite bold in fact. Was approached close enough twice that I couldn’t focus my binoculars on it—could see it clearly without binocs!”

Steve Coggin reported an adult male in Rowan County on September 28, 1985. He described the bird’s gray head, white eye-ring, brown back and yellow breast. Paul Hart, Park Ranger at Crowders Mountain State Park in Gaston County, found a singing male Connecticut Warbler at the park on May 13, 1986.

Bill Hilton Jr. captured, banded, and photographed three female Connecticut Warblers at his York County banding station during the month of May 1991. These birds were the second, third, and fourth banding records

of Connecticut Warbler in the state of South Carolina. Three years later, a dead bird was found off Mt. Gallant Road near the Museum of York County on May 20, 1994.

Dwayne Martin reported an adult male Connecticut Warbler in Catawba County on September 19, 2000, providing the first report from that county. Martin noted he and Lori Owenby spent 45 minutes chasing the bird around the boardwalk at Glenn Hilton Memorial Park before it finally came out into the open so they could get a good look at it. Owenby reported a female at St. Stephens Park on September 17, 2011. Noreen George collected a Connecticut Warbler from the sidewalk next to the Knight's Theater building in downtown Charlotte on September 23, 2014, during a Mecklenburg Audubon Lights Out bird-collision survey. The bird was photographed and the body was sent to the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences for accession into their collection. On May 14, 2017, Sean Brenner saw and recorded the song of a male Connecticut Warbler near the Flat Branch Nature Preserve in Charlotte.

The bird reported on the Stanly SBC on 26 April provides our earliest reported spring arrival date. Our

earliest arrival date confirmed by specimen is 10 May. Our latest spring departure date is the bird drawn by H. Lee Jones in Charlotte on May 27, 1971. Our earliest fall migrant is the bird Elizabeth Clarkson reported arriving in Charlotte on the very early date of 24 August in 1972. Our latest fall departure date is a bird observed by Steve Tracy in his backyard in Gaston County on the evening of 18 October in 2006. Tracy reported:

I looked out off the deck last evening and saw at the edge of the marsh a gray-hooded warbler with a complete white eye ring. I was able to get within 30–40 feet of it and observe it on and off for 10–15 minutes, as it worked its way through the jewel weed and underbrush. It had an olive back, yellow underparts and pinkish legs. The throat was also gray—no black or yellow on the throat.

The Connecticut Warbler is listed on the Yellow Watch List of birds of the continental United States. It is a species with both “troubling” population declines and “high threats.” It is in need of conservation action.