



Golden-cheeked Warbler

Setophaga chrysoparia

Identification

Golden-cheeked warblers are small songbirds with yellow coloring on the sides of the head separated by a black stripe through the eyes. A black throat extends into stripes on the sides of the abdomen, which are surrounded by grey-white feathers. The crown and back of the bird are black in appearance. Golden-cheeked warblers also have white wingbars and a white underbelly. Females can be distinguished from males by an overall paler appearance and fewer black feathers on the throat. Both sexes are between 4.7-5.1 in/12-13 cm in length at maturity, weigh between 0.25-0.52 oz/7-14.7 g, and have a wingspan between 7.5-8.3 in/19-21 cm in length. The golden-cheeked warbler is listed as Endangered in the United States.



Photo credit: [Steve Maslowski/USFWS/Flickr](#)

Observation Tips

Males can be observed in the tops of the tallest oak and juniper trees. They are most likely to be seen from early March to early May, when they first arrive in Texas after migrating from their wintering grounds in Mexico. They emit a high pitch characteristic “bzz-bzz lay-zey-day-zee” call to announce their breeding territory. Males and females will typically remain in the same territory for the entirety of the mating season. Golden-cheeked warblers are known only to inhabit oak juniper woodlands.

Interesting Fact

The golden-cheeked warbler is the only bird to breed in Texas exclusively. Males will return to the same nesting territory year after year and will often breed with the same partner in subsequent years.

Ideal Habitat

Golden-cheeked warbler breeding habitat is found only in central Texas and consists of old-growth and mature re-growth Ashe juniper-oak woodlands at an elevation between 590-1700 ft/180-520 m. The total estimated area of suitable breeding habitat is limited to an estimated 4,000 square miles/6,434 square km. Preferred topography contains limestone hills and canyons, often associated with rough, broken terrain. Occupied areas include junipers at least 40 years old. Nests are constructed from sloughed juniper bark in upright forks in mature junipers between 5-29.5 ft/1.5-9 m above ground. Golden-cheeked warblers migrate to wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America, where they reside from early August through early April. Preferred habitat in the wintering areas consists of montane pine or pine-oak forests as well as lower montane wet and tropical forests. Primary dominant species in wintering grounds include Ocote and Encino oaks.



Range map provided by BirdLife International

Management Activities that Benefit Species – Best Management Practices (BMPs)

Maintain intact areas of juniper-oak woodlands within the breeding habitat in central Texas to ensure adequate areas for nesting and food availability for young. Management that maintains old-growth and mature second-growth juniper forests is critical as it can take decades to recover from disturbances.

Management Activities to Avoid

The primary management practice to avoid is clearing mature juniper-oak woodlands for urban development and grazing lands. Avoid fragmenting golden-cheeked warbler breeding habitat which benefits blue-jays and brown-headed cow birds, which are primary nest predators. In wintering grounds, deforestation for agricultural and wood harvest should be avoided.

Other Species that Benefit from Similar Habitat Management

Similar habitat management practices can benefit the eastern fox squirrel and the black-capped vireo, which are susceptible to habitat destruction of juniper and mixed hardwood forests.

Other Resources

BirdLife International and Handbook of the Birds of the World. 2019. Bird species distribution maps of the world. Version 2019.1. [Golden-cheeked warbler](#)

US Fish and Wildlife Service. Species Profile for [Golden-cheeked warbler](#) (*Dendroica chrysoparia*).

Texas Breeding Bird Atlas. [Golden-cheeked warbler](#)

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology. All About Birds [Golden-cheeked warbler](#)

NatureServe. (2021). *NatureServe Explorer: An Online Encyclopedia of Life* [Web Application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe. Arlington, Virginia. [Golden-Cheeked warbler.](#)