

Orange-Crowned Warbler

Vermivora celata

The family *Parulidae* is comprised of several New World genera (including *Vermivora*, *Dendroica*, *Seiurus*, and *Wilsonia*) collectively known as the wood warblers. Wood warblers are a numerous and diverse group of small, active and colorful songbirds. Despite their namesake, wood warblers do not actually "warble." Rather, many species of this family may have several distinctive and cheerful songs. Almost entirely insectivorous, wood warblers use their slender, straight and pointed bills to capture prey. Warblers of the genus *Vermivora* (meaning "worm-eater") tend to forage in low shrubs and trees yet nest on the ground. Compared to most other *Vermivora* warblers, Orange-crowned Warblers have relatively longer-tails.

As a species, the Orange-crowned Warbler occupies riparian, brushy mixed deciduous-coniferous woodlands, forest edges, and thickets. The orange crown patch, for which they are named, is usually covered and concealed by the tips of the crown feathers. These little warblers (13cm) are a dull olive above and a pale yellow below. Because of their drab coloration, Orange-crowned Warblers are difficult to distinguish from many other species (such as female Yellow and Yellow-rumped Warblers). However, their yellow undertail coverts and faint, blurred olive streaks on the sides of the breast may aid in their identification. A distinctive but short, Cleopatra-like eye line is present in all seasonal plumages.

The song of the Orange-crowned Warbler is a fast trill of flat notes. Often, they sing so quickly that individual song notes are indistinct. Sounding like a rapid, "titititititititutu," their song is downslurred with the last few notes sung at a lower pitch. Their call note is a simple, high and sharp "chip." When on the fly, these warblers use a clear, high, short and rising "seet" call note.

It is believed that the female Orange-crowned Warbler is the nest-builder, constructing the cup-shaped nest on the ground. Occasionally a low shrub may also serve as a nest site. Nests are assembled from coarse grasses and bark strips and then lined with fine materials. The 3-6, white eggs of the clutch are marked with reds or browns, usually near the larger ends. Although data on incubation and brood care is scant, it is believed that the female alone incubates the clutch for 12-14 days. Young birds fledge in another 8-10 days post-hatching. It is thought that both parents assist in caring for the young.

Orange-crowned Warblers are foraging generalists. Although insects compose a major portion of their diet, these warblers also feed on fruits and berries, nectar, tree sap and plant galls. Generally, they forage in low branches, often among dead leaf clumps, and glean invertebrates and fruit from vegetation. These birds may even occasionally be seen at hummingbird feeders!

A widespread and fairly common species, the Orange-crowned Warbler winters from the southern United States south to Central America and Guatemala. Their breeding range spans throughout most of Alaska and Canada to the northeastern states, south along the Pacific Northwest to California and throughout the western states.