

ABOUT THE COVER

Black-throated Gray Warbler

The Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*) has a propensity for vagrancy. Normally warblers of the Far West, they have made an appearance in twenty states where they do not breed, from Florida to Massachusetts on the east coast of the United States, and in Canada as far north as Nova Scotia. The Black-throated Gray Warbler is an elegant little bird, with black head and throat slashed with two bars of white, gray back, two prominent white wing bars, and white below with black-streaked flanks. Males are more brightly colored than females, and females have a white chin and a throat streaked with white. Both have yellow loreal spots. Like the Black-and-white Warbler, it has essentially the same plumage pattern year-round. It can be most easily separated from the Blackpoll Warbler by face pattern and from the Black-and-white Warbler by the gray back lacking prominent black and white stripes, and by its lack of 'nuthatch' foraging behavior. The Black-throated Gray Warbler has two generally accepted subspecies and is closely related to the Black-throated Green-Townsend's-Hermit warbler complex.

The Black-throated Gray Warbler's breeding range is west of the Rocky Mountains, north to British Columbia, and south to northern Mexico. They are migratory, wintering in western and central Mexico. About a dozen of these wandering warblers have been seen in Massachusetts, appearing from September to December, from Cape Cod to Springfield.

Their habitat is varied, with a preference for conifers or mixed conifer-deciduous woodlands with scrubby undergrowth. These include pinyon-juniper and pine-oak scrubland, open areas, and second-growth forest, woodland, scrub, and thickets. Surprisingly little is known about the breeding biology of this species. Judging from their close relatives, they are probably monogamous and produce a single brood. Only the male sings, generally 5-9 buzzy notes. The song is of two types, the first given early in the breeding season when the male is attending the female, and a second song later in the season, often sung as part of the dawn chorus, that may be chiefly a territorial advertisement. There is no information on nuptial displays. The nest is a deep cup from near ground level to 30 feet in oaks or conifers and made of bark strips, grass, rootlets, and moss, lined with feathers. The nest is probably built by the female alone. The usual clutch is 4 reddish brown spotted cream-colored eggs, and incubation may be by the female alone, since only she develops a brood patch. The young at hatching are altricial (nearly naked and helpless) and nidicolous (confined to their nest). In several cases nests had layers built over cowbird eggs. Incubation and fledging periods are not known.

Black-throated Gray Warblers are active foragers, gleaning foliage from trees or shrubs, with occasional hover-gleaning and hawking of insects. Their diet is presumed to be entirely insectivorous, at least during the breeding season. They eat caterpillars and will bash large insects against branches. There may be some partitioning of

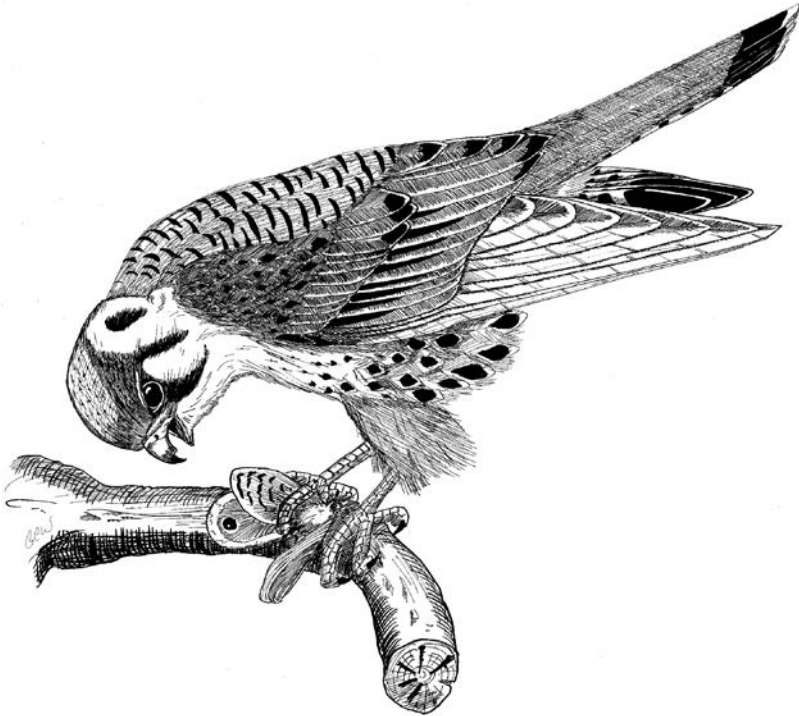
resources between the sexes, as in one study males generally foraged higher and in larger trees than females. They join mixed species foraging flocks during migration and on their Mexican wintering grounds.

Predators include accipters, and probably crows, jays, and mammals as nest predators. They tend to nest in habitats that are not of great economic value to humans, and hence the little available data suggests that their population is stable or increasing. Thus they should remain vagrants to be watched for in fall and winter. 🦅

William E. Davis, Jr.

About the Cover Artist

The work of noted wildlife artist Paul Donahue has appeared many times on the cover of *Bird Observer*. Some of our readers may also have enjoyed the experience of visiting the rain forest canopy walkway at the Amazon Center for Environmental Education and Research off the Rio Napo in the Department of Loreto in northeastern Peru. This canopy walkway, the world's longest, is the creation of Paul Donahue and Teresa Wood. Paul can be reached at PO Box 554, Machias, Maine. 🦅



AMERICAN KESTREL BY GEORGE C. WEST