

1980

Are Golden-winged Warblers Selective in Choosing a Nesting Habitat?

Harriet T. Marsi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb>

Recommended Citation

Marsi, Harriet T. (1980) "Are Golden-winged Warblers Selective in Choosing a Nesting Habitat?," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 5 : Iss. 4 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol5/iss4/5>

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by the Searchable Ornithological Research Archive at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in North American Bird Bander by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usf.edu.

Are Golden-winged Warblers selective in choosing a nesting habitat?

Harriet T. Marsi

A recent article entitled "The Changing Proportion of Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers in Tompkins County and Their Habitat Selection" (John L. Confer and Kristine Knapp, *The Kingbird* 29 [1], Winter 1979) advances the theory that in Tompkins County the density of vegetation determines which warbler will be nesting in a given area. "Golden-winged Warblers (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) nest only in areas of comparatively few trees," Confer and Knapp maintain, while "Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*) territories have a wide range of tree density." If this is true in other regions, Confer and Knapp conclude, "the future for the species (Golden-winged Warbler) may be bleak . . . The recent disappearance of the Golden-winged Warbler from parts of its range is likely due to changing land practices and the absence of large tracts of recently abandoned and subsequently unoccupied farmland."

I maintain a banding station in Binghamton, Broome County, New York. It has been in operation under consistently similar conditions since 1961 and covers fields which had been used as pasture for cattle up to that time. The cows had effectively kept the vegetation down except for hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.) bushes and a very few wild apple (*Malus* spp.) trees. One section of swampland by nature had few trees on it. After 1961, the cattle-pasturing practice was abandoned

and the fields allowed to revert along normal succession lines. Unfortunately, no planned, written data on the vegetative succession has been kept. However, in August 1976, I noted in my journal: "I have suddenly become aware that the area of the net lanes is becoming dominated by sapling red maples (*Acer rubrum* L.). Many are already as high as the thornapples [hawthorns]." At the present writing (June 1980) many red maples, now 12 to 20 feet (3.5 to 6 m) high are topping the hawthorns. These are scattered among several dense shrubby thickets, mostly composed of gray dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*)

I have banded both Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers, as well as their hybrids at the Binghamton Station. The numbers banded are shown in Table I.

Table 1. Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers banded by years

Years	Golden-winged	Blue-winged	Hybrid
1961-66	9	0	0
1968-71	7	11	1
1972-75	9	4	3
1976-79	2	14	1

These records appear to give general support to the Confer-Knapp theory, especially if one compares the 1976 banding figures (the year the saplings apparently "took off") with those of 1976-1979. Apparently, in the first time-span (1961-66) the habitat was attractive to Golden-winged Warblers only. In the next two time spans — 1968 through 1975 — there seems to have been enough shrub growth for the Blue-winged Warbler, yet not so much that the Golden-winged Warbler was discouraged. After 1975, however, when the saplings started to dominate the area, the drop-off in Golden-winged Warblers was striking.

Unfortunately, the Binghamton Station has never been in operation during June and July, the nest-



ing months and, until 1972, not with any consistency during the first two weeks in August. Hence, there are no banding records for these months. But both Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers have been observed during these months and heard singing through mid-June; I would, therefore, consider that they nest here. But, without banding records for the nesting months, the data from this station cannot be considered definitive evidence to prove the Confer-Knapp theory for Broome County. Perhaps other banders with similar records, that also include June and July, can come up with data that will be more significant.

There is another aspect of this situation which other banders may be interested in checking. Confer and Knapp believe that the Blue-winged Warbler can adapt to a "wide range of territories." After examining my records, I wonder if this wide range includes the very low density of trees that the Golden-winged Warbler seems to prefer.

Meanwhile, at the Binghamton Station, I plan to do a small clearing operation in the area of the swamp, hoping that the maintenance of an area of few trees will encourage the Golden-winged Warbler to remain. ♦

Friendsville Stage, Binghamton, NY 13903

Lark Bunting banded in Connecticut

Jeffrey A. Spendelow

On 8 October 1978 I banded a Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) at Lighthouse Point Park, East Haven, Connecticut. There are several recent fall records of this species in Massachusetts and Maine (Finch, *Amer. Birds*, 30:35, 1976; Finch, *Amer. Birds*, 31:230, 1977; Vickery, *Amer. Birds*, 32:18, 1978), but this is the first Connecticut record (N.S. Proctor, pers. comm.). The bird I banded was an immature female with an incompletely pneumatized skull. Sexual determination was accomplished by comparing photographs of the bird with specimens at Yale University's Peabody Museum of Natural History and by comparing measurements taken with those given in Bailey's *Handbook of Birds of the Western United States* (1901, Houghton Mifflin Co.). The bunting appeared to be in good health and was sighted again as late as 24 October at a location about 1 km from where it had been banded.

The Lighthouse Point Park area is well known for its autumn hawk flights, and the New Haven Bird Club has conducted its Hawk Watch here for several years. This area also appears to be a "trap" for vagrant fall migrants. In 1978 I banded two immature Blue Grosbeaks (*Guiraca caerulea*) here, a male on 7 October and a female on 15 October. One of these birds was sighted again on 18 October. In 1979 vagrants captured, all immatures, in-



cluded a Blue Grosbeak on 4 October, a Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*) on 6 October, and an Orange-crowned Warbler (*Vermivora celata*) on 13 October. I would like to thank H.R. Spendelow, Jr. for banding the Dickcissel, and A. Rosengren for having invited me to run banding demonstrations in conjunction with the Hawk Watch. ♦

Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, New Haven, CT 06520