

General Field Notes

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Connecticut Warbler: First Sightings from Wake County, N.C., and a Review of Migration Records Statewide

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At noon on 12 May 1988, I carried my binocular with me on the walk to my rural mail box, 4.5 miles N of Zebulon, Wake County, N.C. As I approached the end of the driveway, a pair of Blue Grosbeaks (*Guiraca caerulea*) chased a small bird into a dry thicket. The bird perched about 4 m from me and approximately 1 m from the ground on a horizontal limb of a sapling. Although the tail of the bird was hidden by a leaf, I could distinguish the field marks of a female Connecticut Warbler (*Oporornis agilis*). The bird had an unmarked olive back, grayish head, and yellow underparts except for the buffy throat and a suggestion of a gray hood across the upper breast. The prominent eye-ring was complete and slightly buffy. The bird almost perfectly resembled the illustration of the female Connecticut Warbler in *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (National Geographic Society, 1983).

Late the next afternoon, 13 May 1988, as I walked along a path that skirts a beaver pond adjacent to the Zebulon Country Club, a small bird with an unmarked olive back and gray head flushed almost from under my feet and flew into the dense wet thicket beside the pond. The bird did not respond to pishing, so I continued my walk. Upon my return to the thicket that the unidentified bird had entered, I saw a small bird flit into a low shrub. Only the head was visible; it was dark gray with a prominent white eye-ring. As I tried to obtain a better view of the bird, it flew from shrub to shrub, uttering loud, ringing *chip* notes with each move. Once it was completely concealed, it began to sing. The loud, percussive, ringing song was nearly deafening at a distance of no more than 5 m. What I heard does not match my recording of the Connecticut Warbler's song or the various renderings of its vocalizations in English syllables. Three or four distinctly separated *cheep* notes were followed by three or four lower-pitched and slightly hurried *chup* notes. The last time the bird sang in my presence, it ended the song with a *tweet*, given with a rising inflection. Of the North American wood warblers known to have a loud, ringing song, only the male Connecticut Warbler has a gray head and throat and a complete, white eye-ring.

When the 1942 edition of *Birds of North Carolina* was prepared, there were no spring records from North Carolina outside the mountains. At Asheville, Thomas D. Burleigh found the Connecticut Warbler to be a rather late spring migrant, with almost daily records spanning the period from 12 through 27 May 1930. Subsequent reports from mountain localities extend the period of occurrence from 27 April (Chat 38:66) to 30 May (Chat 39:28).

The first published spring record of the Connecticut Warbler from the piedmont occurred at North Wilkesboro on 6 May 1956 (Chat 20:63); the first from the coast at Wilmington on 29 April 1967 (Chat 31:82); and the first from the eastern piedmont in Stanly County on 26 April 1969 (Chat 33:98), which is the earliest spring date for the state. In 1971, Connecticut Warblers were reported from Winston-Salem on 1 May (Chat 35:82) and 9 May (Chat 35:87), from near Durham on 7 May (Chat 35:87), and from Charlotte on 27 May (Chat 35:87). By the spring of 1974, Winston-Salem bird students considered the species to be a rare but regular spring transient (Chat 38:65). A second spring record for the coastal region occurred on 26 May 1979, when a female was seen at Fort Macon State Park (Chat 43:101). A singing male was at Crowders Mountain State Park on 13 May 1986 (Chat 51:55). H. T. Hendrickson (pers. comm.) and Marie Yow, a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, collected a male in breeding plumage at Greensboro on 13 May 1969. Dr. Hendrickson has donated the study skin to the North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences. Thus, prior to the two sightings from eastern Wake County, only five of the more than forty spring records of the Connecticut Warbler known from North Carolina had come from the portion of the state east of Winston-Salem and Charlotte.

According to *A Guide to Field Identification of Birds of North America* (Robbins, Bruun and Zim, Golden Press, 1983), the average first arrival date for the Connecticut Warbler in southern Florida is 1 May and the average first arrival date on the breeding grounds in central Canada is 1 June. The spring migration dates for North Carolina (26 April to 30 May) now span the

time period from slightly early arrival in southern Florida to average arrival on the breeding grounds. The peak of occurrence in the piedmont is during the first two weeks of May; the peak in the mountains remains as Burleigh found it, during the third and fourth weeks of May.

As a fall transient, the Connecticut Warbler probably occurs statewide, though—as is the case for the spring—there is no published record from the coastal plain away from the immediate coast. Coastal and piedmont sightings predominate in the fall, and in recent years the species has been reported almost annually from the Outer Banks. The earliest date for a fall migrant is 18 August, when one was banded at Hillsborough in 1970 (Chat 35:34); the latest date is 31 December, when an adult male was reported on the Bodie–Pea Island Christmas Bird Count in 1973 (Chat 38:13). A majority of the fall records are from mid-September to mid-October, the peak migration period for passerines in North Carolina

Spotted Redshank from North Carolina

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On 13 May 1987 Cooper discovered a Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*) in nearly full breeding plumage near the point of Cape Hatteras, Dare County, N. C. The bird was intermediate in size between nearby Lesser Yellowlegs (*T. flavipes*) and Greater Yellowlegs (*T. melanoleuca*). Although the bird resembled a yellowlegs in profile, its sooty black chest mottled and blotched with white was eye-catching (Fig. 1). The lower belly and crissum showed more white than the chest and upper belly. Scapulars, wing coverts, and tertials were spotted with white. The legs were dull black, showing no sign of bright color. The bill was long and straight, about twice the length of the head, and drooped at the tip; its color was dark gray to black with bright red on the basal half of the lower mandible. A white supercilium extended over the eye, which was also surrounded by a broken white eye-ring. The bird resembled a dowitcher (*Limnodromus* sp.) in flight, with dark wings and rump and a wedge of white on the back (Fig. 2). It fed actively in deeper water, running and seining with a sideways sweeping motion of the head. So distinctive was this behavior that it alone enabled us to locate the bird in the flock. Cramp and Simmons (1983) describe this behavior as being characteristic of the Spotted Redshank.

Although the combination of field characters and behavior clearly indicated Spotted Redshank, two points warrant discussion. First, all field guides (e.g., Bruun, Singer & Campbell, 1970; Heinzel, Fitter & Parslow, 1972; Peterson, Mountfort & Hollum, 1974; National Geographic Society,