

## Golden-winged Warbler *Vermivora chrysoptera*



**Folk Name:** (none)

**Status:** Migrant

**Abundance:** Rare

**Habitat:** Deciduous woods (usually moist)

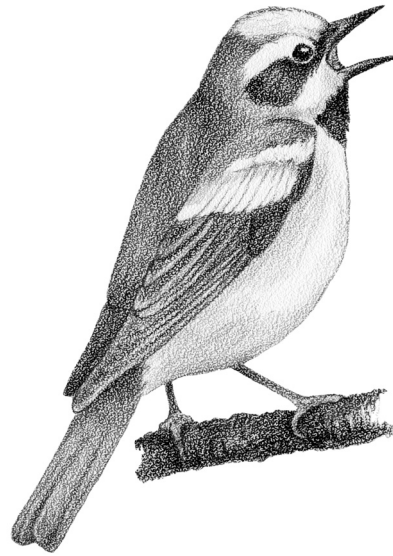
The Golden-winged Warbler is one of the most beautiful and most rare warblers to pass through the Carolina Piedmont. Since the 1960s, the population of this species has steadily declined throughout its North American breeding range. Today, it is believed to be threatened with extinction due in part to habitat loss, interbreeding with the Blue-winged Warbler, and Brown-headed Cowbird nest parasitism.

In 2011, a petition was submitted for listing the Golden-winged Warbler as a Threatened or Endangered Species under the United States Endangered Species Act. The petition elicited a “positive finding” by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service triggering further action to help this warbler. The states of Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have the largest remaining breeding populations, and a major habitat restoration project on behalf of this bird is slated to begin there in 2019.

The Golden-winged Warbler has been confirmed breeding in old fields and successional hardwood patches in 10 counties in the mountains of North Carolina. Its breeding population in the state is currently listed as being of Special Concern. This habitat is ephemeral in nature, and over time, breeding sites are lost. Several agencies have been working in the state to maintain early successional habitat for this special warbler.

The Golden-winged Warbler is known only as a migrant in the Central Carolinas. Leverett Loomis was the first to provide information on this species in the region. He collected a total of four specimens of Golden-winged Warbler in Chester County: a male on September 13, 1886, a female on August 20, 1887, a male on September 22, 1887, and a male on August 28, 1888. Loomis noted that these specimens represented “the only data I possess of its occurrence.”

Frank and Elmer Brown observed two or three Golden-winged Warblers in migration near Second Creek outside Salisbury in Rowan County on May 3, 1924, and another the following day “near a creek about twenty miles below town.” William McIlwaine reported one in Charlotte on May 5, 1930, and noted it as “rare.” Additional observation dates in Mecklenburg County were reported as: August 18, 1954; April 25, 1961; May 2, 1961; May 12, 1963; May 1, 1971; May 3, 1980; May 3, 1986; and May 2, 1987. William Shepard reported one in Spartanburg on April 28, 1966. Paul Hart reported one at Crowders Mountain State Park on May 4, 1984, and another there in the fall of



1985. Dick Brown’s class from UNC Charlotte collected a specimen of a Golden-winged Warbler from the base of the WRET television tower in Charlotte on September 28, 1979. The specimen was preserved in the University’s zoological collection.

Bill Hilton Jr. captured and banded two Golden-winged Warblers at his banding station in York County on September 21, 1993, another was banded there on June 6, 1995. Lex Glover observed one at Landsford Canal State Park in Chester County on September 12, 1998, and David Dobson reported one there on September 12, 1999. Barbara Gearhart reported one at Pee Dee NWR on September 24, 2000.

There have been about two dozen reports of Golden-winged Warbler in the region since the turn of the twenty-first century. These birds were reported in Catawba, Gaston, Spartanburg, York, and Mecklenburg counties. Bill Hilton Jr. banded one in York County on September 4, 2009. Penny Soares reported a “bright” male in her garden on September 30, 2015. She reported she was “shocked” to find it there and noted it was a special “treat and a new garden bird.”

Our earliest spring arrival date for this species is 25 April, and our latest spring departure date is 12 May. Our earliest fall arrival date is 18 August, and our latest fall departure date is 30 September.

The Golden-winged Warbler will occasionally hybridize with the Blue-winged Warbler resulting in two distinct forms known as Lawrence’s Warbler and Brewster’s Warbler. These hybrids are a rare and exciting find

anywhere. David Wright and Heathy Walker discovered a male Brewster's Warbler in northern Mecklenburg County on September 14, 1989. Readers are encouraged to refer to an excellent article by Leo Shapiro published in the May/June 2005 issue of the magazine *Birding* for full details on hybrids.

The Golden-winged 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 immediate conservation action.