

MYRTLE WARBLERS NESTING IN PENNSYLVANIA

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The summer status of the Myrtle Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*) in Pennsylvania has long been a puzzle to ornithologists of the state. The southernmost known limit of the breeding range until now has been the Catskill Mountains of New York. Until recent years there have been but a handful of sight observations in Pennsylvania in summer, with the validity of some of them being doubted. Warren (Report on the Birds of Pennsylvania. Edition 2, 1890) lists three summer records, as follows: Cameron County—June 25, 1888, McKean County—July 14, 1889 and Clinton County—August 10, 1889 and comments, "Although I have never found the nest of the Yellow-rump in this state, I believe that future research will show that it breeds regularly, but sparingly, in some of our secluded and higher mountainous districts. I have seen on different occasions, as noted on a previous page, birds of this species in the summer months; and have also observed single birds or small detached flocks late in August and early in September, in Chester, York and Juniata counties, whence they doubtless had come from some comparatively near breeding place." Todd (Birds of Western Pennsylvania, 1940:515) questions the accuracy of these reports, and can find "absolutely no confirming evidence from other sources," but admits that "Warren's own observations may generally be trusted." Sutton (An Introduction to the Birds of Pennsylvania, 1928) mentions no summer records.

John D. Carter (Cassina, XXV:33) reports at least two males in song at Pocono Lake June 5-7, 1923 and has told me that he once found young Myrtle Warblers not long from the nest. These were the first indications of probable actual nesting within the borders of the state. He remarked to me in 1933 that he had occasionally seen the Myrtle in summer but had never been successful in finding the nest. Those of us who have been in the field with Carter during the nesting season and have watched the perseverance and determination with which he could seek out the nest which was his immediate objective may assume that the Myrtle must have been rare indeed at Pocono Lake prior to 1933, for, had there been any semblance of regular occurrence, Carter would almost certainly have discovered them. The writer spent the entire summer of 1933 at Pocono Lake, was in the field almost daily, often nest-hunting with Carter, kept daily lists and recorded no Myrtles that season.

There have been several irregular reports subsequent to that time, but it was not until 1948, when the writer spent the first half of the summer at

Pocono and noted Myrtle Warblers singing regularly through July, that speculation again arose as to their nesting in the area. James Bond became interested in the reports and urged a comprehensive search the following spring. Accordingly, Chandler Ross and the writer spent the last two week-ends of May at Pocono Lake Preserve, concentrating our search near the headquarters buildings by the foot of the lake. Here Myrtles had been most numerous the preceding year, and I had heard as many as five or six individual singing males during July. Egbert S. Cary, Jr., a resident of the Preserve and a corresponding member of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, greeted us with the word that on May 19th he had watched a female gathering spider webbing near the office, but had been unable to determine where she had carried it. We watched the male diligently and determined his singing territory. Song was usually from the top boughs of tall spruces over a radius of roughly fifty yards. The female was kept under observation whenever she appeared, and evergreens suitable for nesting sites were scrutinized without success. Bond also joined the search for a day, and he, too, was unsuccessful.

Cary, at Bond's suggestion, scattered small, white chicken feathers on the ground in hopes that the warblers might utilize them in lining the nest. Cary's surveillance, however, could not be continuous, and, while feathers seemed to disappear, the warblers were never caught in the act of removal.

On June 5, 1949, Cary noted the female carrying food and followed her to a small nearby spruce where, on a bough at an elevation of twelve feet, he found the elusive nest with three well-fledged young, and to him goes the honor of discovery. The rearing was successful and the nest later removed to the nature room of the Pocono Lake Preserve Library, where it is on exhibit today. In the lining may be seen some of Cary's chicken feathers!

Curiously enough, the writer found a second nest on June 27th with no effort whatsoever. A small, drab warbler breaking off dead twigs from a hemlock a few yards beyond the back door of the cottage attracted my attention and proved to be a female Myrtle. She repeatedly flew back and forth to a spot some 30-40 feet high on a lateral branch of a large white pine with the dead twigs, and the framework of a nest under construction was easily noted. Over a half-hour period she made approximately a dozen trips with nesting materials, most of which were twigs from the same hemlock where she was originally observed. The male did not help with the construction during this period but was heard singing several times from about fifty yards away. At both nests, singing territory seemed to be centered at a considerable distance from the territory around the nest itself. Of interest in the second nest discovery are the location, which is unusually high for this species, and the late date, which could indicate either an unsuccessful first attempt or a second brood. Unfortunately, this was the last week-end in June, the cottage was rented for July, and no further opportunity was therefore presented to watch the progress of the nest.

Over the years, records of Myrtle Warblers at Pocono Lake by Carter, Cary, Fletcher Street and the writer show observations as early as January 17th and as late as October 19th. In the mild winter of early 1950, Cary recorded Myrtles almost daily from January 17th until the end of March, unusual records for winter from the mountains, although winter Myrtles are often noted about the Philadelphia region.

Pocono Lake Preserve is a woodland area encircling Pocono Lake and lies on the western part of the Pocono plateau at an elevation of approximately 1900 feet. Its Canadian zone flora and fauna have long made it a favorite spot with Delaware Valley ornithologists, and papers by Baily, Carter and Fletcher Street of their observations may be found in earlier numbers of *Cassinia*. Here, within a hundred miles of Philadelphia, they found the nests of Yellow-bellied Flycatchers and White-throated Sparrows, both at or near the southern limit of their ranges; here in the dense spruces were considerable numbers of nesting Golden-crowned Kinglets, which, curiously, are not found breeding to the south and west along the Alleghenies until one reaches the spruces of eastern West Virginia and western North Carolina; here were nesting Brown Creepers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Nashville Warblers and singing Hermit Thrushes; and now, too, the Myrtle Warbler has found a Pennsylvania home in Pocono's pines and spruces and is perhaps the most interesting resident of this rich area.

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