



**Ruby-crowned Kinglets rarely show their  
ruby crest**



**A Blue-headed Vireo roosts near  
Boiling Spring Lakes**

## **Brunswick Wildlife Winter's Songbirds**

During winter many species of migratory songbirds stay in our area while close and distant relatives head to the Caribbean and South America. This article is about three of the best “little guys” you may find this winter in your backyard or in nearby woods.

Mostly they breed in northern boreal forest and eat insects plus insect larvae and eggs. How do they survive in Brunswick County in winter? Well, we still have insects during winter. Also, these songbirds shift to berries, sap, and seed when insects are not active.

The Ruby-crowned Kinglet is one of the smallest songbirds in North America. Trust me, it is very difficult to photograph. In addition to its size, this bird is very active and moves along the branches flicking its wings. Also, it forages by a method called “sally gleaning”, taking caterpillars, aphids, and other insects from the underside of leaves by hovering in the air supported by very rapid wing beats.

The kinglet can be identified by its white, oval eye-ring and two white wing bars. The male has red crest down the center of its crown which is concealed unless the bird is agitated. I sometimes see the crest displayed when a kinglet scolds a potential predator (me), usually more often in spring as its hormones start to crank up just before the trip north.

The Palm Warbler is also a small, insect-eating bird with a thin, pointed bill well adapted to nabbing insects. It has a yellow rump and undertail coverts and is generally found in fields and scrub during winter and migration.

Songbirds tend to forage in mixed-species flocks during winter; however, you can quickly identify the Palm because it frequently pumps its tail.

There are two subspecies of the Palm Warbler...the Eastern or Yellow Palm and the Western Palm. They breed apart but their wintering grounds overlap. Eastern birds are mostly yellow underneath while the Western subspecies, like the one in the photo, are light underneath.

The Blue-headed Vireo may be identified by its bold white “spectacles”, white wing bars, blue-gray head, yellow flanks, and olive back. There are two subspecies of this vireo, including one that nests at the higher altitudes in the Appalachians from Pennsylvania down to Northern Georgia. Appalachian breeders generally migrate short distances to winter near the Atlantic coast, including the Lower Cape Fear, from southeastern Virginia around the Gulf Coast to Texas.

Females choose males with large territories and those that demonstrate their superior nest building skills by constructing “model nests”. If she accepts the male’s proposal, the male will assist her with building the real nest and with incubation of her clutch.

These little guys asked me to deliver a message: “Count us”! The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), sponsored by National Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, will be held this weekend, February 15 through 18. This is your chance to assist as a citizen scientist.

Last year, based on over 80,000 checklists submitted, the GBBC recorded more than eleven million birds of 613 species. As a result of the count, it was discovered that many species had started their spring migrations earlier than in the past.

Many species, like the kinglet and Palm Warbler, breed in remote places therefore GBBC statistics are very important for giving scientists knowledge of their status.

The GBBC website may be found at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). It offers an overview, count instructions, identification assistance, and a FAQ section. Even though the count takes place this weekend, data may be submitted up to March 1.

Please encourage your birding friends to participate and contact [citizenscience@audubon.org](mailto:citizenscience@audubon.org) or [cornellbirds@cornell.edu](mailto:cornellbirds@cornell.edu) with questions.

John Ennis



**The Palm Warbler is a member of  
the Wood-Warbler Family**

