

Warbling Vireo

Vireo gilvus

The rich song of the Warbling Vireo is a common sound in many parts of central and northern North America during summer. It's a great bird to learn by ear, because its fast, rollicking song is its most distinctive feature. Otherwise, Warbling Vireos are fairly plain birds with gray-olive upperparts and white underparts washed with faint yellow. They have a mild face pattern with a whitish stripe over the eye. They stay high in deciduous treetops, where they move methodically among the leaves hunting for caterpillars.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Warbling Vireos are small, chunky songbirds with thick, straight, slightly hooked bills. They are medium-sized for vireos, with a fairly round head and medium-length bill and tail.

Color Pattern

Warbling Vireos are gray-olive above and whitish below, washed on the sides and vent with yellow. They have a dark line through the eye and a white line over the eye. The lores (the area between the eye and bill) are white in most individuals. Typically, the brightest plumage on Warbling Vireos is on vent or flanks. Worn midsummer birds can be nearly entirely gray above and whitish below.

Behavior

Warbling Vireos forage sluggishly, intently peering at leaf surfaces from a single perch before pouncing or moving on. They eat mostly caterpillars. They give their loud, rollicking, finch-like song frequently on summer territories.

Habitat

Deciduous forest is the favored habitat of Warbling Vireos throughout the year, though they also use some mixed coniferous and deciduous habitats. Even on migration they typically occur in areas with taller trees.

Cool Facts

- Warbling Vireos have a good name—the males sing a fast, up-and-down, rollicking song that suits the word “warbling.” The early twentieth century ornithologist William Dawson described the song this way: “fresh as apples and as sweet as apple blossoms comes that dear, homely song from the willows.” The highly variable song usually ends on a high note, leading the birder Pete Dunne to describe it as sounding “like a happy drunk making a conversational point at a party.”

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 4.7 - 5.1 inches
- Wingspan - 8.7 inches
- Weight - 0.4 - 0.6 ounces

