

**BREEDING BY THE BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER  
IN SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI**

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The Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) is a common summer resident in the eastern United States, nesting south to central Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana (Lowery 1978, Imhof 1976, American Ornithologists' Union 1983). In Mississippi, nesting by the Black-and-white Warbler is rare in the southern portion of the state. There are no breeding records for coastal Mississippi (Toups and Jackson 1987) and the species is apparently absent in summer on the adjacent coastal plain. In this note we report successful breeding by the Black-and-white Warbler in DeSoto National Forest of southern Mississippi and describe the habitat used by the birds.

On 31 May 1992 we found a male Black-and-white Warbler at the terminus of Forest Service road 335A in the Black Creek District of DeSoto National Forest. The bird was singing along the edge of a regenerating clearcut bordered by pine-oak woods approximately 33 km SSE of Hattiesburg and 6 km WSW of Brooklyn, Forrest County, Mississippi (32° 45' N, 89° 15' W). The bird was singing vigorously -- a high, sibilant *wesee wesee wesee* -- and approached closely in response to "spshing." It was a male, distinctively patterned above with bold black and white stripes, a black-and-white striped crown, black eyeline, and blackish auriculars. The underparts were white, patterned with a black throat and prominently streaked sides. Wing coverts were distinctly edged with white (creating a double wing-bar). A hint of contrast between brownish-black flight feathers and the black of the greater coverts suggested a bird in its first summer (Pyle 1987), but this was inconclusive. The bird resumed singing almost immediately and a brief search revealed no other individuals.

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The male continued to sing actively at the same location on the morning and evening of 1 June, but could not be located on the morning of 2 June. We searched again on the afternoon of 4 June and found the male singing sporadically and foraging (in a distinctive creeping style) along the trunk and branches of a large oak growing near the edge of the clearcut. This time a thorough search revealed a female Black-and-white Warbler in a thin line of standing trees approximately 30 m farther into the clearcut. She was similar in plumage to the male, but with a whitish face (somewhat grayish on the auriculars) and white underparts (pale streaking on the sides). Chipping constantly (a sharp *pit*), she moved nervously up and down the line of trees, suggesting a nest or young in the area. The male also approached, but showed less agitation than the female. Despite the behavior of the adults, we failed to locate a nest or young.

On the morning of 5 June, we found the female (and later the male) feeding two recently fledged young. The fledglings were being fed along the edge of the same line of trees where the female was so agitated on the previous day. Because the fledglings were very small (their wings and tail barely long enough to sustain flights of 2-3 m), they undoubtedly fledged nearby within the previous day or so. Their plumage was generally gray-brown, somewhat lighter on the underparts, with inconspicuous coarse streaking. There was a hint of a buffy eyeline and wingbars. The fledglings perched quietly in low vegetation, moving only occasionally in response to the female's movements. Although she chipped nervously, the female continued to feed the fledglings. The male appeared much less frequently and only fed the fledglings a single time over the course of 15-20 minutes. The entire family moved away into thicker vegetation in the clearcut.

The habitat in which all the sightings were made is somewhat atypical for breeding Black-and-white Warblers. The warblers' activities were concentrated at the corner of a regenerating clearcut approximately 25-50 m from the edge of a dry pine-oak woodland. Virtually all trees had been cut with the exception of a large oak (in which the male sang and foraged) and the thin line of trees along a shallow ditch where the fledglings were found. The rest of the clearcut was covered with a thick, but patchy growth (approximately 1-3 m in height) of oaks (*Quercus* spp.), pines (*Pinus* spp), sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), and blackberries (*Rubus* spp.). The Black-and-white Warblers were never seen beyond the edge of the clearcut. Other birds in the immediate area included

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*), Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*), Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*), Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila caerulea*), and Carolina Chickadee (*Parus carolinensis*).

Although the Black-and-white Warbler is unquestionably an early fall migrant, some portion of late summer records along the coast of Mississippi (e.g., Toups and Jackson 1987) and adjacent states could represent the movement of birds away from relatively local breeding areas such as described here. Unfortunately upland areas away from the immediate coast receive relatively little attention from birders during the late spring and summer. More field work is needed in DeSoto National Forest and adjacent areas to clarify the status of the Black-and-white Warbler as a breeding bird in southern Mississippi.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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