

# Yellow-Rumped Warbler

*Dendroica coronata*

The family *Parulidae* is comprised of several New World genera (including *Dendroica*, *Vermivora*, *Seiurus*, and *Wilsonia*) collectively known as the wood warblers. Wood warblers are a numerous and diverse group of small, active and colorful songbirds. The word "warble" means "singing with trills, runs or quavers." However, despite their namesake, wood warblers are not true warbles and 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. Members of the genus *Dendroica* (meaning "tree-dweller") include the Yellow-rumped, Yellow and the Townsend's Warblers. A large group, this genus is primarily composed of arboreal warblers with wing bars and tail spots.

As a species, the Yellow-rumped Warbler is comprised of two former species (now subspecies), the eastern Myrtle Warbler and the western Audubon's Warbler. Of these subspecies, the Myrtle Warbler is most commonly found in Alaska, particularly in Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. Abundant in boreal coniferous forests and mixed woodlands, Yellow-rumped Warblers are generalists able to forage in a variety of habitats. In Alaska, they also inhabit cottonwood (poplar) stands along riparian areas. A small (14cm) bird, the Yellow-rumped Warbler is identified by its characteristic yellow rump, yellow shoulder patches, white tail patches and yellow crown. Eastern forms (Myrtle Warblers) are distinguished from western forms (Audubon's Warblers) by their white eyebrows, white throat and sides of neck and contrasting cheek patch. In the western race (Audubon's Warbler), the throat is yellow. The Yellow-rumped Warbler's grayish back and wings are striped with black. Their black breast is offset by the white of the wing bars, belly and tail spots.

Yellow-rumped Warblers appear to have at least two indistinct song patterns. Their song, similar to the trill of a Junco, is described as a flat, shivering "tuwee-tuwee-tuwee" or "tyew-tyew-tyew." Often, the notes of the song may be doubled. Given throughout the year, their call is sharp, emphatic "chek."

Female Yellow-rumped Warblers build their cup-shaped nests on horizontal branches of coniferous trees, although deciduous trees may also serve as nest sites. The nests are constructed with shredded bark, weed stalks, twigs and rootlets and carefully lined with feathers. Interwoven into the nest structure, the feathers are positioned to curve over the nest and conceal the eggs. A clutch consists of 3-5, 18mm creamy white eggs, marked or wreathed with brown or gray. After the female incubates the eggs for 12-13 days, hatchlings fledge in another 10-12 days. Both parents feed the young and often bring food to the nest simultaneously.

Yellow-rumped Warblers are opportunistic foraging generalists. Although insects

compose the majority of their diet, these warblers also feed on the berries of shrubs in winter. These amazing little birds are able to digest the waxy coating of many northern berries indigestible to other birds. Many foraging strategies are used to gather insects and berries. They may pursue their prey by swooping after it in short spurts of flight or hover and glean insects and berries from the ground and vegetation. Also, they may skim over the water to capture insects at the surface. During winter, male birds tend to forage at higher altitudes than females.

The Yellow-rumped Warbler is one of the last wood warblers to migrate from the breeding grounds and winters from the southern United States to Central America, although some birds may not migrate. This species typically migrates at night and may occur in mixed flocks with other warblers and chickadees. Their ability to digest the waxy coating of berries probably enables these birds to winter farther north than most wood warblers. The breeding range spans throughout most of Alaska and Canada to the northeastern states, south along the Pacific Northwest to California and is spotted throughout the western states.