

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla*



Folk Name: Teacher Bird, Golden-crowned Thrush,
Golden-crowned Accentor

Status: Migrant, Breeder, Winter Visitor

Abundance: Fairly Common to Common

Habitat: Upland forests

The Ovenbird is a 6-inch-long “golden-crowned” warbler that is one of the more common breeding warblers found in the forests of the Carolina Piedmont. However, this bird is more often heard than it is seen. It is renowned for its vigorous *teacher, teacher, teacher* song that the male sings each breeding season. This song can be heard echoing in most large tracts of deciduous forest in the Central Carolinas throughout the spring.

It is often hard to pinpoint the exact location of a male Ovenbird when he is singing. He generally starts on the ground or on a fallen log, where he walks daily foraging in the leaf litter for food. He then gradually moves into higher spots, slowly up into the understory, as his song continues to grow louder. His camouflaged appearance lets him blend into his surroundings, and his song often resonates in many directions.

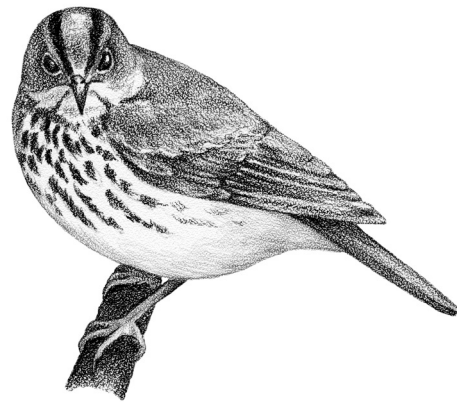
A short article on bird ventriloquism published in *The Charlotte Observer* in January 24, 1882, shared the following: “The ovenbird...singing from a distance, can throw its sharp, ringing notes in such a way as to cause the listener to believe it is almost in reach.”

The Charlotte News shared this tidbit about the Ovenbird with readers on October 11, 1910:

This member of the Thrush family [it is actually a warbler] gets its name from its queer nest, which is shaped like an oven [Dutch Oven—domed over the top], and is placed often in depressions in the ground at the foot of trees or bushes. It is an oval nest, with an opening on the end, and is made of grasses and fibres. One will have to brave the discomforts of thickly tangled woods to find the Oven Bird “at home.”

In 1942, George Andrews with the Statesville Audubon Club wrote: “The Ovenbird, Golden-crowned Thrush, brown as last year’s leaf, embodies sweetness, dignity, gayety, and jauntiness. ...Each Spring I go to seek the Ovenbird on the forest floor and each Spring he is an old fond memory and a new delight, too lovely to be realized. I follow his quick-walking gait—fast or I lose him—so brown a fairy on so brown a rug!”

Almost all Ovenbirds are found in this region between April and early October. They are regularly found on spring bird counts with a peak one-day count of 57 birds



tallied in 1961. Our earliest date of arrival in spring is 5 March and our latest date seen in the fall is 27 October. These birds migrate at night between their breeding grounds in eastern and central North America and their wintering grounds in Florida, Bermuda, Cuba, Mexico, and Central America.

We have one record of an Ovenbird lingering in the region into the month of November. John Bonestell reported that his barber informed him he had been watching a “green wren” at the Arcade Men’s Shop in downtown Charlotte. The bird had been “patrolling a patch of mulch along the side of the building” for about a month. On November 19, 2012, Bonestell stopped to get his haircut at the shop and found the bird exactly where the barber had reported it to be. The “green wren” turned out to be an Ovenbird. It’s not known how long this bird survived.



Ovenbird foraging in leaf litter in Matthews. (Will Stuart)

We have three reports from the month of December. John Scavetto reported one at Idlewild Park in Matthews on December 11, 2011. Scavetto watched the bird foraging on a log and wrote: “He foraged for about 2 minutes while I watched at about 15 feet. I couldn’t believe how crisp this bird appeared. All colors were bright and sharp. Including that heavy olive wash and darkly marked chest. Just beautiful.” Mark Woitkiewicz reported one at Latta Plantation Nature Preserve in Huntersville on February 5, 2013. Dwayne Martin reported an Ovenbird at Riverbend Park in Catawba County that arrived on December 8, 2013, and is believed to have survived there until March 30, 2014.

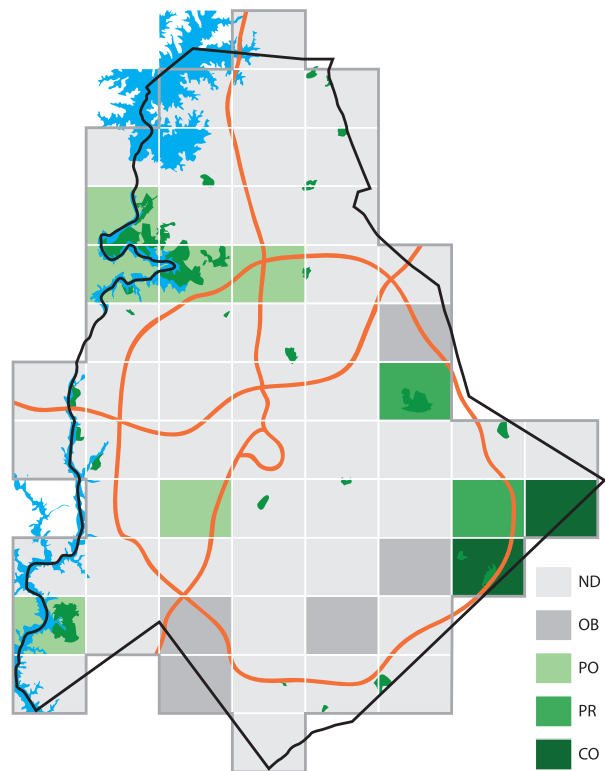
The Ovenbird can be expected to nest within intact (low edge effect) forests in every county in the Central Carolinas. The species is considered to be “area sensitive” and requires fairly large forest patches or intact small patches near a larger patch. John Cely reports two key nesting factors are “a litter layer of deciduous leaves and a closed canopy.” This warbler always builds its nest on the ground where the forest floor is open with little understory vegetation.

On June 11, 1944, Grace Anderson found an Ovenbird nest with “almost fully fledged young” in Statesville. The first Ovenbird nest confirmed in Mecklenburg County was found by William Hon and Jim Layton on May 28, 1946, about 2 miles southeast of the Charlotte city limits. They observed the parent feed a single, tailless young bird at the nest. Ovenbirds were reported nesting at the Carolina Sandhills NWR in Chesterfield County in June 1979. Robin Carter observed an adult feeding a newly-fledged young bird near Leeds in Chester County on June 10, 1989. Lex Glover reported Ovenbirds were “widespread” breeding birds to the northeast and southeast of Lancaster in Lancaster County during the summer of 1991.

The Ovenbird has the dreadful distinction of being the warbler with the highest documented incidence of death or injury from impacts with towers or buildings in Charlotte. Twenty were found dead at the base of the ceilometer tower at the Charlotte Municipal Airport on September 25, 1955, along with a group of over 100 other migrating songbirds, mostly warblers. Seventeen were found dead at the base of the WSOC television tower in early October 1959. Stephen R. Thomas photographed multiple injured Ovenbirds lying on the streets of downtown Charlotte on May 1, 2007; May 6,

2007; and May 12, 2011. Mecklenburg Audubon Lights Out volunteers documented over 50 dead or injured Ovenbirds that hit buildings in downtown Charlotte from 2012 to 2014. The reasons are unclear as to why the Ovenbird tower kill numbers are so high with respect to other warbler species flying through in migration at the same time.

Carl Ganser, a volunteer with the Mecklenburg County Breeding Bird Atlas, observed a pair of Ovenbirds feeding a new fledgling in a “large woods” off Ashley Glen Drive and Fairview Road in Charlotte on May 13, 2011. Data collected during the Mecklenburg County Breeding Bird Atlas indicate a breeding code of confirmed or probable in five or fewer survey blocks for this species in the county. It was therefore designated as an “imperiled” breeding bird that is especially vulnerable to extirpation.



Mecklenburg County Breeding Bird Atlas:

Local (PR/2, CO/2)