

WARBLER HOT SPOTS

Finding warblers during migration can be a tricky business, and depends on the time of year, weather, and local food resources, and many other factors. There are some locations, though, that seem to attract warblers annually, and they are often visited by birders from around the world to get better looks at these migrants. Here's a partial list of spots that are well known for their warblers. For more information, a quick web search will undoubtedly give plenty of ideas about when and how to visit.

Cape May, NJ

Cape May is a town located on the southernmost coastal tip of New Jersey. It's located at the end of a peninsula, and that peninsula creates an effective funnel for southbound migrants in the fall. Starting in early August, warblers (and many other birds) pass through with regularity. The peak of migrational diversity occurs in mid-September. The Cape May Bird Observatory conducts counts of migrating warblers starting in late August, taking of a phenomenon known as "morning flight". Birds that have migrated south overnight reach the Delaware Bay and often halt before continuing. Around dawn, these birds redistribute themselves in the area by flying north, and it's this northbound flight that brings them past the counting station at Higbee Beach. On a good day, many thousands of warblers dash by the counter, who relies on call notes, visual cues, and anything else to identify the birds. For someone who hasn't seen this process before, it seems nearly impossible to identify a warbler in flight, but in fact it can be done with excellent reliability by the determined and the experienced.

Black Swamp Marsh (Crane Creek), OH

Located in Northern Ohio on southwestern bank of Lake Erie, Black Swamp (also known as Crane Creek) relies on that large body of water to halt northbound migrants in the spring. It is notoriously difficult to predict what weather will bring the warblers in greatest numbers, but there are regularly good numbers of birds on the famous boardwalk, which runs through wet woods that are a few hundred yards from the lake. Photographers are especially attracted to this area for the phenomenal looks sometimes given by spring birds, especially on wet and windy days, which can drive the warblers low to the ground and incite them to feed without regard to people...we have had more than one report of birds picking insects off of visitors' shoes!

High Island, TX and Dauphin Island, AL

Classic locales for "fallouts", these two hotspots are spring migrant spots that rest on the north edge of the Gulf of Mexico. Although the famous fallouts garner the most attention from birders, there are regular trans-gulf migrants that start arriving in these spots as early as late March, and well into May.

South Padre Island, TX

Located on the southern coast of Texas, South Padre is a heavily developed resort town, with the exception of a few green areas that are a special attraction for spring migrants. Because

of the limited habitat, birds are concentrated in their search for water and food, especially at the green areas around the South Padre Convention Center. Here, a water feature and feeding stations sit within a small copse of short vegetation, which sits adjacent to a marsh and flats on the bay side of the island. On a good migration day, hundreds of warblers may come through, and there is almost always some bird or another utilizing this precious resource, often giving close looks.

The Dry Tortugas, FL

Situated about seventy miles west off the southern tip of Florida, the Dry Tortugas is a small group of islands that often attract many warblers during spring migration. A ferry service allows day trips, and primitive camping is also possible. With the right weather, large numbers of warblers can wind up landing temporarily on these islands in search of rest and water. Searching around Fort Jefferson may turn up a wide variety of birds on a good day. In addition, this is a good spot to see some otherwise hard-to-see North American birds, like Brown Noddy and Bridled Tern. Mid- to late- April are traditionally the most productive dates to visit.