BLACK–THROATED GREEN WARBLER REDISCOVERED NESTING ON EASTERN LONG ISLAND

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In 1993 and 1994, a population of Black–throated Green Warblers (*Dendroica virescens*) was discovered and nesting documented in Northwest Woods, Town of East Hampton, Long Island. This is a new location for this species and appears to constitute the first confirmed breeding for Long Island in several decades.

Black–throated Green Warbler has been listed as a local but widespread nester in the Long Island pine barrens and on the North Fork by Latham (1920), Helme (1930), Eaton (1914), Griscom (1923), Cruickshank (1942) and Bull (1964, 1974). Bull (1964) summarizes the situation as follows: "On Long Island, it is scattered throughout the pine barrens, wherever pitch pines grow to large size, but has decreased there in recent years because of much cutting and burning. It is somewhat surprising to find it also nesting in deciduous woodland in western Suffolk..." Bull (1974) states that "On Long Island it is, or was, commonly distributed on the north shore from Manhasset, Nassau Co., east to Miller's Place, Suffolk Co., and in extreme eastern Suffolk Co. at Peconic, Southold and Orient...locally common from Melville east to Coram and Riverhead, but on the south shore of the coastal plane, where nominate *virens* is near its southern limits, it is known from only three localities—all in Suffolk Co."

However, there is good reason to believe that between the publication of Bull's two volumes (or even earlier), the Black–throated Green Warbler had vanished as a breeding species from Long Island. In 25 years of work in the pine barrens, I have never seen or heard it on territory and six years of intensive searching (1980–1985) by Breeding Bird Atlas workers on Long Island produced nothing more than two "Possible" records, i.e., a "species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitat on suitable territory" or "singing male(s) present (or breeding calls heard) in breeding season". These data support the conclusion that Black–throated Green Warbler was no longer nesting regularly, if at all, on Long Island. The most recent prior reports that specifically support breeding come from western Suffolk County in 1946 and there are only scattered observations afterwards. The discovery of a new breeding population in a new location for the species appears to represent the first confirmed Long Island records in close to half a century.

The northwest area of Suffolk County encloses one large and several smaller estuaries opening out onto Gardiner's Bay between Sag Harbor

and Three Mile Harbor. The moist and relatively rich soils of this region support large stands of Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*), probably the only naturally occurring population of this northern pine surviving on Long Island. The forest cover also includes Pitch Pine (*Pinus rigida*), Tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*) and several species of oak as well a variety of shrubs and ground covers, many of them in the heath family and specifically adapted to low, moist, acidic soils. Nesting woodland birds include Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*), Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*), Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*), White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*), Black-capped Chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*), Tufted Titmouse (*Parus bicolor*), Wood Thrush (*Catharus mustelinus*), Veery (*Catharus fuscescens*), Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*), Pine Warbler (*Dendroica pinus*), American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*), Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*) and Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*). The moist, rich soils, the mix of species and the dominating presence of White Pine suggest a New England forest rather than a typical Long Island pine barrens.

The presence here of a population of Black-throated Green Warblers was first revealed in 1993 by the Breeding Bird Inventory conducted by East Hampton's Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Resources under its director, Larry Penny, and coordinated by Lucy Miller, also of the department. The censusing method, which involves listening for bird songs on a series of fixed routes, revealed a number of Black-throated Green Warbler possibly on territory well into June and July in locations distinguished or dominated by the presence of White Pine. Six of these territories were occupied again in 1994.

Breeding was confirmed on 2 July 1994 when I observed a male feeding young in an area of wet woods at the head of Northwest Harbor. In the spring and summer of 1993, this was the site of a particularly persistent territorial male with a characteristic five-note song; a bird with the same song returned to the territory in 1994. All of the earlier observations were of a bird that was feeding and singing at a relatively leisurely pace in the forest canopy; by mid June, singing had stopped and the bird could not be located. Now, however, the five-note singer was active underneath the canopy, sometimes at eye level or even on the ground, and it was singing persistently and hunting with the frantic manner of a parent feeding young. The prey, mainly caterpillars and winged insects, were beaten to death against a branch and then carried up to the canopy to feed two or three noisy fledglings fairly well hidden in the pine needles.

The adult bird acted completely oblivious to my presence; it is even possible that his prominent feeding movements and song were meant to pull my attention away from the hidden, tree top young. However when Blue Jay appeared in the woods, the warbler stopped singing and

switched to a regular and persistent chip sound, almost certainly an alarm call; the bird continued to feed but now swallowed everything that he caught. After the Blue Jays departed, he went back to his five–note song and resumed the treetop food runs. The second time Blue Jay entered the area, I did not notice them until the warbler again switched behavior, prompting me to look for the cause; again, when the jays left, the warbler resumed its singing and feeding behavior as before. Another male feeding young was also reported the next day, July 3, in a different location by Chris Roberts, whose work on the census helped to discover several of these birds on territory in both 1993 and 1994.

I would describe this population as small and scattered in a well–defined area and habitat. The birds appear to have colonized the Northwest Woods within the past decade although a number of local birders (Jim Ash, Chris Roberts) report having heard it fairly regularly in breeding season since the mid 1980s. This distinctive forest was not part of the known historic breeding range of the species on Long Island; the closest record and possibly the only other record for the South Fork of Long Island was at Georgica Pond, a classic pine barrens, i.e., Pitch Pine and oak, close to East Hampton Village.

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