

RECORD REVIEW: SONGS OF THE WARBLERS OF NORTH AMERICA

by Michael R. Greenwald, West Roxbury

SONGS OF THE WARBLERS OF NORTH AMERICA (Identified on the cover as *WARBLERS*) by Donald J. Borror and William W. H. Gunn, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in association with the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. 1985. Three 12-inch 45 RPM records or two cassettes. \$34.95.

In this expanded version of their *Songs of Warblers of Eastern North America*, Borror and Gunn have presented the birding community with yet another new concept in bird-sound recordings. This set contains 281 examples of the songs and calls of the 57 species of warblers that had occurred in North America at the time of production, including Gray-crowned Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis poliocephala*), Slate-throated Redstart (*Myioborus miniatus*), Fan-tailed Warbler (*Euthlypis lachrymosa*), Golden-crowned Warbler (*Basileuterus culicivorus*), and Rufous-capped Warbler (*Basileuterus rufifrons*). The Crescent-chested Warbler (*Vermivora superciliosa*), whose first and only North American occurrence was in Arizona, September 3-15, 1983, is not included. Several regional and seasonal variations are given for each warbler species, and, if applicable, variant song-types are given as well. Call notes are included for many species.

The recording quality is superb and has been engineered to bring to ordinary discs and cassettes the closest possible approximation of the quality available on the original tapes as played on laboratory equipment. Furthermore, quite useful and most innovative is the accompanying fifty-page booklet. This booklet contains precise information for locating the tape source of each recording, a short article on the general features of warbler song, and, available perhaps for the first time, a key to warbler songs done in the couplet style of other biological keys. Each pattern or variant of warbler song is shown on a sonogram which, unlike those shown in some field guides, is 1.25 inches high and 3.75 to 11 inches long, thereby making it easier to read and showing much more detail.

If there is any weakness at all in this set, it lies in the sparseness of comments comparing the song of one species with that of another. To be sure, other recordings of bird songs do not have such notations, but since this set has some and is otherwise so thorough, more discussion would be welcome.

However, there are certain factors of which the buyer should be aware, although they should not be considered defects. Discs and cassettes come in an *identical package*. Be sure you know which you are buying before you take the package off the shelf. Second, the discs are 45 RPM in order "to achieve maximum undistorted playback level" (page ii). Although they have standard size holes, you should be sure your turntable can accommodate this speed. Finally, this set is not really designed for field use.

One of the technical notes on adjusting the cassette deck should be adequate to demonstrate that fact: "Set the equalization switch for Chrome, Type II (70 microsecond) tape" (page ii). The cassette recorders which most birders carry into the field are not capable of making such an adjustment.

This set is not for beginners. Those who have no familiarity at all with warbler song will find it overwhelming. Those who are just starting to learn bird sounds are better advised to use recordings that are limited to one or two examples of the bird's most typical song (such as Roger Tory Peterson's *A Field Guide to Bird Songs*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company and The Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University, 1983). However, to those who already have some familiarity with warbler song, this set is indispensable and represents a major advance in the availability of bird sound to the nonprofessional.

MICHAEL R. GREENWALD began birding by ear in New Hampshire's White Mountains in the early 1970s. He has served as a resident naturalist in the hut system of the Appalachian Mountain Club for eight years, has worked with the New Hampshire Breeding Bird Atlas since 1982, and has been a guest lecturer on the subject of birding in the White Mountains. He has been on the editorial staff of *Bird Observer* since the spring of 1984.



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