

KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly



Consenting Adults... Patient, Expectant Birders

The Wonderful World of Warblers

The Beech Forest in The Provincelands, along with Race Point and New Beach or Herring Cove, is a daily stop for many year rounders. Mostly, you can see these regulars going along this circuit at trolling speed, checking out the new day. Some of us, being more immediately aware of the weather, moisture and temperature, check it more physically, on bicycle or on foot. From the end of April to the beginning of June, visitors from almost anywhere park and check the ground, middle growth and tree tops for small songbirds called warblers.

Though it is the next left after the "dump", the Beech Forest is worlds away from its mundane neighbor. Provincetown is a flyway for warblers and the Beech Forest is an ideal habitat for these tiny creatures of great beauty: beauty of song and beauty of plumage. Audubon and Cape Cod Bird Club leaders and members arrive daily in all weather conditions to catch a glimpse and to identify the warblers. Last year on a good day, we identified twenty three species. Some are more rare than others. Some are showy and some are secretive. Some are found deep in the under growth by water, some behind wind-driven leaves, some on treetops. All are small, quick and ever moving in a constant search for food so needed after long flights some thousands of miles over open water. The food is tiny insects, "hatches" and grubs, worms, larvae and, for the water thrush, even small crustaceans, fish and snails. But that's a ground bird. To try and identify a bit of yellow fluff, darting about in pursuit of a tiny flying insect is a challenge. You always hope they will sing, too, which they do. That is another key to identification.

One of my vivid and chuckley memories is of a trip to Block Island with Audubon for "confusing fall warblers". Thirty seven people stood around a ground shrub viewing a ruby-crowned kinglet. When he did flash his crown, which is not often, all thirty-seven people moaned "Ooh-ohhh". "Consenting adults," Wendy Willard whispered to me.

On any given morning you can find consenting adults checking wing bars, eye stripes, leg colors, head and back patterns, while straining to hear notes so high pitched you begin to think a trained canine would be useful. You can hear delight as people call to each other "tzeet-tzeet-buzz" in various formulae as the clincher on identification. "Black-throated Blue!" "Black Burnian!" "chuck, tick--Canada!" "sweet, sweet--Prothonotary!" "teacher, teacher, teacher--Ovenbird!"

There is no gourmet reason for the name "ovenbird". Rather it comes from the shape of the nest which is found on the ground. The



Ovenbird

ovenbird walks on the ground and even on tree limbs unlike other birds, which hop. It was called the "night warbler" by Thoreau who searched long and hard but never identified the bird. He searched so diligently for the night song that Emerson chided him, saying that if he found the source and identified

the bird he might "thereafter lose all interest in life." So Thoreau never saw the pretty pink legs walking along and never saw the interestingly shaped nest. But you can...

Each year you meet new people as well as new birds. Ginny Page of Concord, Massachusetts had driven "oh, just another 100 miles to see a bird" and was glad to see a rose-breasted grosbeak and a parula despite the damp and lack of coffee. We began to discuss the value of Beech Forest parking lot for handicapped bird watching. The center island yields many species daily. If a person is unable to walk the loop, they could bird comfortably even in a wheelchair in this area. It's a good idea and we hope the National Seashore will accept and promote this activity.



Jackie Sones

Most people can bird and can do so long into their lives. The joy of being outdoors, of learning and experiencing, the camaraderie and the ongoing interest are treasures that cost you only making up your mind to do it. Binoculars and a field guide can give you a modest start. If you become more involved, you can purchase tapes and CDs of the calls.

But my suggestion is to purchase the video "Watching Warblers" by Michael Mile and Judith Fietch. Many of us were introduced to this video by Jackie Sones while taking warbler warm-up sessions at Wellfleet Audubon during April—a much asked for and so helpful program at only \$18 for 3 sessions. Think about it for next year. I think everybody present bought the video. Bird Watchers General Store in Orleans carries it. To see the bird in its habitat while singing slices through years of questions on identification.

So, just think of it. You live here. You have the opportunity to experience the warbler migration and to fill your mind and soul with beauty for so little effort. When you meet fellow birders from so many parts of the U.S. and the world, you'll wonder how you ever did without it.

The Cape Cod Bird Club leads warbler walks in the Beech Forest each Saturday and Sunday in May at 8 a.m. free of charge. Wellfleet Audubon leads their walk Wednesday mornings in May at 6:30 a.m. and charges \$6 for members and \$9 for non-members. Meet in the parking lot for both. The bird club has a different leader each session and Jackie Sones leads the Audubon walks. Good luck and good birding!



Wilson's Warbler, Fall Plumage