

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

This resource can be cited as:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2003, January 6. Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. <http://www.myfwc.com/bba/> (Date accessed mm/dd/yyyy).

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## Northern Parula *Parula americana*

The Northern Parula is a common breeder throughout most of Florida and is conspicuous because of its loud, persistent song. Its familiar punctuated, buzzy trill makes it as much a part of southern swampy woodlands and upland hammocks as Spanish moss.

The species breeds from southern Canada south to southern Texas, the northern Gulf coast, and south Florida. Northern Parulas occasionally winter in southern peninsular Florida, but the majority winter in Mexico, Central America, and the West Indies (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

**Habitat.** When breeding, the Northern Parula frequents hardwood forests, pine-oak woodlands, cypress, and hardwood swamps, wherever Spanish moss thrives (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Northern Parulas forage actively for ants, bees, wasps, spiders, and other insects (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Vegetable matter does not appear to be an important component of their diet.

The nest is carefully woven into the base of a high clump of Spanish moss; therefore, it is difficult to spot from below. Four or 5 white, brown-speckled eggs are incubated for 12 to 14 days. The nestlings fledge after 10 days.

**Seasonal Occurrence.** The Northern Parula is found throughout the state during migration, which peaks in September and October and in March and April. The eggs are laid in early April. Two broods are likely because Northern Parulas remain on the breeding grounds until late August. In winter Northern Parulas are occasionally seen in north Florida (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

**Status.** Perhaps because the Northern Parula is the smallest eastern wood warbler, its wintering population in the United States is largely restricted to subtropical Florida (Root 1988). Curiously, the Northern Parula's wintering distribution and breeding distribution in Florida hardly overlap.

The Northern Parula and Spanish moss, a bromeliad, are intimately associated because of this warbler's habit of building its nest within the plant's cascading festoons. The southern limit of the Northern Parula's breeding range in Florida does not, however, correspond perfectly with the range of Spanish moss, at least not at present. This temporal proviso is necessary if the Northern Parula's breeding range was accurately determined more than 50 years ago. Howell (1932) showed the range only extending to central Florida, 161 km (100 mi) north of today's southern limit. The Northern Parula may still be expanding its range in Florida.

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