

FIRST RECORD OF MacGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER FOR NEW YORK STATE

Richard R. Veit¹ and Margo E. Taylor²

¹Biology Department
The College of Staten Island
2800 Victory Boulevard
Staten Island, NY 10314
Veit@postbox.csi.cuny.edu

²323 W 1st Ave.
Malvern, PA 19355

One of us (Veit) identified a MacGillivray's Warbler (*Oporornis tolmiei*) at the Mohlenoff Nursery (now a New York City Parks facility) just after dawn on Wednesday 15 Dec 1999. The nursery is located on Victory Boulevard, along the northern edge of the Fresh Kills marshes, Staten Island, Richmond County, New York. Veit was searching at the time for Orange-crowned (*Vermivora celata*) and Nashville warblers (*V. ruficapilla*) that had been discovered by Andrew Bernick the previous Sunday, 12 Dec. During the subsequent days, a number of observers viewed the MacGillivray's Warbler from as close as 20' with IOX binoculars, and exposed some recognizable photographs. Several of us (Albert Burchsted, Tom Brown, Andy Bernick, Jarrod Santora, plus others not in our party) saw the warbler on Saturday 17 Dec, on the Staten Island Christmas Bird Count, and Burchsted made recognizable recordings of its call note.

The bird spent much of its time foraging in weedy vegetation enclosed within a dilapidated greenhouse. At other times, it would leave the greenhouse and forage along a stand of Norway spruces and in the shrubs and weeds surrounding the spruces. It was last seen by Santora on 28 Dec.

The MacGillivray's Warbler was recognizable as MacGillivray's, and not Mourning (*O. philadelphia*) due to its call note, the coloration of the throat, and the color and configuration of the crescents about the eye. This bird was extremely vocal for an *Oporornis*, uttering bursts of 15-20 calls at a time over a 2-3 minute period, during which time it would flit actively about the shrubby vegetation. The call note of the Staten Island bird can be best described as intermediate between that of a Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) and that of a Yellow-rumped Warbler



Figure 1: MacGillivray's Warbler, Staten Island, Richmond County, NY, on 15 Dec. 1999.



Figure 2: Closeup of same bird

Photos by Steve Nanz

(*Dendroica coronata*). The distinctive note of Mourning Warbler, by comparison, is a sharp "spic", remarkably similar to the chip note of the Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*). Some field guides (Dunn and Garrett 1997) describe the call note of Mourning Warbler as "flat". To our ear it is the note of MacGillivray's that is flat, with Mourning being sharp. In any event, Mourning sounds like an Indigo Bunting, Macgillivray's like a yellowthroat or hoarse Yellow-rumped Warbler. These differences in voice are consistent, and in our opinion, diagnostic.

The throat and upper chest area (the area enclosed by the hood) on our bird were grayish white, without any hint of yellow, and diffusely streaked with dusky but not black. Finally, the eye crescents on the Staten Island bird were bold, white, and together encircled about 2/3 of the circumference of the eye. Mourning Warblers, by contrast, have much narrower, off-white eye-rings that tend to encircle a larger proportion of the circumference of the eye.

IDENTIFICATION AND AGING

To check the validity of field characters cited by various authors as diagnostic in separating MacGillivray's from Mourning Warblers, we examined specimens in the AMNH. We selected 50 specimens of MacGillivray's Warblers and 39 specimens of Mourning Warblers collected between 15 Aug and 31 Jan. We omitted adult males from our selection, using the reasoning that our bird could not have been an adult male on the basis of plumage characters. Adult males in fall and winter are similar to adult males in spring and summer (Dunn and Garrett 1997). We measured the wing chord and tail length of all specimens, in order to use the difference in length of these two structures as a basis for assigning each specimen to one or another species (Lanyon and Bull 1967; Pyle 1998). Then we assessed, for each specimen that could be unambiguously assigned to one or the other species on the basis of measurements, whether the distinctiveness of the above mentioned field characters held true.

For MacGillivray's Warblers, we found that three out of fifty specimens had some yellow on the throat, but none of these three had as bright or extensive yellow as did the average Mourning Warbler. Twenty of the 39 Mourning Warblers that we examined had wing-minus-tail measurements within the range of overlap between the two species, and seven of the twenty had wing-minus-tail measurements well outside the range of Mourning (wing-minus-tail of less than 5 mm) and within the

range of MacGillivray's. We suspect that these seven specimens may be misidentified.

Of the remaining 19 Mourning Warblers, five had throats that were either buff or whitish, and without any trace of yellow. Nevertheless, none of the Mourning Warblers had any hint of obscure darkish streaking on the throat typical of the Staten Island individual and other MacGillivray's Warblers. Assessing the coloration of the eye-ring in museum specimens is difficult due to the vagaries of the style in which the specimens were prepared. Therefore we were unable to quantify the usefulness of this character in distinguishing the species based on the AMNH specimens. Nevertheless, we did not find any Mourning Warblers with bright and restricted orbital crescents that were typical of many of the specimens of MacGillivray's Warblers. In sum, our analysis of the AMNH specimens supported the validity of the field marks that we used to identify the Staten Island MacGillivray's Warbler. We are uncertain about the age and sex of the bird, though it was not an adult male. We lean towards identifying it as a hatching year male, because of the blackish coloration of the lores (females of any age would most likely have greyish lores).

The accumulation of East Coast records since the late 1970's suggests the possibility that the eastwards dispersal of this species has increased in recent years.

STATUS ON THE NORTH AMERICAN EAST COAST

This constitutes the first record for the state of New York, though there is a previous record of a bird banded in Fredonia 29 Oct 1983 (*American Birds* 38(2) p.200) that was considered "probably" this species. In addition, there are seven records from Massachusetts (Veit and Petersen 1993), one record from New Jersey (Walsh 1999) one from Georgia (banded, Jekyll Isle 2 Oct 1987 (*American Birds* 42(1) p.59) and, pending clarification, there are either two or three from Florida. See *Field Notes* 52(3) p. 322 for the first Florida occurrence, and then *North American Birds* 53(1) p.48 and 53(2) p.163. All but two of these East Coast records are from the late fall (Sep to Dec), except for the first from Florida. In addition to the above records, there is a male collected in New Haven, CT in May 1890. This specimen is AMNH #507935, and appears to us to be MacGillivray's. There is also a bird collected by Kenneth P. Able on Block Island, Rhode Island 28 Sep 1972 (AMNH#808837) that appears to us to be a MacGillivray's as well. Able (pers. comm.) felt that the Block Island

bird was MacGillivray's when collected, and we will report on this and other East Coast records in a subsequent publication.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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