

Northern Parula

Parula americanus

The one warbler that summers at Corkscrew year in and year out is the Northern Parula. It is a common breeder throughout most of Florida and is usually found by listening to its loud, persistent song.

Males have two distinct songs while females tend to be quiet. The first song, heard in the spring, is an ascending trill with a separate end note. It is used to attract mates. The second call is a series of buzzy notes, which the male most often uses to identify and defend its territory.

The Northern Parula is the smallest eastern wood warbler, weighing in at barely a quarter of an ounce and only about four and a half inches long.

Males and females have yellowish throats and chests and two white wing bars. The male has an orange and black patch across the breast and a small black eyeline, which females and immature birds lack.

Both genders have a bluish patch on their backs. When John J. Audubon first saw the birds, he named them “Blue Yellow Back Warbler.”

Parulas are active in the mid and upper canopy where they forage at branch tips for insects, most commonly ants, bees, wasps, and spiders. They rarely look for food close to the trunk of a tree.

The Parula breeds from southern Canada to southern Florida, and it is found throughout Florida during migration, which peaks in August-September and again in March-April. The



Parula anting on the boardwalk railing.

majority of Parulas winter in Mexico, Central America, and the West Indies, but some do winter in subtropical southern Florida (*see chart above right*).



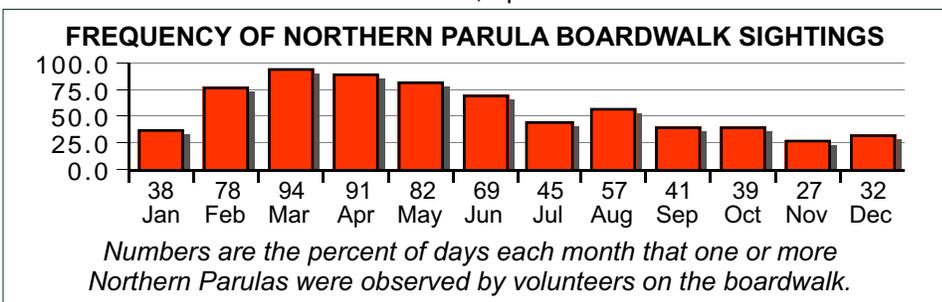
Male Northern Parula



Nest of alternate materials near south lake, April 2007



Female Northern Parula



When breeding, the Northern Parula prefers cypress and hardwood swamps, hardwood forests, pine-oak woodlands, or wherever Spanish moss thrives. They favor woods with a very dense understory of saplings and shrubs that is near still or slow-moving water. The male arrives first in a nesting area and establishes a territory.

In the South, Northern Parulas nest most frequently in a high clump of Spanish moss, which makes the nest very difficult to spot from below.

They fashion the nest by hollowing out a mass of the Spanish moss and forming a cup near the bottom. An entrance hole is built in the side near the rim of the

cup, and often a second hole is built on the opposite side of the nest. The female, with a little help from the male, lines the nest with epiphytic fibers, fine grass,

hair, and plant down.

In the northern breeding grounds, Parulas will use beard lichens for nest sites. When Spanish moss or lichen isn't available or isn't dense enough, the nest may be made of existing hanging clusters of twigs or leaves. The same nesting site is often used in successive years.

In Florida, nest building starts toward the end of March and in April, and pairs are generally monogamous. Eggs are laid as early as the first week of April, and second broods are possible because Parulas remain on the breeding grounds until late August. Three to five eggs are laid, one per day, and the female incubates the eggs for 12 to 14 days. The nestlings fledge after 10 days.

Fast Facts

- Parula is pronounced PAR-a-la or PAR-ya-la, according to *Birds of North America*.
- * Both males and females breed in their first year.
- The oldest documented Parula lived for seven years.