

Yellow-throated Warbler: at Vermilion County Feeder

by Marilyn F. Campbell

I witnessed a Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*) at a backyard feeder on 10 April 2006. This species is the earliest of wood warblers to return to my yard each year, and it usually nests in one of several large sycamore trees along the river on the property.

On that day, I went out to fill feeders and heard the warbler singing directly overhead in a sycamore. As I was putting seed into one of the tube feeders, the warbler landed just a few feet from me on another feeder, which contained sunflower hearts. The bird reached and grabbed a seed, then flew off. I finished filling the other feeders and retreated to the house, where I watched from a window for several minutes. During that time, the warbler did not return. I made a note in my journal thinking it would be a one-time occurrence.



Yellow-throated Warbler discovered in Springfield, Sangamon County. 22 September 2006. Photo by Dennis Oehmke.

Exactly one week later, on 17 April, this “unique” event was repeated. Once again, the warbler was singing directly overhead, then landed on the same feeder and took a sunflower heart and flew away. I did not see it return for subsequent seeds.

I have lived at this location along the Little Vermilion River at the south edge of Georgetown, Illinois (Vermilion County) since 1977, and have fed birds all

those years. The Yellow-throated Warbler has been a backyard bird each spring and summer, but these were the first observations I’ve had of one taking seeds at my feeding station in 20 years.

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Selected instances of Yellow-throated Warblers at feeders

Marilyn Campbell’s report on a Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*) visiting her sunflower feeder in April 2006 led me to do a quick search of other similar reports. In Bent (1953), Alexander Sprunt, Jr. wrote: “Food of the yellow-throated warbler has apparently not been well investigated. Little appears in the literature, an illustration of the need to learn more of the diet of small, woodland birds. Records of the examination of seven stomachs reveal that insects compose most of its diet ... beetles, moths and their larvae, flies, bugs, grasshoppers, grouse locusts, crick-

ets, scale insects, and spiders are included in the food.” No mention was made of this bird eating seeds. In addition, Hall (1996) makes no mention of the Yellow-throated Warbler eating seeds or visiting feeders. Yellow-throated Warblers will come to feeders in winter, especially for suet, when north of their normal wintering range (pers. comm. S. Bailey), but Campbell’s report above and one below are from the regular spring/breeding range.

Here are several incidences indicating Yellow-throated Warblers do visit feeders and may eat sunflower seeds.

- June Osborne (2006) who leads birding walks at Neal’s Lodges and sets up bird-feeding stations along the spring-fed Frio River in Concan, Texas, made this observation 15 April 2006: “At the Cattle Guard this morning, a Yellow-throated Warbler surprised us by going to the sunflower feeder. It looked as if it were getting seeds! But warblers are not supposed to eat seeds, right? If it wasn’t eating them, it surely fooled us! Perhaps it was finding insects there, or maybe it had not read the book.”

Note that in fall and winter, some warblers including Yellow-