



Revealed! A small flock of migrating songbirds, including this Prairie Warbler, was foraging with my chickadee



My Prairie Warbler was a “first fall” male that fledged this summer

## **Brunswick Wildlife Migrating Warblers Revealed!**

What’s behind my obsession with finding warblers? I’ve mentioned or featured them in a number of articles...especially those concerning the fall migration.

Most birders treasure these avian jewels. Warblers are beautiful, hard to find, and difficult to photograph. During breeding season and even migration, many occupy a niche near the top of the canopy of tall hardwoods. I love the challenge!

Incidentally, “warbler neck” is an ailment featuring a stiff, sore neck caused by searching the canopy for warblers.

A handful of warblers nest in the Lower Cape Fear; however, during fall migration it is possible to see up to fifteen warbler species as they migrate down our barrier islands.

During migration, they are often seen at much lower heights. My guy was just above my head in a small oak tree in the NC Aquarium parking lot.

Post-breeding many birds, such as warblers, vireos, and orioles forage together in mixed-species flocks. In theory, this provides extra protection through safety in numbers and more pairs of eyes to help locate food.

Warblers and other songbirds are fairly quiet after their last brood has fledged since they usually do not have to protect territory. This leads to hormone and internal structure changes that inhibit singing. For example, gonads shrink (until the following spring) which is thought to lighten the load for flying long distances during migration.

During breeding season, the best way to locate songbirds is to hear them singing. During migration and winter we birders need help.

Chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches pretty much never shut up, so find them by their chattering and you may find migratory or overwintering songbirds. In this case, the Carolina Chickadee with its “chickadee, dee, dee, dee” call, gave away the location of the small foraging flock that included this Prairie Warbler.

Prairie Warblers breed from Florida to Maine, including our area and most overwinter in southernmost Florida, the Bahamas, and the Greater Antilles. I am calling this guy a “migrant” because he was on a barrier island.

Practice this method in locations known for mixed-species foraging flocks like the Aquarium area, Ft. Fisher Museum, Carolina Beach State Park, and Bald Head Island. The resident chatterboxes and I will be glad to share the wealth.

John Ennis



**The whistleblower! I located the warblers  
by following the chattering of this Carolina Chickadee**