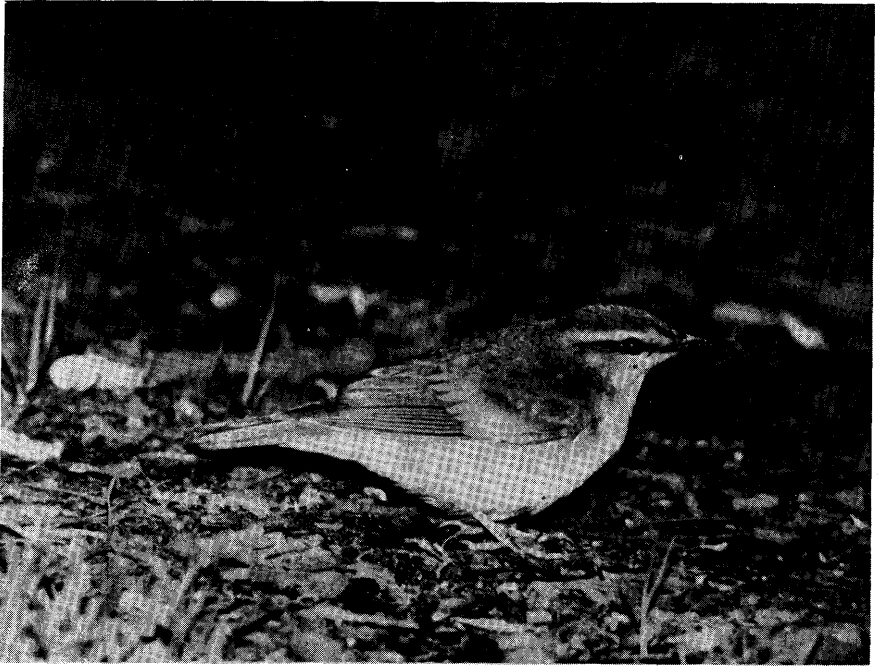




11 May 1979

Swainson's Warbler
Central Park, New York Co.
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PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES

36. SWAINSON'S WARBLER

PETER W. POST

The Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*) occupies two disjunct breeding areas: the "... river floodplain forests and swamps of the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast Plains, and ... the rich moist woods of the Mixed Mesophytic forest ... of the Southern Appalachians" (B. Meanley, 1971, *Natural History of the Swainson's Warbler*, N. American Fauna No. 69, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, U.S. Government Printing Office, Wash., D.C., p. 13). It reaches its northernmost limit in the Pocomoke River Swamp along the eastern shore of Maryland and Delaware. The occurrence of Swainson's Warbler as a breeding bird in the Cedar Swamp of southern New Jersey is a distinct possibility, but is as yet unconfirmed (C. Leck, personal communication). Swainson's Warbler has been recorded ten times in the northeast; eight times in New York and twice in New Jersey:

1. Prospect Park, Kings Co., 5-6 May 1950, Geoffrey Carleton, William T. Helmuth, Irwin Alperin, and Robert Grant (*Wilson Bull.* 64: 109-110, 1952).
2. Bronx Botanical Garden, Bronx Co., 6 May 1963, Edward J. Maguire, William Hackett, Geoffrey Carleton, Peter W. Post, and Joseph L. Horowitz (*Aud. Field Notes* 17: 393, 1963).
3. Central Park, New York Co., 11 May 1963, Hugh McGuinness, Peter Polshek, Herbert D. Hale, *et al.* (*Proc. Linn. Soc. N.Y.*, No. 72 [1971-74], p. 81).
4. Tobay Beach, Nassau Co., 20 May 1973, mist-netted by Anthony J. Lauro; photograph by Paul A. Buckley appears in *Amer. Birds* 27: 841, 1973.
5. Forest Park, Queens Co., 10 May 1975, Thomas H. Davis, John Carabella, Elaine Cook, Stephen Dempsey, Michael Gochfeld, Michael Kleinbaum, and Tom Robben (*Kingbird* 25: 86-87, 1975).
6. Burgeson Sanctuary, Chatauqua Co., 13 May 1975, mist-netted by A. and Doris Richardson; photograph by Archie Richardson appears in *Kingbird* 25: 204-205, 1975.
7. Bronx Botanical Gardens, Bronx Co., 27 April 1977, Daniel Rafferty, John Oswald, Edward J. Maguire, Felix Pappalardi, Theodore Peszell, Jean Knolles, Max Schechtman, and Ernest Howsler

- (*Amer. Birds* 31: 982, 1977; E. Maguire, personal communication).
8. Linwood, Atlantic Co., New Jersey, 23 May 1968, mist-netted by William E. Savell; photograph appears in *EBBA News* 31: 159, 1968.
 9. Island Beach State Park, Ocean Co., New Jersey, 17 May 1979, mist-netted by Fred Lesser (*N.J. Aud., Records N.J. Birds* 5 (3): 47, 1979; *Amer. Birds* 33: 757, 1979).
 10. On 9 May 1979 the author was birding in Central Park, New York City. About 0900 he came across Timothy Stiles, a new birder, who reported that he had just seen what he believed to be a Swainson's Warbler. Approximately a half-hour later and about a hundred feet from Stiles' observation, Wilma Bauman caught a glimpse of a warbler, among the Japanese knotweed, with a brown cap, eyeline, and long, sharply-pointed bill which she felt could have been the bird. Despite extensive searching it could not be located again that day or on the next. Upon hearing this story, Martin Sohmer told of having seen a Swainson's Warbler, elsewhere in the Ramble, two days previously, on 7 May. Because he was alone and because he could not find the bird again after his initial observation, he did not report it at the time.

About noon on the 11th, the author was birding near the Azalea Pond with Sheila Rosenberg when we saw a Swainson's Warbler. We immediately spread the word throughout the Ramble, went to the boathouse to telephone everyone we could think of who might want to see the bird, and sent someone to get Arthur Swoger, whom I knew was photographing birds at the base of the Point, and who obtained the marvelous photograph reproduced here.

Thus, a Swainson's Warbler was reported seen in Central Park on 7, 9 and 11 May, but not on 8 or 10 May. The possibility exists that more than one individual was in the park that week; but of course this is speculation.

The 11 May bird was seen by dozens of people, some of whom were fortunate to hear it sing. It remained until dark, never straying more than six feet from the edge of the eastern end of the pond; an area it actively defended against occasional intruders such as Northern Waterthrushes. The occupation of a feeding territory was also characteristic of the previous Central Park and Bronx Park occurrences.

The Swainson's Warbler spent most of its time on the ground probing beneath the leaf litter. It would lift dead leaves with its bill,

seize whatever insects it could find underneath, and withdraw to let the leaf fall back in place; a method of feeding unique among parulids (Meanley, *op. cit.* pp. 74-75). The bird also continuously exhibited the characteristic "shivering" motion of the body, especially the wings and tail, which Meanley (*op. cit.* p. 77) has described as a "quivering or tremulous movement."

The 27 April to 23 May dates of occurrence in the northeastern United States suggests individuals that had migrated from wintering areas and that overshot the breeding grounds.

Note that six of the records cited above are from the heavily birded New York City parks, whereas the remaining four occurrences were of individuals whose presence was unknown until they were mist-netted by bird-banders, suggesting that this secretive species probably occurs more often in our area than the records indicate.

I thank Thomas H. Davis, Edward J. Maguire and Charles Leck for contributing information on the previous records in New York and New Jersey.

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