

Black-throated Green Warbler *Setophaga virens*



Folk Name: (none)

Status: Migrant and local Breeder

Abundance: Uncommon to Fairly Common

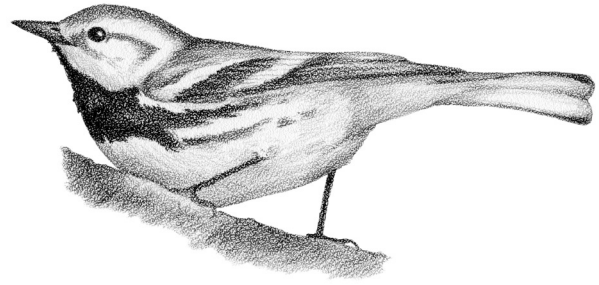
Habitat: Conifer forest or mixed hardwood forest

The Black-throated Green Warbler is a bit of an enigma in the Carolinas. In most of the region, it is strictly an uncommon to fairly common migrant seen during the peak of migration each spring and fall. The majority of these birds are heading to and from breeding sites in boreal forests of the northeastern and north-central United States and into Canada. However, some Black-throated Green Warblers breed in North and South Carolina. In fact, as South Carolina ornithologist John Cely put it: “The Black-throated Green Warbler has one of the most unusual breeding distributions of any songbird” in these two states.

There is a mountain population and a coastal population and at least one remnant population nesting in between. There is ongoing debate as to whether the mountain and coastal populations are separate subspecies. Some ornithologists believe they can be separated by distinct morphological characteristics while others disagree. The coastal population is said to be smaller overall and to have a noticeably smaller bill. It also occupies a different ecological niche: coastal swamps (non-alluvial wetlands) from Virginia to South Carolina.

The Central Carolinas is located between these two populations, but the Black-throated Green Warbler has been found to nest here in several locations in the North Carolina Piedmont. In June 1909, Bruner reported this warbler breeding just west of Taylorsville. John Trott discovered a few pairs of Black-throated Green Warblers nesting regularly near Badin, NC, at Morrow Mountain in the 1950s. The males were found singing in the tops of tall pines on the mountain for six years in a row. In 1967, Mark Simpson found the Black-throated Green Warbler to be a summer resident in the Brushy Mountains. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he found the Black-throated Green Warbler to be a common breeding bird and “the most abundant warbler in the range” at all elevations in the South Mountains. Small breeding populations are believed to be still present at each of these mountain locations today.

Leverett Loomis collected a single specimen of a Black-throated Green Warbler in Chester County on May 9, 1879. He described this warbler as being a regular migrant. William McIlwaine reported several in Charlotte on May 2, 1928. Roxie Collie Simpson pointed out a Black-throated Green Warbler to bird club members on a field trip in Charlotte on October 17, 1940. Sarah



Nooe collected one specimen of a Black-throated Green Warbler after it was found dead on the Queens College campus in Charlotte on October 19, 1955. She and her students weighed the bird in at 9.9 grams.

H. Lee Jones recorded our earliest spring arrival of a Black-throated Green Warbler on March 25, 1967. This bird was in Charlotte. Our latest spring departure date (for non-breeding sites) is 18 May. Breeding birds have been reported singing on territory as early as 18 May, but usually arrive the last week of May. The peak one-day count for this region is 10 birds. Our earliest fall arrival away from a breeding site is 28 August. Judy Walker, a professor at UNC Charlotte, collected a freshly dead specimen that appeared to have hit a window of Colvard Hall on campus on the very late date of 21 November in 2014. We have no reports of this bird in the region from December through February.

In 2017, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission held a series of public hearings to discuss proposed listings of wildlife species to receive full state protection. The coastal subspecies of Black-throated Green Warbler, known as “Wayne’s Warbler,” was proposed for listing as a State Endangered species because of limited suitable breeding habitat and a sharp reduction in numbers.



Black-throated Green Warbler on August 27, 2013.