

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER

724-01-1992

Re the request for details about the 12 Orange-crowned Warblers observed in northern Butler County on May 9, 1992: This was a cumulative figure for the day at four localities: Wolf Creek Narrows 4, Miller Track 4, Slippery Rock Township 2, and Glades State Gamelands 2.

The low pressure that rapidly engulfed northern Butler County by mid-morning held vireos and warblers in the trees. Rain started falling about 1000 hrs and intensified all day. By 1500 hrs it was raining so hard that our group could not leave our vehicles. We were forced to call it a day. Yet our group identified 19 warbler species and 110 individuals during the field period, mostly in the morning. The normal migration pattern of fallout around dawn and then feeding-moving-resting through the trees until evening flight time was broken by the inclement weather. On May 9-10 vireos and warblers definitely were "stalled" in northern Butler County.

Based on spring records kept for northern Butler County since 1972, the Orange-crowned Warbler is recorded every year that a wave of warblers stalls here because of weather conditions similar to May 9-10, 1992. Most Orange-crowns fly over this part of the county at night and can be identified by their characteristic CHIP call note. As many as 3 individual Orange-crowns have been identified at one time, in one place in the past, but 2 individuals at one time in one place have been recorded on several occasions since 1972, even in my own backyard. Of course, proof for this point is difficult if not impossible to declare, but it seems to me that Orange-crowns travel in already bonded pairs, at least here. The species is usually among the earliest warbler arrivals after Yellow-throated, Myrtle, Yellow and Louisiana Waterthrush, between May 1-10. The Tennessee Warbler, which can be confused for the Orange-crown, usually arrives here between May 10-15, peaking about May 18-20. In the third week of May the Tennessee is the most common warbler species in northern Butler County.

Based on years of field experience, and true on May 9, Orange-crowns prefer forest edge habitat, although I've observed them in open woodlots and yards and gardens where mature trees occur. All 12 individuals on May 9 were feeding in low branches of deciduous trees along Wolf Creek or in open woodlots, perhaps no higher than 15-20 feet above ground level. The Tennessee Warbler, on the other hand, prefers the canopy layer of trees and I've rarely observed it lower than 25 feet above ground level. The light was excellent from dawn to 1000 hrs and without even using binoculars (7X to 10X used by 4 group members) we detected an overall drab olive color of the Orange-crowns at 25 feet. The 1 Tennessee Warbler seen that day illustrated a three-tone coloration: light gray crown, dark green back, and white underparts. With binoculars, the Orange-crowns had light gray and thin bills, dark olive backs, wings, and upper tails, and light olive-gray underparts from throat to undertail coverts which were slightly lighter olive (but not yellow as shown in some guides). This color pattern was enhanced by dark olive streaks on the breasts and abdomens of the birds and contrasted with the lack of such streaks on the white underparts of the lone Tennessee Warbler observed that day. Finally, as mentioned above, the Orange-crowned Warbler has a distinctive CHIP call note that is used in migration and moving through the low branches of trees. Only 2 or 3 male Orange-crowns sang early that morning, a high pitched trill followed quickly by a slow, lower trill, which is quite different from the gradually accelerated high trill of the Tennessee Warbler. Only 2 male Orange-crowns displayed the tawny orange crown characteristic of some individuals of the species, although I frankly have never seen more than 2 such individuals.

May 1992 was one of the best springs for warbler waves in years, again because of weather patterns that kept migrants from travelling long distances each night. Some 30 warbler species were recorded between May 10-16 along Wolf Creek. Orange-crowns were absent after May 12 but Tennessees dominated from May 12-16.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: **Orange-crowned Warbler**

Date of Sighting: **9 May 1992**

Observer(s): **Gene Wilhelm**

Date of Submission: **1992 Butler**

Submitted by: **Gene Wilhelm**

| Member | Class I | Class II | Class III | Class IV | Class V | | |
|---------------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|---------|---|---|
| | | | | | A | B | C |
| E. Kwater | | | X | | | | |
| B. Haas | | | X | | | | |
| F. Haas | | | X | | | | |
| R. Ickes | | | X | | | | |
| G. McWilliams | | | | X | | | |
| S. Santner | | | X | X | | | |
| J. Skinner | | | X | | | | |
| TOTALS | | | 6 | 1 | | | |
| DECISION | | | | | | | |

Comments:

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Signature (Secretary):

Date:

7/2/93