

Spring migration corridor of Golden-cheeked Warblers in Tamaulipas, Mexico

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Golden-cheeked Warbler off of Comanche Trail, Travis County, Texas. Photograph/Greg W. Lasley.

THE GOLDEN-CHEEKED WARBLER (*Dendroica chrysoparia*) is rarely encountered outside its restricted breeding range in the cedar and oak hill country of the Edwards Plateau in central Texas. There are only a handful of specimens and sight records from its apparent winter range in the highlands of Mexico (Chiapas), Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (summarized by Braun, *et al.* 1986). In his seminal work (1976), Pulich noted about a dozen records of the species along its presumed migration route through the Sierra Madre Oriental of eastern Mexico.

At 1530 hrs CST on March 17, 1988, while birding around the village of Julilo in Tamaulipas, Mexico (ca. 23°6'N, 99°11'W), we observed at least six Golden-cheeked Warblers at 1500 meters in the pine-oak transition forest of the Sierra de Guatemala. We discovered the birds moving with a large feeding wave of migrating passerines, consisting mainly of Black-throated Green Warblers (*Dendroica*

virens). Lesser numbers of Townsend's (*Dendroica townsendi*) and Wilson's (*Wilsonia pusilla*) warblers were dispersed throughout.

At the core of the flock we picked out Golden-cheeked Warblers, mostly males, foraging with the other migrants among the flowering crowns of the oaks. Most of the authors are familiar with this species from years of combined field experience in Texas. Because of the size and erratic movement of the traveling flock—scattered over a hectare of forest—we could only estimate that at least six, and probably more, individuals were present during ten minutes of observation. Our current report resembles a sighting of several birds migrating at 1100 meters on March 18, 1987, by Johnson *et al.* (1988) at Texas Southmost College's Rancho del Cielo Biological Station. The village of Julilo is only a walk of eight or ten kilometers from here.

Male Golden-cheeked Warblers usually begin arriving on their breed-

ing territories in Texas early in March. While little is known about the migration patterns of this uncommon species, both of these observations, as well as the records cited by Pulich (1976), suggest that the bulk of migrating spring birds funnel through a narrow corridor of mountain ridges above 1000 meters along the eastern slope of Mexico (Figure 1). The Golden-cheeked Warbler seems increasingly threatened on two fronts. First, the escalating real estate pressures for developing the Edwards Plateau and second, the potentially catastrophic destruction of winter habitat in Central American tropical forests. In addition, future efforts to manage this species may also need to focus on preserving its transitory bottleneck through the cloud-forest ridges of the Sierra Madre Oriental. ■

LITERATURE CITED

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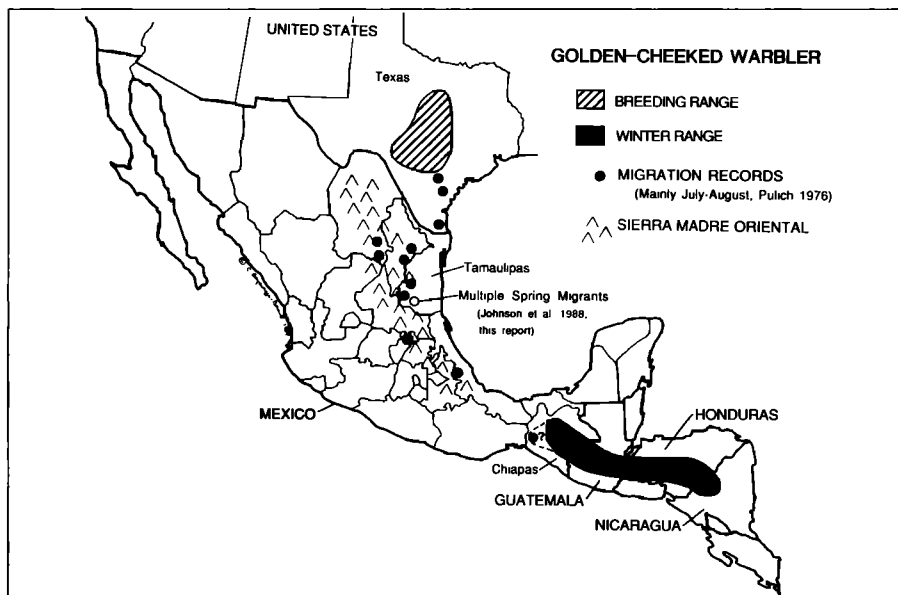


Figure 1. North American distribution of the Golden-cheeked Warbler.