

WARBLER TAIL SPOTS
By Charles H. Blake

Many of our warblers have white (or yellowish) areas in, at least, the outer tail feathers. They are wanting in: Swainson's, Worm-eating, Orange-crowned, Nashville Warblers, Seiurus, Oporornis, Yellowthroat, Chat, Wilson's, Canada Warblers. Experience indicates that these spots in the outer tail feathers, when present, can be useful as auxiliary characters for confirming the identification of fall warblers. The accompanying diagrams show the patterns of eastern warblers, except the three great rarities: Bachman's, Kirtland's, and Sutton's Warblers. These species have no special winter plumage.

Some further remarks are in order. Closely related species (Bay-breast and Blackpoll) tend to have nearly identical patterns. Differences caused by age or sex seem to be fairly minor (exception: spots almost wanting in female Black-throated Blue). Measurement of spot length in 447 Myrtles, disregarding age and sex, shows a range of 15 to 27 mm. but the mean is 20.4 ± 1.6 mm. The span from 19 to 22 mm. includes 74 per cent of the birds, so the distribution is well peaked and the tails rather small. The white may extend to the tip (Palm) or stop short (Cape May, Myrtle). There may be a subterminal dark area next to the rachis (Black and White) or no such area (Palm). A few species have white extending across the outer vane (Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Prairie). Very narrow white margins on either vane are frequent in fall. These appear to wear away rather soon and are not here considered as part of the pattern.

I am indebted to the North Carolina State Museum and the Museum of Comparative Zoology for loan of specimens.

Outer Tail Feathers of Eastern Warblers. 55

