

FIRST WINTER OCCURRENCES OF THE CAPE MAY WARBLER FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

Phil Ranson

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The Cape May Warbler (*Dendroica tigrina*) is a regular but rare local summer visitor to the Peace River region of northeastern British Columbia and vagrant elsewhere in the province where it has been recorded from 19 May to 22 October. There are no published winter records for British Columbia (Campbell et al. 2001).

On 24 October 2004, I rescued a Pine Siskin (*Carduelis pinus*) from the jaws of my family cat. The bird was in shock so I placed it on the feeder tray on the deck where other siskins were gathering. I watched the bird from inside the house when my attention was drawn to a yellowish bird in a deciduous shrub (*Wiegelia* sp.) along the fence line under the dining room window. I viewed the bird through 10 x 42 mm binoculars. It appeared to be an unfamiliar *Dendroica* warbler, certainly not one of the warblers regularly seen in the Williams Lake area. Believing I may have an “eastern” warbler, I attempted to make a mental note of as many field marks as I could before the bird disappeared. While in this

process, a second identical but possibly brighter warbler came into my field of view in the same shrub. A check through Sibley (2000) and Dunn and Garrett (1997) identified the birds as Cape May Warblers. One bird remained in the area for about an hour and at one point came into the feeder tray by the window allowing close views.

On 30 October, one warbler returned again and foraged in the *Wiegelia* shrub. I watched it for about 15 seconds before it flew up in an attempt to catch a flying insect and then was gone.

On 6 December I received an e-mail from Anna Roberts that: "Wally Chernoff, 696-5th Avenue North in Williams Lake has what he thinks is a Townsend's Warbler that is very aggressive in driving off other birds from his feeder." I was unable to check for the bird that day but called Wally and suggested, as his feeder was less than one kilometre from the original sighting, that this may be a Cape May Warbler. He checked his field guide and thought it could be but wasn't sure. I arrived at 0815 hrs the next morning (31 October). The feeder was quiet but within 10 minutes the warbler arrived. Indeed, it was a Cape May Warbler. The bird had been at his feeders for about three weeks and Wally was concerned that this 'pugnacious' individual was driving off the other birds. It was feeding almost entirely on peanut butter.

The Cape May Warbler was last seen on 10 December 2004 (Figure 1) at which time it was very active chasing redpolls and chickadees from the feeder area. This autumn and winter occurrence is the first record for the Cariboo checklist area (see Roberts and Gebauer 1992) and the second winter occurrence for British Columbia. The other winter record for British Columbia was deposited in the BC Photo File for Wildlife Records (see Campbell and Stirling 1971) in the Wildlife Data Centre in Victoria. A Cape May



Figure 1. Wintering Cape May Warbler at Williams Lake, BC. 10 December 2004. (Anna Roberts). BC Photo 3148.



Figure 2. Cape May Warbler visiting suet feeder in Revelstoke, BC. 1 December 2000. (Mike Tomlinson). BC Photo 2090.

Warbler visited a feeder daily at Mike Tomlinson's home in Revelstoke from 1 to 9 December 2000 (Figure 2). The bird's plumage suggests that it was a "hatching year" male. The back spotting is fairly evident, which should make the bird a male, but overall brightness on the colour print is less than maximal for the species in winter (K. Garrett, pers. comm.).

Acknowledgements

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Literature Cited

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About the Author

Phil has been a casual birder since his childhood in England. He attended a birding course given by Jim Grant in Vernon in the early 1980s and has been a committed birder ever since. Phil is a forest protection officer and lives with his wife and two teenage daughters in Williams Lake.