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Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorus*

The plain-colored Worm-Eating Warbler is distinguished from all other Florida warblers by the 4 black stripes on its head. It breeds from south of a line that extends eastward from southeast Nebraska to western Massachusetts, south to northeast Texas and the central Gulf states. It winters in Mexico, Central America, and the West Indies.

The Worm-eating Warbler is chiefly a transient in Florida, seen regularly, but in small numbers in deciduous woodlands in both spring and fall migration. Rarely, some winter in south Florida (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Habitat. This bird prefers to nest in steep, wooded ravines with an undergrowth of saplings and small shrubbed habitat seldom found in Florida (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Worm-eating Warblers commonly spend the majority of their time walking on the forest floor searching for its insect prey (Griscom and Sprunt 1957, Harrison 1984). More recent information suggests that they forage throughout the lower portion of the canopy (Greenburg 1987).

Nests are usually built on the ground amid dead leaves and beneath a shrub or tree root. They are constructed partly skeletonized dead leaves, moss, and occasionally horsehair (Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Griscom and Sprunt 1957). Four white eggs, speckled with shades of brown, are laid and incubated for 13 days, and nestlings fledge in about 10 days (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Seasonal Occurrence. Migration peaks for the Worm-eating Warbler occur in mid-September to mid-October and again in April (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Status. The first nesting in the state occurred in the early 1960s, when Stevenson found them breeding in northwest Florida (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

No confirmed nesting was found for this species during the Atlas period, and only 1 "possible." A singing male in suitable habitat was reported in Holmes County. Far to the east in Nassau County, a singing male was present from mid-May into late June, but no evidence of confirmed breeding was found. One wonders how to treat these outliers as one-time-only events or possibly, as pioneers in an expanding range?

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Worm-eating Warbler

