

The At A Glance photograph for October depicts a nondescript stripe-breasted bird with a prominent supercilium and a slender, pointed bill. This combination of features eliminates otherwise superficially similar thrushes, pipits, sparrows, and finches. The only Massachusetts birds sharing the characteristics shown in the photograph are two warblers in the genus *Seiurus*: Northern Waterthrush and Louisiana Waterthrush.

Waterthrush identification is a classic example of a case where two sibling species are so similar that only by using a series of comparative features is it possible to safely separate them in the field. With waterthrushes, the critical identification features are the supercilium, throat pattern, appearance of the breast streaks, and the presence or absence of a flank patch.

The waterthrush in the photograph has a long supercilium that is continuously broad from the eye back to the nape. The streaks on the underparts are broad and widely spaced, and they stop short of the throat, which is unmarked. Especially important to notice is a well defined dusky flank patch that contrasts with the white background coloration of the underparts. These characteristics all indicate that the pictured bird is a Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*).

By comparison, the Northern Waterthrush has a smaller bill and a shorter and narrower supercilium, especially behind the eye, and the typical individual's throat is distinctly spotted. Ordinarily the ventral streaks are more sharply defined and coalesce across the yellowish-washed upper breast, thus producing a distinct necklaced effect. Most importantly the Northern Waterthrush does not have a contrasting flank patch. During the breeding season, the Northern Waterthrush prefers wooded swamps with standing water, while the Louisiana Waterthrush is ordinarily found along running streams in rich woodlands.

Photo by Hal H. Harrison. Courtesy of MAS.



AT A GLANCE

Photo by Ralph E. Lawrence. Courtesy of MAS.



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

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