

Wilson's Warbler

Wilsonia pusilla

The family *Parulidae* is comprised of several New World genera (including *Wilsonia*, *Dendroica*, *Vermivora*, and *Seiurus*) collectively known as the wood warblers. Wood warblers are a numerous and diverse group of small, active and colorful songbirds. The name "warbler" means "singing with trills, runs and quavers" and was originally applied to European warbler species, unrelated to the North American Wood Warblers. 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. Wilson's Warbler is a member of the genus *Wilsonia*. This genus is composed of wood warblers with conspicuous rictal bristles around the mouth. These bristles form a tactile insect-net to aid these warblers in catching insects on the wing. Named for their diminutive size (only 12cm), the Latin name of the Wilson's Warbler, "*pusilla*," means "very small!"

Wilson's Warbler is a very small (12cm) and active bird found in dense, riparian woodlands and brushy vegetation near water, especially willow and alder thickets. These adaptable birds are able to nest over a wide range of elevations. Olive above and vibrant yellow below, these warblers have yellow lores and a long and dark, completely olive tail. Their large black eyes contrast with their vivid yellow face. Males have a distinctive, velvety black cap offset by a golden yellow forehead. In the female, the crown patch is diminished, brownish or absent altogether. However, females do have a vague but characteristic yellowish eyebrow stripe. Wilson's Warblers lack yellow tail-spots, wing bars and streaks on the breast. These plumage traits, along with their long, thin, solid-olive tail, distinguish Wilson's Warbler from another willow-dwelling species, the Yellow Warbler.

Wilson's Warbler rapidly whistles a chattering series of 10-15 "chchchchchchchchchch" notes. The whistled notes are short and quick, with the last few notes downslurred. Their call is a husky, sharp "jimp" or "jip." When on the fly, the call is a clear, abrupt "tilk."

Ground nests are cup-shaped and placed among vine tangles, tree roots and grasses. In just five days, the female rapidly assembles the bulky nests of dead leaves, grasses and mosses and lines it with fine grass and hair. Clutch size ranges from 2-7, 16mm white to creamy eggs, variably marked or wreathed in browns. Unaided, the female incubates the eggs for 10-13 days. Young birds fledge in another 8-11 days post-hatching. Both parents assist in caring for the offspring.

On the breeding grounds, Wilson's Warblers consume insects gleaned from foliage and bark. In winter, these warblers will occasionally also feed on berries.

These birds hunt flying insects by swooping after them from their perches. They also glean insects from the ground and vegetation as they hover low above the forest floor.

Wilson's Warblers overwinter in Central America as far south as southern Panama. During the breeding season, they range throughout most of Alaska and Canada to the northeastern states and south along the Pacific Northwest to parts of the western and midwestern states.