

primarily at higher elevations in central and western parts of the state, but also locally in the east in pine forests on the coastal plain. They are seasonally monogamous and may rear two broods. The Yellow-rump's song has been described as a "silver trilling" rising or falling at the end; the song has been transliterated as *wheedle wheedle wheedler* or *ching ching wheedle wheedle weet*. They give a *tsee* or *tseet* flight song and various metallic *chep* or *chek* notes. In courtship the male fluffs his feathers, displaying his yellow crown and breast patches, raises his wings, flutters, and sings.

The males spend much of their time defending the nesting territory while the female incubates. They nest mostly on horizontal branches of spruce and other conifers as high as 50 feet, but usually 5-20 feet above the ground. The nest is a cup of twigs, shredded bark, and roots, often lined with feathers. The usual clutch is 4-5 creamy-white eggs, marbled brown or gray. Incubation, mostly by the female, lasts 12-13 days, and within two weeks the young have fledged. Yellow-rumps will give elaborate "broken wing" distraction displays near the nest, and both parents feed the young.

Yellow-rumped Warblers are foraging generalists, hawking, hovering, and gleaning a bewildering assortment of insects and spiders out of the air, from the ground, or from the branches, trunks, and foliage of trees. Males forage higher than females, a partitioning of resources that may serve to provide a food supply for the female near the nest. Although insectivorous during the breeding season, they may shift to "bugs and berries" at other seasons. In winter they often subsist largely on Bayberry, Wax Myrtle (hence the origin of the name "Myrtle" Warbler), cranberries, red cedar berries, and even Poison Ivy.

Yellow-rumped Warblers are often victims of Brown-headed Cowbird nest parasitism, and many thousands die during migration in collisions with radio towers and other structures, a problem made worse by the proliferation of towers related to cellular telephone transmission. However, these spritely birds remain our most common migrant warbler and add a cheery note to many otherwise bleak winter days.

--W.E. Davis, Jr.

#### ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

Louise Zemaitis, a freelance artist and naturalist, is a regular exhibitor at the "The Loft," Cape May Bird Observatory's gallery. Her illustrations have appeared in a wide variety of books, magazines, brochures, and newsletters, and on T-shirts. She also leads bird and butterfly trips for Cape May Bird Observatory. Louise lives in Cape May Point, New Jersey, with her naturalist sons, Bradley and Alec, and her husband, Michael O'Brien. Louise and her husband have recently opened their own studio, Swallowtail Studio, in Cape May Point, which can be reached at (609) 898-9578.