

The Wonderful World of Wood Warblers!

By Phil Riebel

The Miramichi area is blessed with a rich natural environment with lots of different plants, animals, birds and insects. I have a special interest in birds, and my wife and I have identified 89 species of birds on our property alone! One of the groups of birds I find the most interesting is the Wood Warblers because many of them have beautiful vibrant colors. The challenge is that they are hard to see. Below are some tips to find and recognize the most common local Wood Warbler species.

What the heck is a Warbler you say!

They are small active birds with short pointed bills. They are all migratory songbirds, meaning that they winter in the South, usually Central or South America, and then they fly North in the spring. They typically arrive in Miramichi in May, and leave in August or September. They live in tree tops or closer to the ground depending on the species. The tree top dwellers are usually brightly colored. In North America there are 54 different species.

How to Find Them?

The best time of year to see Wood Warblers is from May to mid-July when they are pairing up, nesting and taking care of their young. You need a decent pair of binoculars because they are small birds, not much longer than 6 inches from head to tail. You also need a good identification guide for North American birds, like Sibley's guide, or Peterson's.

One useful trick to attract warblers is "pisching". If you hear or see a warbler nearby, you can make a noise that sounds like "pisch, pisch pisch" or "tche, tche, tche". Repeat it several times in a row and you will often see the bird come closer. This is an alarm call that draws them closer. It is often the only way to get a good look at them.

Finally, you should learn their songs, because it may be the only evidence you have that there is a warbler nearby. The Cornell University web site called "All About Birds" (<http://www.allaboutbirds.org>) is a great resource for all North American birds. You can search for some of the species we have listed below and play their song. The other option is to buy good set of bird song CD's like the ones by John and Lilian Stokes.

Most Common Local Wood Warblers

The 10 species listed below are some of the most common ones, but there are several more. You can find these if you go for a walk at the Ducks Unlimited marsh, French Fort Cove, or local wooded trails. You may also have them in your backyard. The more bird habitat (i.e. trees) you have retained on your property, the more birds you will see.

American Redstart. The male is easy to identify because it is black with bright orange patches on the shoulders and wings

Common Yellowthroat. Easy to identify because of its bright yellow color and black mask. Very common in clear cut blocks after 2 to 5 years of growth, in alders, shrubs, often near wetlands.

Northern Parula. This one is hard to see but you can hear it in almost any wooded lot around town. They live in the canopy of trees, quite high up. If you learn the song you will find it easily. It's a beautifully colored bird.

Black-and-White Warbler. Easy to recognize because it is essentially black and white. Just think of a zebra.

Magnolia Warbler. The male has a yellow breast with black streaks and a black mask.

Chestnut-sided Warbler. The chestnut-colored patch on the shoulder and breast make this one easy to identify. Often found in small trees and shrubs, like along power lines or near fields.

Black-throated Green Warbler and **Black-throated Blue Warbler.** These two are colorful but a bit more rare than the ones above. They are in tree canopies but may come down if you "pisch".

Yellow-rumped Warbler. This one is often recognized because of its yellow patch on its back-side between the tail and main body. The male has black mask.

Yellow Warbler. This one is all yellow with reddish streaks on its breast. It is also common on small trees and shrubs near water or in fields.

Locally we have also often seen the following warblers, Bay-breasted, Tennesse, Nashville, Pine, Palm and Cape May.

Good luck finding and enjoying the Wood Warblers.