

# Nikon

## Photo Quiz

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- .clearer, brighter image
- .highest quality materials
- .heavy duty construction
- .superb handling

*Naturally*  
BETTER!

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The quiz bird for this issue is, judging by the size of the branch, a relatively small passerine. It is quite bright yellow from the face through the throat, breast and belly to the undertail coverts. The eye stands out as large and black but there is a blackish loreal line (between the eye and the bill base). The rear of the crown is black and sharply defines the face and auricular. The nape, wings and back are a soft olive green. The tail from below is quite white. The legs are bright flesh pink. The bill is narrow throughout, fine-tipped and black.

Perhaps this quiz bird might lend itself to a modified key. We have lots of small passerines with unmarked bright yellow underparts. So let's at least begin by trying to "key our bird out". A quick perusal of the 2002 Ontario Bird Checklist reveals 22 species that have, at least in some plumages, clear or almost clear yellow plumage from throat to, or nearly to, the vent.

Let's examine the bill first. Our bird has a narrow bill from the base to the finely pointed tip. Seven species: Yellow-breasted Chat; Scarlet, Summer, and Western Tanager female and basic plumaged birds; Smith's Longspur; and American and Lesser Goldfinches all have much thicker bills.

The remaining 15 are all warblers. So we've already keyed it out to one family, the Parulidae or Wood-Warblers. To be precise, the chat is also a Parulid but a rather

odd one at that. Of those remaining 15, four have wing bars: Blue-winged, Lawrence's (a hybrid), Magnolia and Pine Warblers. In addition, the latter two always have at least traces of streaking on the breast or flanks.

So now we have 11. Six more species, in those plumages that are essentially yellow, possess either an eye ring or eye spectacle. So we can now eliminate Mourning, Connecticut, MacGillivray's, Nashville, Canada and Kentucky Warblers.

At this point, I'm going to abandon the key and examine the six remaining candidates in more detail. A key would work but it becomes stilted at this juncture. Keys work less well with the subtleties of shape and posture. Moreover, most birders in the field or in perusing this article would automatically have jumped to this point.

Female and first basic Prothonotary Warblers have yellow faces and underparts. They also, however, have dark backs, slaty wings, pure white vents and white undertail coverts. Moreover, the face is very plain with no dark lores, so the eye is very bold and prominent.

The Common Yellowthroat is not so uniformly yellow below, fading to dull off-white on the belly, and it has a dull yellow vent. The tail is brown. It is olive-brown above, not moss or olive-green. The yellowthroat is somewhat more slender and not as chunky.

The aptly named Yellow

Warbler is almost as bright above as it is below. It has yellow edges to all the wing feathers and clear yellow lores. It is essentially an all yellow bird.

Strictly speaking, we eliminated Kentucky Warbler earlier but it is similar enough to be discussed again. It is quite similar to the quiz bird in overall plumage, being bright yellow below and bright olive green above. Both it and the quiz bird are most often glimpsed in undergrowth and shrubbery and present the same impression of colour and size. A clear look in the open, such as in the photo, would reveal the bright yellow spectacle on the black "sideburn" of a Kentucky. Moreover, Kentucky does not have white in the tail.

Two species of warbler that are yellow below, bright olive above, plain-faced and with varying amounts of black on the head are Hooded and Wilson's. Adult males with distinctive black head markings are unmistakable. But here we

have a bird with only a small amount of black on the head. However, Wilson's Warbler, even a plain first basic female, has a bright yellow superciliary stripe that extends to the bill base and contrasts with a duller face and crown. It has yellow lores. The tail is dark without white and not as broad as in the subject bird.

Of course, we have a **Hooded Warbler**, a southern gem whose breeding range barely extends into southern Ontario. Sightings of this bird always make an Ontario birder's day. In life, the differences from Wilson's Warbler are even more dramatic. Hooded Warblers nervously and energetically flick their tails open and closed. This photo by Jim Flynn catches it with tail spread to reveal the extensive and diagnostic white in the tail feathers. It has a bull neck and large head, whereas Wilson's has a rather petite head, small eye and a short, small, light-coloured bill creating an altogether different "look" than Hooded.

Bob Curry, 3115 New Street, Unit 30, Burlington, Ontario L7N 3T6