

TIPS FOR TYROS - CONFUSING FALL WARBLERS:
BLACKPOLL, BAY-BREASTED, AND PINE

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Although they can't hold a candle to the Old World warblers, which are confusing at all seasons, the fall-plumaged North American wood warblers do add an element of confusion to a new birder's identification problem. Foremost among these are the Blackpoll Warbler (*Dendroica striata*), the Bay-breasted Warbler (*D. castanea*), and the Pine Warbler (*D. pinus*). We'll do the easiest first.

Pine Warbler. The Pine Warbler is uncommon to rare in the fall in New England. Although it breeds commonly on Cape Cod and is widely but thinly distributed elsewhere across the state, it is an early migrant, and adults especially are seldom seen after August. Immatures may be seen, usually singly, until mid-October. What this means is that from September on the chances are good that the bird you're looking at is not a Pine. However, if it appears large (for a warbler), has a clear yellow breast, white wingbars, and an unstreaked back, then it may well be an adult-plumaged Pine Warbler. The immature has wingbars, is unstreaked and tan-colored (darker above and lighter below), thus giving it a "clean-looking" appearance.

Bay-breasted and Blackpoll warblers. The Bay-breasted Warbler is most abundant from late August to mid-September and is widely distributed as a migrant, although its numbers may vary dramatically from year to year. Blackpoll Warbler migrants appear in small numbers in late August and early September, and reach peak abundance from mid-September to mid-October. Its numbers also may vary from year to year.

In general appearance, the Bay-breast bears close resemblance to the Blackpoll in that both are greenish above and light below with white wingbars and tail spots and a streaked back. The real tip off as to its identity is the color of the upperparts, which in the Bay-breast is yellow green and in the Blackpoll is gray green. The underparts are equally distinctive. The Bay-breast is buffy below, a feature that is most pronounced on the undertail coverts. In addition, all age and sex classes except the immature female show varying degrees of bay on the sides. The Blackpoll's underparts are whitish yellow with the yellow varying from a tinge to a complete suffusion. If doubt remains, then check the legs, which are lead gray in the Bay-breast and brownish yellow in the Blackpoll. If you have particularly good glasses, check the soles of the feet - which are yellow in the Blackpoll!

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