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American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*

Redstarts are the flycatchers of the warbler family, and they spend a considerable amount of time catching their insect food on the wing. As they flit about in their acrobatic maneuvers, they spread their tails, displaying colorful tail patches. They breed across much of North America except for the Pacific coast and the arid southwest, and they are mostly absent from the Great Plains (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). American Redstarts winter from southern Baja California, northern Mexico, central and south Florida and the Bahamas, to northern South America.

The American Redstart is a transient throughout Florida, an uncommon to rare breeder in northwest Florida, and a rare to accidental winter resident in the peninsula (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Habitat. Redstarts prefer deciduous woodlands, chiefly second-growth, younger forests, with a canopy of larger, mature trees in moist or wet situations typical of some of the river bottom forests of the Florida Panhandle (Ehrlich et al. 1988; Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Redstarts eat primarily flying insects, less commonly berries and seeds.

Nests are placed in the fork of a low tree and are constructed of small twigs, grasses, rootlets, bark, spider web and lichens. Eggs are white, marked with brown speckles, and are incubated for 12 days. Nestlings fledge in about 9 to 10 days.

Seasonal Occurrence. This abundant spring and fall transient occurs throughout Florida; and in spring it is one of the last of our migrant warblers to depart the state. Records of dawdling transients extend well into June and by the end of July, American Redstarts in their fall migration begin to appear.

Status. American Redstarts were first discovered breeding in Florida in the early 1960s in the northwest corner of the Panhandle in Escambia County (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Breeding was not confirmed during the Atlas period, but a "probable" and 3 "possibles" were recorded in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties, and dozens of individuals and "pairs" were reported by atlasers throughout the state well into June as far south as the Key. Because American Redstarts are common migrants and such rare and irregular breeders in Florida, the published map should not be trusted as an accurate depiction of the breeding range.

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