

[Skip to content.](#) [Skip to navigation](#)

From the [CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY](#) and the [AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION](#).

Search Site

Search

## Sections

- [Home](#)
- [Species](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [News & Info](#)
- [FAQ](#)

Already a subscriber? [Sign in](#) Don't have a subscription? [Subscribe Now](#)

# Blackburnian Warbler

*Dendroica fusca*

Order PASSERIFORMES— Family PARULIDAE

Issue No. 102 – Revised: December 1, 2004

**Authors:** Morse, Douglass H.

**Revisors:** Morse, Douglass H.

[Articles](#) [Multimedia](#) [References](#)

## Courtesy Preview

This Introductory article that you are viewing is a courtesy preview of the full life history account of this species. The remaining articles (Distribution, Habitat, Behavior, etc.), as well as the Multimedia Galleries and Reference sections of this account are subscriber-only content, and you will need a subscription in order to view the species account in its entirety. Click on the [Subscribe](#) tab for more information.

If you are already a current subscriber, you will need to [sign in](#) with your login information to access BNA normally.

## Introduction

The Blackburnian Warbler is a brilliantly colored Neotropical migrant, one of a large group of *Dendroica* wood warblers that coexist during the breeding season in the northeastern coniferous forests of North America. Birds of this group are so similar structurally that early students of bird foraging and niche partitioning wondered how they coexisted. They are now known to separate ecologically by foraging areas ([MacArthur 1958](#), [Morse 1968](#)), the Blackburnian exploiting a treetop niche.

Although the Blackburnian Warbler is morphologically similar to many of its congeners that share these forests, it differs strikingly from them in coloration. Breeding males are characterized by blazing orange plumage over much of the anterior part of their body, a color not shared by other members of this genus.



Blackburnian Warbler, male; Ontario,

In common with some other *Dendroica* wood warblers, the range of the Blackburnian extends both to the northwest in Canada and to the southeast along the Appalachian Mountains. In the southern part of its breeding range, this species specializes on hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), although like the Black-throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*) it sometimes inhabits deciduous forests as well. Throughout its breeding grounds, this insectivorous species appears to feed primarily on lepidopteran larvae, which it gleans from small branches high in trees. It nearly always builds its nest in conifers, on small limbs well out from the trunk.

Populations of this species are vulnerable owing to the loss of preferred winter forest habitat in northern South America, although Breeding Bird Survey data suggest that their numbers remain stable. Blackburnian Warblers are forest-interior species, and their numbers decline in forest fragments. Southerly populations breeding in eastern hemlock and Fraser fir are at risk as a result of woolly adelgids responsible for heavy mortality of these trees.

Some aspects of the Blackburnian Warbler's breeding biology are relatively well known, including foraging ([MacArthur 1958](#), [Morse 1968](#)), population dynamics ([Morse 1976a](#)), interspecific interactions ([Morse 1976b](#)), habitat selection ([Morse 1976a](#)), and singing behavior ([Morse 1967](#)). Some ecological studies have been performed on their wintering grounds in Colombia ([Chiplely 1980](#); [Lerner and Stauffer 1998](#)). Recent studies have focused on the effect of silvicultural practices on this and other species (e. g., [Hagan et al. 1996](#), [Meiklejorn and Hughes 1999](#), [Hobson and Bayne 2000a](#), [Cumming and Diamond 2002](#)). However, information on many aspects of the species' life cycle is rudimentary. Little is known of its migratory ecology. Many aspects of its breeding ecology remain largely or completely unknown, in part a consequence of its treetop existence in northern forests.

Canada; May.



Figure 1. Breeding range of the Blackburnian Warbler.

### Recommended Citation

Morse, Douglass H. 2004. Blackburnian Warbler (*Dendroica fusca*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/102>

[doi:10.2173/bna.102](https://doi.org/10.2173/bna.102)

#### • Articles

- [Introduction](#)
- [Distinguishing Characteristics](#)
- [Distribution](#)
- [Systematics](#)
- [Migration](#)
- [Habitat](#)
- [Food Habits](#)
- [Sounds](#)
- [Behavior](#)
- [Breeding](#)
- [Demography and Populations](#)
- [Conservation and Management](#)
- [Appearance](#)
- [Measurements](#)
- [Other](#)
- [Priorities for Future Research](#)
- [Acknowledgments](#)
- [About the Author\(s\)](#)

[Home](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Terms of Service](#)

© 2009 by [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)

