

The Prairie Warbler

The Prairie Warbler is not a bird of the open prairie, but of cutover woodlands or clearings growing up in thickets. Bent, in Life Histories of North American Wood Warblers, says "Perhaps it was given the name because it has been found on the so-called prairies or flat, grassy lands among trees in the Southern states."

In Mississippi the Prairie Warbler seems to prefer cutover hillsides or ridges with mixed stands of pine, scrub oak and hardwoods and an undergrowth of bushes and shrubs such as blueberry, huckleberry, myrtle, yaupon or oak sprouts. Sometimes they are found in abandoned agricultural land or pastures growing up with sage grass, bushes and young trees.

The Prairie Warbler winters from central Florida south through the West Indies and islands off Mexico and Central America from Quintana Roo to Nicaragua. It breeds from southeastern South Dakota, Iowa, southern Wisconsin, northern Michigan, southern Ontario, southeastern New York, southern Vermont and southern New Hampshire south to eastern Oklahoma, southern Louisiana, Mississippi, southern Alabama and central Georgia. In Florida and the Florida Keys a geographic race known as the Florida Prairie Warbler is found.

Arriving in Mississippi the middle of March, the Prairie Warbler is a spring and fall transient on the offshore Gulf islands, the Mississippi Coast, and apparently in the Yazoo Delta. To date we have one spring record for the delta and no fall records. Extreme dates of spring migration are March 18 and May 1. It is a locally common summer resident of Rankin and Lafayette Counties, likely anywhere east of the Loess Bluffs, from Jones County north to Tishomingo County.

A sight record of young in Pearl River County and observations of abandoned nest and males singing in April in the Sandhill Crane territory of Jackson County indicates that it also nests, at least locally, in the extreme southern part of Mississippi.

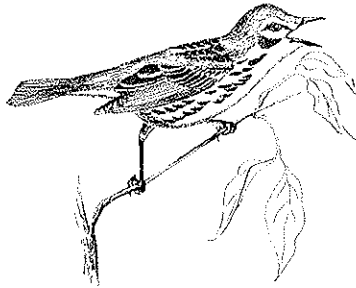
This warbler feeds upon winged insects, spiders and caterpillars obtained from low bushes and occasionally in the treetops.

The nest is made of plant fibers, grass and fine leaves, lined with rootlets, hair and a few feathers and is usually

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placed from three or four feet from the ground and artfully concealed among leaves in low bushes or small trees. One nest found in Tishomingo County was in a burned-over broomsedge



opening four inches from the ground in a low bush surrounded by other bushes, vines and broomsedge.

Another nest 18 inches from the ground in a huckleberry bush was found by a field worker who stated:

The Prairie Warbler seems to prefer the huckleberry bush as almost all nests found have been in them on cutover hillsides." The three to five eggs, usually four, are white, finely spotted with reddish-brown.

The breeding population apparently leaves its nesting ground by the end of August. The latest record for all but the coastal counties is August 30. Migrants begin to arrive on the coast by July 22, where they are fairly common in scrubby growths of pine and oak until late September. They have been observed on Deer Island as late as October 29. There are no winter records.

Adult male Prairie Warblers are yellowish-green above with distinctive chestnut streaking on the back and yellow faces and underparts. A black stripe extends thru the eye and another V-shaped one is located below the eye. The sides of the head, neck and body are heavily streaked with black and there are two light yellow wing bars. The female is similar but paler and streaking is less extensive. Immatures in the fall possess only a faint dusky indication of the black markings of the adults and the wing bars are faint or absent. However, the yellow underparts, a dusky mark on the side of the neck and the bird's habit of wagging its tail are identifying features.

The song is a series of short buzzy notes rapidly uttered on a rapidly-ascending scale, ending at a very high pitch. The song is most distinctive because of the high-pitched ascending, buzzing notes and is comparable in pitch only to the black and white warbler in this respect. The distinctive song is the best clue to locating and finding the Prairie Warbler. -- B. E. Gandy