

Distraction Display of Chestnut-sided Warbler

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At 1100 EDT on 16 June 1981 I was hiking along a dirt road leading up the side of John's Knob (1200 m) in Graham County, N.C., when a female Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*) flew from a small *Rubus* thicket along the roadside and alighted on the ground about 3 m from me. The bird was a female, showing a chestnut stripe broken in several places on its sides, a white cheek with only a trace of black below the eye, and generally less intense and less extensive greenish-yellow towards the back of the head and back than would be expected on a male. It began to chip excitedly and to drag its wings, especially the left one, while running along the ground in front of me. When I approached the bird it flew into a small tree 2 m from my head and began chipping "in protest," obviously excited and with its crown erect. A 10-minute search of the immediate vicinity failed to turn up either a nest or young, but this does not mean that one or the other did not exist. Throughout the search the bird engaged in numerous broken-wing displays and chipped frequently. Interestingly, the bird would feign a broken wing only when I was within a small area with a diameter of about 4 m. The bird's mate, a well-marked male, was seen foraging close by, but it did not engage in such antics. Lee noted that among the warblers breeding in the Carolinas only the Black-and-white and the Swainson's have been recorded performing broken-wing acts (Chat 44:111-112).

BACKYARD BIRDING (Continued from page 95)

The females and immatures begin to disappear in late September and early October. Usually they move on following a cold front that has brought with it a number of migrant thrashers from the north. When these new birds appear, there is much scolding and chasing for a day or two and then all are gone. The males who winter here seem to wander during this period in early fall, but by November, can be found in their accustomed haunts.

For the past few winters we have had two males staying over. Naturally, they do not get on well together. One stays in the hedge on one side of the house and the other on the opposite side. Except during extremely cold or snowy times, they rarely come in contact with each other. At these times, they appear to be somewhat more tolerant of each other. However, when the days begin to warm and grow longer, the two male thrashers are often seen chasing each other. When the territories are staked out, one must not cross over into that of the other. This usually means that they nest in yards other than mine, but they continue to slip in for food.

During the winter months the male thrashers revert to their typical shyness. I rarely see them except when they come for food. On warm winter days, I can hear one or both of them singing a whisper song from a concealed perch in an evergreen. By mid-January, they sing more often and for longer periods of time. When mid-February comes, singing begins in earnest as they map out their territories. With the return of the females, the singing reaches its highest and loveliest peak—from dawn until dark.