

Orange-crowned Warbler *Oreothlypis celata*



Folk Name: (none)

Status: Migrant, Winter Visitor

Abundance: Rare to Uncommon

Habitat: Forest edge and brushy evergreen thickets

The Orange-crowned Warbler is found only as a migrant and occasional winter visitor in the Carolina Piedmont. It is a nondescript, greenish warbler with a narrow, broken white eye-ring, dark eye line, and a noticeably sharp bill. It might be confused with the Tennessee Warbler in the fall, but the Tennessee has white undertail coverts instead of the yellow ones found on the Orange-crowned Warbler. This bird has been described as “extremely rare” in the Carolinas before the month of October, and many September records are believed to be cases of misidentification.

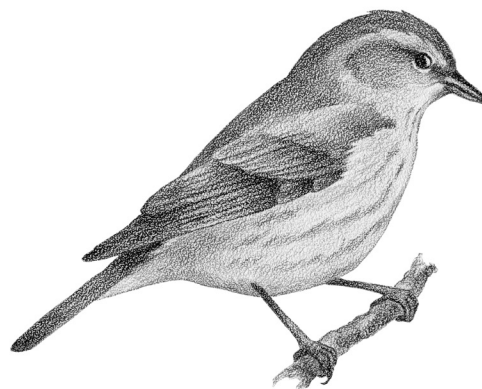
We have reports of this warbler in the Central Carolinas from 21 September through 1 May. Two of our four September reports provided good details. John Scavetto reported one in Charlotte on September 26, 2012, and wrote:

The bird was medium sized mostly olive green with short dark primaries. It made the tail seem longer in appearance. There were wide blurry streaks all the way down its sides stopping just short of the vent area. The vent area was green to yellow but void of any markings. No wing bars and a dark eye line meeting a very pointy bill. I watched and moved up the tree line toward the building watching him for about three minutes.

The late May Day sighting is of particular note as it was a singing male reported in 1996 by Kenn Kaufman, who was conducting a South Carolina Big Day with Dennis



Orange-crowned Warbler. (Jeff Lemons)



Forsythe and Robin Carter, all of whom are experienced birders of particular renown.

Christmas Bird Count participants reported one in Chester County on Christmas Day in 1937, providing our first winter report. Elizabeth Clarkson reported the first Orange-crowned Warblers recorded in Mecklenburg County on October 13–25, 1946. She later noted they were “plentiful in some years, 1946, 1947, and 1952.” Clarkson also reported them on October 3, 1948. A large fallout of migrating warblers suddenly appeared in her garden and moved through in a period of just 2 hours. She “ran from one place to another watching” many different species and noted seeing six to eight Orange-crowned Warblers at one time. Doug Pratt sighted an Orange-crowned Warbler in Charlotte on March 16, 1968.

The frequency of winter sightings of the Orange-crowned Warbler in the Piedmont of the Carolinas slowly increased throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but most of these birds still spend their winter along the coast. Heathy Walker reported an Orange-crowned Warbler visiting her suet feeder in central Charlotte on January 20, 1983, and David Wright spied one later that year in north Charlotte on 12 November. Walker reported another on February 3, 1986. Paul Hart sighted an Orange-crowned Warbler near the Charlotte airport on the day after Christmas 1987. Heathy Walker reported one visiting her yard from 18 February to 29 February in 1988 and again from 29 March through 1 April. Robin Carter sighted one in Chester County on January 26, 1988.

Today, a few Orange-crowned Warblers are usually found each year somewhere in this region. This species has been reported present here for 25 of the past 30 years. Many have been seen in December, January, and February. These winter visitors are often reported visiting backyard bird feeders where they seem to be attracted to both suet and the water in bird baths.