

FIRST CONFIRMED NESTING OF CERULEAN WARBLER IN MASSACHUSETTS

by D'Ann W. Brownrigg and J. Thomas Brownrigg

On July 2, 1989, we observed a male Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*) feeding a fledgling near Gate 40 at Quabbin Reservoir in Worcester County, Massachusetts. We were exploring an area a little off the beaten path when we heard a call that we did not recognize. The series of buzzy warbles, all on a single pitch and uniformly repeated, was distinguishable from the songs of the many American Redstarts present. While trying to locate the singing bird, we saw a fledgling in a thirty-foot-high shagbark hickory near the road. The youngster was perched, midway between the trunk of the tree and the outside of the canopy, on a branch about ten feet down from the top of the tree. The bird had nearly white undersides, a yellowish eyebrow, and two broad wing bars on darker wings. The tail was quite short, and not all of the feathers had erupted. While speculating about the identity of this quiet fledgling, we saw the singing bird approach and feed it. After carefully noting that the adult bird had two prominent white wing bars, black streaking on the sides, and a black breast band on an otherwise white underside, we consulted the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* and concluded that both birds, as well as the song, matched the description of the Cerulean Warbler and that the adult bird was clearly a male.

We observed the birds clearly for thirty minutes or so. At one point the adult flew to a lower dead branch of a large red oak and perched for a few minutes, which gave us a particularly good view. The young bird sat quietly in one location the entire time that we watched it. The adult flitted from branch to branch just below the leaves at the tops of the oak trees, moving three to four feet at a time and staying within about fifty feet of the young bird. We saw him feed the fledgling two or three times.

We reported the sighting to Wayne Petersen by calling the Environmental Helpline and to Mark Lynch, who had requested information about unusual sightings at Gate 40 in his *Bird Observer* article about the area [15 (5): 221, October 1987]. Both Wayne and Mark told us that the Cerulean Warbler has been expanding its range and that the species had been seen in different parts of the Quabbin Reservation earlier in the summer. Both males and females and a copulating pair had been observed, but our report was the first observation of recently fledged young.

On a return trip on July 8, 1989, we checked the area three times during the day but did not see or hear either bird until about 3:00 P.M., when we heard a male singing. This time we watched him as he moved across a broader area,

singing and moving about near the tops of the trees. At one point he seemed to be part of a diverse mixed flock of chickadees, Tufted Titmice, a White-breasted Nuthatch, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, redstarts, a Red-eyed Vireo, and an Ovenbird, all concentrated near us. We did not see the young bird on that occasion. We saw a Brown Creeper, a towhee, Least Flycatchers, and Veerys and heard a Black-billed Cuckoo in the immediate area where the Ceruleans had been observed. The entire area, which includes fields, a stream, and a logging road, was well worth birding.

The section where the Cerulean family was found is part of a mature deciduous forest (mostly oaks with a few maples, hickories, and an occasional white pine) on a long but irregular slope. This part has been fairly recently logged. The leaves on the trees are concentrated in a thin canopy with most of the inner branches bare, and the understory vegetation is sparse. On the hilltops, there are a few ferns, blueberries, and wild sarsaparilla. On the lower slope, there are boggy areas with more shrubs.

We wish to thank Wayne Petersen and Mark Lynch for their help regarding this sighting. On July 9, Wayne Petersen and David Ludlow visited the same area and located two singing male Cerulean Warblers, one of which was feeding two recently fledged young. As with the initial observation, at no time during the hour they spent in the area was a female bird seen.

D'ANN W. and J. THOMAS BROWNRIGG of Carlisle have been serious birders for about six years, largely inspired by Betty Valentine's "Birding for Fun" course at Massachusetts Audubon. Tom has been interested in natural history since his childhood in the Chicago area. Tom and D'Ann met in a chemistry lab when undergraduates at the University of Illinois in Champaign and have been married for twenty-three years. D'Ann has an M.S. in psychology (ethology) from the University of Chicago, where she worked with doves. Tom has a Ph.D. in chemistry from the same university and is applications manager at American Holographic in Littleton. They particularly enjoy outings to Quabbin Reservation and consider Gate 40, which they learned about from Mark Lynch's article in *Bird Observer*, one of the most rewarding areas in terms of variety of birds and interesting wild terrain.

Bird Observer Spring Workshops

The Vernal Renaissance — an introduction to spring _____

Spring is a season eagerly awaited by New England birders, naturalists, and gardeners. As the days lengthen in March and April, snow and ice begin to melt, and southwest winds usher in migrant birds. Maple sap begins to flow, pussy willows pop, spring peepers peep, and beneath the icy waters of vernal ponds, fairy shrimp and spotted salamanders engage in ages-old breeding rituals.

In this introduction to spring, we will discuss some of the principle features of the season as they occur in coastal and freshwater environments and in field and woodland habitats. The field trip will be designed to provide opportunities to experience some of the notions described during the lecture and to discover an assortment of the early spring migrant birds.

Seminar: Friday, April 20, 1990. Field Trip: Sunday, April 22, 1990. Cost: \$30.

Butterflies of the Bird World — a workshop on spring warblers _____

For many birders, warblers represent the zenith of songbird evolution. The thirty-five species regularly occurring in Massachusetts provide splendid examples of a number of ecological, behavioral, and conservation problems. Participants will be introduced to the topics of migration, breeding and foraging habitat, and song. These issues will be interwoven with the techniques of spring warbler identification. The field trip will be to Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge and to Crooked Pond in Boxford at a time when a variety of early spring warblers are passing through the region.

Seminar: Friday, May 4, 1990. Field Trip: Sunday, May 6, 1990. Cost: \$30.

The Barrens and their Beasts — a workshop on pine barren ecology _____

Southeastern Massachusetts lies close to the northern edge of a unique association of plants and animals called the pine barrens. To the uninitiated, pine barrens appear desolate and devoid of animal life, yet several of the state's rarest plant and invertebrate species occur there. Breeding birds in the pine barrens include species with a southern affinity, such as Whip-poor-will and Fish Crow, and more northern species like Hermit Thrush and Nashville Warbler. Participants will be introduced to the interesting and often understated ecology of the pine barrens. The indoor session will present an overview of the environment and its birdlife, and the field trip to the Myles Standish State Forest in Plymouth will offer the opportunity to observe firsthand the representative birds and plants.

Seminar: Friday, June 8, 1990. Field Trip: Sunday, June 10, 1990. Cost: \$30.

WAYNE R. PETERSEN will present all three workshops. All seminar sessions will be held at Babson College, Tomasso Hall (Room 209), Forest Street, Wellesley, MA, from 7:30 - 9:30 P.M. Details about the field trips will be announced at the seminars preceding them. If you have questions, please call 617-293-5262 (Hanson). Preregistration is required. Each workshop is limited to twenty participants, so please register early.

TO REGISTER, send your name(s), address, and telephone numbers (day and evening) along with your check payable to Bird Observer to Bird Observer Workshops, c/o W.R. Petersen, 378 County Road, Hanson, MA 02341.