

LEARNING BIRDS WITH WORDS: SPRING WARBLERS AT COLONIAL PARK

EARLY MIGRANTS

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER – *white below, heavy black streaks on breast in an upside-down U pattern, yellow sides, yellow rump* (obvious as bird flies away), *black cheek*, gray above with black streaking (female more brownish with same pattern, dark cheek); *often flycatches* (perches upright on a branch, looking about, then flies out to catch a passing insect)

PALM WARBLER – *constantly wags tail*; overall brownish, *yellow undertail coverts, yellow throat, rufous crown*; often on ground

ON OR NEAR THE GROUND

Common Yellowthroat – *yellow throat, black bandit mask* (female has no mask, dark cheek contrasts sharply with yellow throat), whitish belly, yellow undertail coverts, olive above

Mourning Warbler – *yellow below, gray hood with irregular black bib* (female has gray hood, no bib), olive above; hops on ground

Ovenbird – *streaked below* (distinct black streaks on white underparts), *white eye-ring, “cantaloupe” crown*, olive brown above; tail often raised

CLOSE TO WATER

Northern Waterthrush – *densely streaked below, narrow eyebrow* (underparts and eyebrow usually tinged yellow), dark brown above; *bobs its rear up and down* as it walks along water’s edge

ON A LIMB

Black-and-white Warbler – *striped like a zebra* (bold black and white stripes overall); *creeps on limbs* (like a nuthatch)

IN A TREE

AMERICAN REDSTART – *black with orange patches* on wings and tail, tail black-tipped from below; *often fans tail* (female drab and plain until she fans her tail, showing yellow patches)

MAGNOLIA WARBLER – *yellow below, thick black streaks on breast, black mask* (female has less streaking on breast and gray face), gray/black/white upperparts, tail black-tipped from below

Canada Warbler – *yellow below with black necklace, eye-ring, plain gray above*

Black-throated Blue Warbler – *white belly, black throat, blue above, white wing patch* (female drab olive with dark cheek and white wing patch)

Black-throated Green Warbler – *yellow face, black throat* (female has much less black on throat), green back

Yellow Warbler – *yellow overall, reddish streaks on breast* (female has no streaks), *plain face* with big black eye

Wilson’s Warbler – *yellow with a black cap* (female may show only trace of a cap), yellow-green above; a small warbler

Nashville Warbler – *yellow throat, gray head, white eye-ring*, olive above; a small warbler

Chestnut-sided Warbler – *white below, chestnut sides, yellow crown*

Bay-breasted Warbler – *dark head, deep chestnut (“bay”) throat and sides* (female paler, salmon on sides)

Blackpoll Warbler – black and white: *black cap*, white cheek, white below with thin black stripes on sides (female greenish-gray, no cap, grayish stripes on sides), *yellow legs*

Blackburnian Warbler – *flame orange throat* (female has orange-yellow throat), orange surrounds dark cheek; likes tree tops

Northern Parula – *yellow throat and yellow lower bill* (male has rust and black necklace), *blue-gray above, white wing-bars*, green back; a small warbler that likes tree tops

According to the **eBird** bar chart for Colonial Park, the twenty warblers described above are common in the spring. They are also boldly patterned, making them relatively easy to describe and learn. (If you're wondering where to begin, start with the four written in all caps: Yellow-rumped, Palm, American Redstart, and Magnolia.)

Two other warblers are common in the spring at Colonial Park, but they lack bold patterns, making them harder to identify. They are:

Tennessee Warbler – look for thin pale eyebrow, unstreaked underparts, *white undertail coverts*

Orange-crowned Warbler – look for thin dark eyeline, blurry streaks on breast, *yellow undertail coverts*

The following warblers are less common at Colonial Park in the spring:

Blue-winged Warbler

Golden-winged Warbler

Cape May Warbler

Pine Warbler

Hooded Warbler

Connecticut Warbler (on the ground)

The following are rare:

Prairie Warbler

Cerulean Warbler

Prothonotary Warbler

Kentucky Warbler

Learn to recognize other small spring migrants that are often seen with warblers:

Ruby-crowned Kinglet – olive-gray above, *wing-bars*, *white eye-ring*, ruby crown patch usually concealed; tiny and active

Golden-crowned Kinglet – olive-gray above, *wing-bars*, *black crown stripes with yellow (or orange) in the center*; tiny and active

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – *white below, blue-gray above, white eye-ring*; tiny and active, often cocks tail

Least Flycatcher – grayish-olive above, *wing-bars, bold eye-ring, whitish below*; *flycatches* (perches upright, flies out from perch to take an insect in the air)

Prepared by Sharon Kennedy, April 2010. I have drawn heavily from David Allen Sibley, Roger Tory Peterson, and Kenn Kaufman (yup, he spells his last name with one “n” and his first name with two). I take responsibility for the words “zebra,” “cantaloupe,” and “salmon.”