

Black-and-white Warbler

Mniotilta varia

The Black-and-white Warbler may be the easiest warbler to identify because of its distinctive nuthatch-like feeding strategy and contrasting black and white plumage.

In Corkscrew, the Yellow-throated Warbler is also black and white on top, but its yellow throat is distinctive and its foraging habits are different.

The Black-and-white Warbler is the only member of the genus *Mniotilta*, which means “moss-plucking.” That refers to its habit of probing bark and moss for insects.

It has an unusually long hind toe and claw on each foot as well as heavier legs than other wood warblers. These adaptations allow it to move securely up and down and under on the surface of tree bark.

The Black-and-white Warbler creeps along tree branches and trunks from the canopy to the ground, picking and probing with its thin bill. It often creeps upside-down along the undersides of branches, and may creep downward head first.

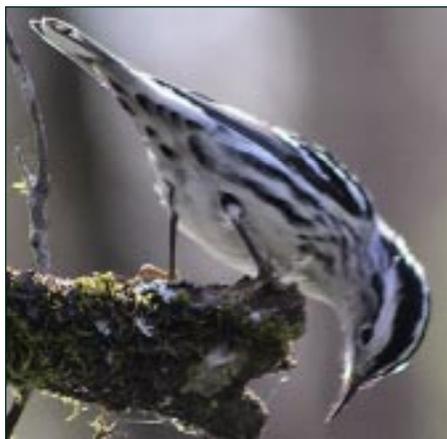
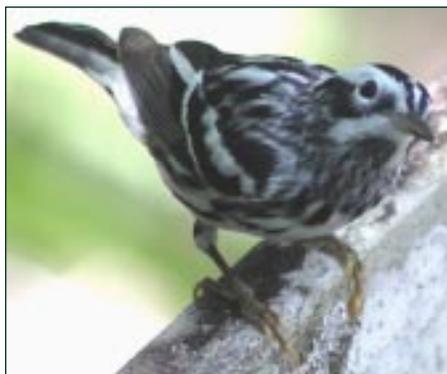
Both sexes have black and white stripes, including the crown. The male has a black throat, *top photo*, while the female’s throat is white, *bottom photo*. The female is generally smaller than the male. Juveniles look much like the females.

It primarily eats insects that are gleaned from tree trunks and limbs of trees. It moves up, down, and around the surfaces, unlike two other species which have similar foraging techniques.

Because of its habit of creeping around trunks and branches searching for food, it was once called the “Black-and-white Creeper,” but Brown Creepers tend to only move up a tree.

And unlike nuthatches which typically move downward, the Black-and-white moves in every direction.

Its main food items include caterpillars, flies, bugs, beetles, borers, spi-



ders, larvae, and egg masses. It is the only North American wood warbler that regularly forages on bark.

Although it specializes in bark gleaning, it also makes use of other foraging behaviors more typical of other warblers including occasional flycatching and foliage gleaning.

By foraging from bark in this manner, it can glean enough food, including dormant insect forms, before trees leaf out to allow it to arrive at its breeding grounds earlier than other warblers.

It breeds between April and August from northern Alberta and central Manitoba east to Newfoundland, and south to the southeastern United States east of Rockies.

Males arrive on the breeding grounds first in the spring. Soon after arriving, they establish a territory, and then begin looking for a mate. The males try to attract a female by following her around, singing and showing off their feathers. They may also perch near the female and flutter their wings.

Once a monogamous pair has formed, the female builds the nest. When the nest is finished, the female lays 4 to 6 white eggs and incubates them for 10 to 12 days. The male sometimes brings food to the female while she is incubating. After the chicks hatch, both parents feed them and defend the nest. The chicks leave the nest after 8 to 12 days, but they stay in their parents’ territory for two to three weeks before leaving.

Black-and-white Warblers winter from Florida southward through Central and South America. In Corkscrew, they begin to arrive in September and leave in early April. They are most often observed in January and February.

Generally solitary, black-and-whites join mixed-species flocks in winter and during migration.

They sing in their northern breeding territories, but here they only call. Winter calls include a dull *chip* or *tik*, as well as a doubled *seet-seet* flight call

BLACK-AND-WHITE FACT

A group of black-and-white warblers is collectively known as a “dichotomy,” “distinction,” and “integration” of warblers.

