

## AT A GLANCE

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June 2004



DAVID LARSON

This month we see an obvious passerine perched on the ground among dry leaves; plain on the back and wings, tail held slightly up, and with at least the back of the head either in shadow or significantly darker in color than the rest of the dorsum. A first impression suggests the possibility that the bird is a thrush, possibly even an American Robin, based upon the contrast between the back of the head and the back.

A closer look at the surroundings of the bird, however, suggests that the bird is not nearly large enough to be a robin, or even some other species of thrush for that matter. The bird pictured in the photograph hardly appears larger than some of the dry leaves in its surroundings. Likewise, close scrutiny of the legs of the mystery bird shows them to be very thin and not terribly long, both of which characters are atypical for virtually any North American thrush. Indeed, this is no thrush.

Further examination reveals what appears to be a pale or light-colored crescent on the bird's right cheek. More significantly, perhaps, is that the dark eye of the bird is clearly visible, suggesting that the eye is located on the face of a bird having the same color as the light crescent barely visible from the rear. With this in mind, it is reasonable to conclude that the bird has a dark eye clearly set off against a light-colored face. With this assumption in mind, the significance of the black on the crown and back of the head takes on added importance.

There is really only one species of bird in Massachusetts that shares the combination of a plain back and wings, a black crown and back of head, and a plain (actually yellow) face with a dark eye in the center — an adult male Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*). Although a Black-capped Chickadee might superficially seem to have this combination of features, a chickadee's tail and overall appearance would be slimmer, the wings would show pale edgings on some of the feathers, and the eye would not be positioned in the white of the face, but rather in the black of the cap. Once the pattern of the pictured species is properly integrated, the identification is actually quite straightforward.

The Hooded Warbler is a relatively rare spring and autumn migrant in Massachusetts that has actually nested in the state on a handful of occasions. Although the species can appear anywhere in the Commonwealth, the majority of reports come from the eastern parts of Massachusetts. David Larson took this photograph of a Hooded Warbler at Hall's Pond in Brookline. 🐦

*Wayne R. Petersen*



UPLAND SANDPIPER BY DAVID LARSON

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Can you identify this animal?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.



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