

PROBABLE BREEDING OF CERULEAN WARBLER ON EASTERN LONG ISLAND

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The Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*) has only been confirmed once as a breeding species on Long Island (Salzman 1983). Bull (1964) stated "one or two birds on eastern Long Island in 1962 and 1963 merely summered, but did not breed." Andrlé and Carroll (1988) note, however, that during the New York breeding bird atlas survey period 1980-1985, one possible and one probable breeding event also occurred on Long Island, in addition to the confirmed breeding record. Zaranski and Baptist (1990) report an easterly expansion of territorial and breeding Cerulean Warbler in Connecticut commencing in the 1960's. Laughlin and Kibbe (1985) report the first Vermont record in 1977, and they comment on the slow but steady expansion of *D. cerulea* in the Northeast. We believe that our observations detailed below are further evidence of this expansion.

On 29 May 1992, while visiting a favorite birding spot in the town of East Hampton, the authors found what appeared to be a small colony of Cerulean Warblers inhabiting a tract of moist woodlands in an area known as the Northwest Woods. The birds were highly active and quite visible as they sang and chased one another. Their activity was largely concentrated around a small pond in the woods. On this date at least two, and possibly three, males were observed. A return visit on 3 June found the birds to be still very active and still favoring the pond area. It was then determined that there were at least three males present. A female was also seen at two different times during the course of the day.

On subsequent visits of 12 and 22 June, the birds had become much less active and more widely dispersed, though still singing persistently. By now the individual territories of the birds could be identified, with the vicinity of the pond hosting one male, and an adjacent section of woods another. The third male was found singing in a grove of Black Locust trees some distance away. No females were seen on these dates, nor on subsequent visits on 7, 10, 11 and 12 July, when many hours of observation failed to produce further evidence of

breeding activity. By the early July visit, the birds were much less vocal, but remained true to their individual sites. By 10 July the locust grove male could no longer be located, and by 17 July the other two birds apparently also had disappeared.

The habitat here can be characterized as Northeastern Deciduous Forest, consisting of mixed hardwoods, oaks (*Quercus*), maples (*Acer*), and hickories (*Carya*), with elements of disturbance succession such as Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and Ailanthus (*Ailanthus altissima*). The trees average 40 to 60 feet in height, with an understory of mixed huckleberry (*Gaylussacia*), blueberry (*Vaccinium*), and viburnum (*Viburnum*). The site is remarkably close to the shore line, and attains a maximum of 30 feet in elevation.

The use of the phrase "probable breeding" as it pertains to this study is consistent with the definition given in Andrie and Carroll (1988:4), i.e.,

Pair observed in suitable habitat in breeding season. Singing male present (or breeding calls heard) on more than one date in the same place. This is a good indication that a bird has taken up residence if the dates are a week or more apart. Bird (or pair) apparently holding territory. In addition to territorial singing, chasing of other individuals often marks a territory.

Although no definitive evidence of breeding was found at this site during the 1992 nesting season, the prolonged presence and the behavioral activity of the warblers strongly suggest that breeding was at least attempted, if not actually carried out. The presence of a singing male at this same site in the spring of 1990 (but not in 1991) lends credence to the theory that the birds may reuse this area periodically. The writers plan to revisit and monitor the locality in future springs in the hope of obtaining more conclusive data on the breeding status of the species here.

An interesting footnote is the observation of at least three Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax viriscens*), two of which defended virtually the same territories as did two of the Cerulean Warbler in these woods. The flycatchers were still on territory and singing as of 29 July, and are also assumed to be breeding here.

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