

Male Golden-winged Warbler Attends Blue-winged Warbler Nest

by
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Introduction

Beginning in 1986, Ron Kingswood and the author initiated a project to document, by photographic means, the breeding warblers and vireos of Elgin Co., Ontario. The Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*), although referred to by Brooman (1954) as "a regular, but not common summer resident", is one of a number of warblers lacking breeding evidence for the county (G. Peck [Ontario Nest Record Scheme], pers. comm.). The first sight record of the Blue-winged Warbler (*V. pinus*) for Elgin Co. occurred in 1963 but the species was not found breeding within its borders until 1985.

It is a well established fact that where the breeding range of these two warblers overlap, as is the case in Elgin Co., hybridization between the species can occur (Parkes 1951). Gill (1980) notes that Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers normally do not defend breeding territories against each other. However, Grom and Panza (1986) describe in detail the fierce defence of a nest in Pennsylvania by a male Brewster's Warbler (*V. chrysoptera* x *V. pinus*), mated to a

female Brewster's, against a persistent interloper, a male Golden-winged Warbler.

Description

On 8 June 1988, we found a male Golden-winged Warbler near a concession road in Bayham Township, Elgin Co. When first observed it appeared to be carrying food to and alternately singing from the west side of a semi-circular opening on the edges of a mixed deciduous wood.

The Golden-wing was also noted to repeatedly chase what we initially identified as a female Blue-winged Warbler across the opening into a thicket of shrubs. Closer observations, however, showed it to be a male Blue-wing. A visit to the site the following day failed to disclose the whereabouts of a nest but both males were observed carrying food and engaging in further "dog fights" across the clearing, always in a west to east direction.

Returning on 13 June, Kingswood discovered a well-concealed ground nest containing five young nearly ready to fledge. It was situated about 2m in from the west edge of the open area and sur-

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rounded by several saplings. The dead top half of a broken bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*) rested across the nest, effectively camouflaging the dome-shaped leaf structure beneath. The broken stalk also provided a perch by which the adults would descend to the nest.

We immediately began to set up the blind and photographic equipment. I was not quite settled in and Kingswood was scarcely out of sight when a female Blue-winged Warbler arrived and began feeding the young, followed closely by the male. As the male Blue-wing departed, a male Golden-winged Warbler with food in its bill appeared about 30cm above the nest. After a momentary pause, it left without further approaching the nest.

During one of the subsequent visits by both Blue-wings, the male Golden-wing again appeared above the nest at approximately the same distance as before. Anticipating his return, I was able to obtain one exposure of the Golden-wing at the nest, with food clearly visible in his bill, while the female Blue-wing attended to the nestlings just below him. As was the case during his first visit, the Golden-wing departed without delivering the food to the young.

Soon thereafter the nestlings began to leave the nest, one by one. In the interval that followed, four adult birds were observed simultaneously in the immediate area, all endeavouring to feed the fledglings: a male Golden-wing, a male Blue-wing, and two female Blue-wings.

Summary

It is quite possible that a second nest existed in close proximity to the subject nest where the two Blue-wings appeared to be the dominant pair. By attrition it would seem that the male Golden-wing was paired with the second female Blue-wing.

To test our theory, we returned to the area on 15 June, by which time we hoped that the five nestlings and their rightful parents would have left the area, leaving the remaining pair to confirm the coupling of all four adults. Instead, we found one young being alternately fed by the male Golden-winged Warbler and the male Blue-winged Warbler. Careful examination of the transparencies obtained at the nest suggest that both adult Blue-wings appeared to be "pure", with no signs of any ancestral hybridization. Also, studies were made of each photograph to determine if more than one female attended the nest, but no discernible differences were noted. Plumages of the nestlings appeared to be uniform, a further indication that the adult male of the subject nest was a Blue-winged Warbler.

Literature Cited

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