

1980

Warbler Tail Spots

Charles H. Blake

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Recommended Citation

Blake, Charles H. (1980) "Warbler Tail Spots," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 5 : Iss. 3 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol5/iss3/4>

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Warbler tail spots

Charles H. Blake

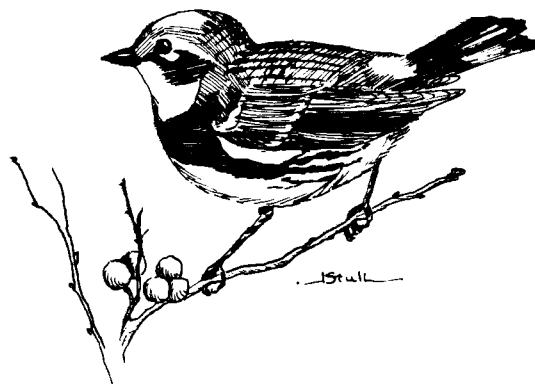
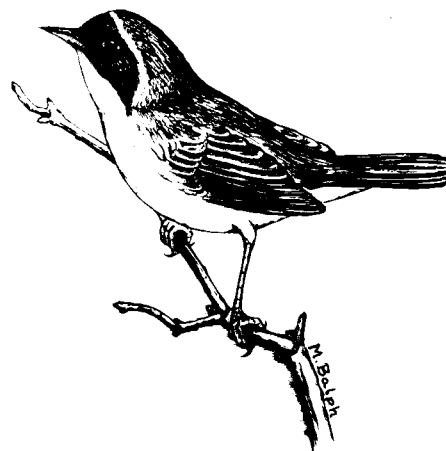
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Many of our warblers have white (or yellowish) areas in, at least, the outer tail feathers. They are wanting in: Swainson's, Worm-eating, Orange-crowned, Nashville, Wilson's and Canada Warblers, as well as the [Common] Yellow-throat, [Yellow-breasted] Chat, and *Seiurus* and *Oporornis*. Experience indicates that these spots in the outer tail feathers, when present, can be useful as auxiliary characters for confirming the identification of fall warblers. The accompanying diagrams show the patterns of eastern warblers, except the three great rarities: Bachman's, Kirtland's and Sutton's Warblers. These [latter] species have no special winter plumage.

Some further remarks are in order. Closely related species (Bay-breasted and Blackpoll) tend to have nearly identical patterns. Differences caused by age or sex seem to be fairly minor (exception: spots almost wanting in the female Black-throated Blue). Measurement of the spot length in 447 Myrtles [Yellow-rumped], disregarding age and sex, shows a range of 15 to 27 mm but the mean is 20.4 ± 1.6 mm. The span from 19 to 22 mm included 74% of the birds, so the distribution is well peaked. The white may extend to the tip (Palm) or stop short (Cape May, Myrtle). There may be a subterminal dark area next to the rachis (Black-and-White) or no such area (Palm). A few species have white extending across the outer vane (Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Prairie). Very narrow white margins on either vane are frequent in fall. These appear to wear away rather soon and are not here considered as part of the pattern.

I am indebted to the North Carolina State Museum and the Museum of Comparative Zoology for loan of specimens. ♦

Box 10, Hillsborough, NC 27278





Blackburnian



Am. Redstart



Bl-thr Green



Prairie



Yellow



Prothonotary



Blue-winged



Hooded



Chest-sided



C. Yellowthroat



Golden-winged



Pine



Cape May



Myrtle



Black-and-white



Cerulean



Parula



Bay-breasted



Magnolia



Palm



Bl-thr Blue ♂



Blackpoll



Tennessee