

Chestnut-sided Warbler *Setophaga pensylvanica*



Folk Name: (none)
Status: Migrant
Abundance: Uncommon
Habitat: Woodlands

The Chestnut-sided Warbler can look like an entirely different species in its spring and fall plumages. In the spring, both adults have a yellow crown, black eye-line and whisker, and chestnut on their sides. In the fall, the adults are much less colorful and the immature birds are simply lime green above and white below with a distinct white eye-ring.

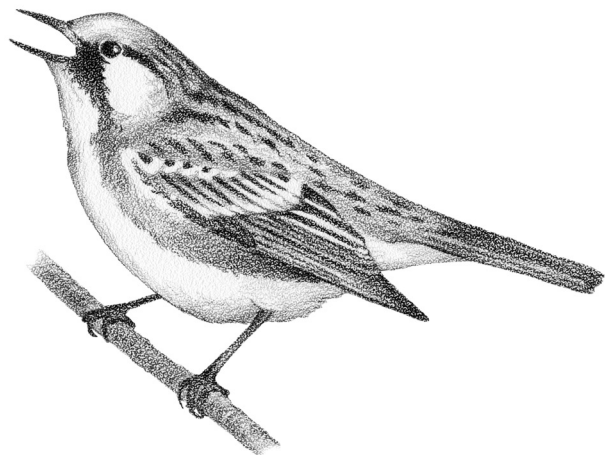
This warbler nests in early successional habitat in the mountains of North Carolina with a few possibly nesting in the mountains of South Carolina. In the 1960s, Mark Simpson recorded Chestnut-sided Warblers during breeding season in the Brushy Mountains on the western edge of this region. This species is rarely found nesting below 3,000 feet.

The Chestnut-sided Warbler is a migrant in the Carolina Piedmont. In the late 1800s, Leverett Loomis regularly recorded this species moving thorough Chester County each spring from the last week of April until 15 May, and he remarked “[o]n the way north, they sing somewhat.” Loomis found only what he described as immature birds moving south each fall from 16 August to 19 October with an obvious peak in numbers in September.

E.M. Hoffman observed a Chestnut-sided Warbler in Salisbury on May 1, 1921, and Elmer Brown saw one there on May 5, 1929. Frank Brown and William McIlwaine provided records of the Chestnut-sided Warbler in Davidson and Charlotte in the spring of 1929. McIlwaine recorded two present on 3 May in Charlotte and Brown saw his first one in Davidson on 5 May. McIlwaine recorded one on 15 May in 1930 and reported fall migrants moving through on 6 September and 8 September of that year. In 1931, he noted several in town from 7 May through 12 May. A decade later, Charlie Sellers reported Chestnut-sided Warblers arriving in Charlotte on May 12, 1940, and 10 May in 1941.

John Trott observed at least one male in Stanly County several times between 9 April and 1 May in 1955. Local Audubon Club members picked up six dead Chestnut-sided Warblers at the base of the ceilometer tower at the Charlotte airport on the morning of September 26, 1955. Joe and Becky Norwood collected four dead at the base of the WSOC television tower in east Charlotte during the first week of October 1959.

This species has been reported on about 75% of all Spring Bird Counts conducted in the region with a



peak count of 10 birds tallied in 1961. Spring migrants generally arrive in late April and depart by the end of May. Our earliest spring arrival date is 9 April, and our latest spring departure date is 18 May. Our earliest fall arrival date is a first-winter male reported by Tom Sanders at the Evergeen Nature Preserve in Charlotte on July 29, 2009. This bird was later described as “an extremely early fall migrant.” Our latest fall departure date is 19 October.

Stephen Thomas photographed an injured Chestnut-sided Warbler on September 5, 2007, foraging in the grass along a sidewalk in downtown Charlotte. The bird appeared to have hit a building while it was migrating over the city the night before.



Chestnut-sided Warbler in fall. (Steve Thomas)