

This month's photograph features an obviously small (particularly notice the legs) and reasonably slim bird with a fine, sharp-pointed bill. The bill shape indicates that the bird is an insectivore, but not a vireo because the upper mandible lacks the tiny hook at the tip that is a signature of the vireo family. The fact that its tail is relatively short and that the bird is perched in a bush argues against its being an American Pipit, a species that the bird in the photograph otherwise slightly resembles.

Knowing that the bird is not one of the above possibilities and considering the features that are obvious in the photograph, there is a strong suggestion that the photograph represents some species of wood-warbler (Subfamily Parulinae). As most birders are aware, having established that the small insectivore in the picture is a wood-warbler only somewhat reduces the identification options: There are over 30 regularly occurring species of wood-warblers in Massachusetts!

However, a quick assessment of the pictured bird's characteristics reveals a prominent eyebrow stripe, streaks on the sides and breast, faint wing bars, the suggestion of some faint streaking on the back, and strikingly pale (white?) and unmarked undertail coverts. The presence of wing bars and breast streaks at once eliminates quite a number of warbler species that lack these features.



*Photograph by Roger Everett*

Indeed, of the features noted, the obvious pale eyebrow stripe may be the most important. Although waterthrushes have obvious eyebrow stripes, they lack wing bars and would typically be more heavily streaked below. A Prairie Warbler, although similar in some respects, would not show such a distinct eyebrow stripe and would usually possess a dusky jaw stripe not seen on the pictured bird.

At this point, Palm Warbler (*Dendroica palmarum*) should be a strong possibility. With this in mind, it can be appreciated that the pale undertail coverts in the photograph are in actuality yellow, a characteristic field mark of Palm Warblers in any plumage. If the pictured warbler were on a video, it would no doubt be vigorously pumping its tail!

Palm Warblers are common spring and fall migrants in Massachusetts and occasionally they even attempt to overwinter along the coastal plain. The bird in the picture is in winter plumage and was photographed on Cape Cod.

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## AT A GLANCE

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Photograph by Wayne Petersen



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