

Townsend's Warbler at The Chicago Botanic Garden

By James Steffen



'At first I thought it was another Black-throated Green, but the clear yellow throat and yellow face surrounding a dark face patch suggested something I had never seen before.'



I was conducting an early morning bird survey on 6 May 1993 at the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe, Cook County, prior to undertaking my other duties of woodland restoration. Spring migration was exceptional at the Garden that year and by the time I arrived at the north end of the cottonwoods adjoining our nursery, I was greeted by what had become common during the last few weeks - dozens of flitting warblers and a symphony of bird song. Yellow, Palm, Yellow-rumped, and Black-throated Green Warblers comprised the matrix of the warbler mixture.

While watching a small group of Black-throated Greens moving from the brushy fence row along the golf course to the cottonwoods behind our pole barn, I noticed a lone bird low in the hawthorns beneath the cottonwoods. At first I thought it was another Black-throated Green, but

Female Townsend's Warbler, 6 May 1993, Chicago Botanic Garden, Cook County. Photo by Margot Merrick. (Left)

Female Townsend's Warbler, 6 May 1993, Chicago Botanic Garden, Cook County. Photo by Margot Merrick. (Right)

the clear yellow throat and yellow face surrounding a dark face patch suggested something I had never seen before. Could it be a Yellow-throated Warbler? This seemed like a good choice since I had never seen a Yellow-throated Warbler.

I made a field sketch, consulted a field guide, and summoned Laurence Binford who had been wanting to see a Yellow-throated Warbler at the Garden. While waiting for Binford, I decided the bird didn't match the field guide picture of a

Yellow-throated Warbler. This bird's face was yellow not white. But what else could it be?

When Binford arrived we began searching for the bird but could not find it. Then Binford called me to the south end of the cottonwoods where he said he had not found the Yellow-throated Warbler but an even better bird.

It was the same bird I had seen earlier. Perhaps it was a western warbler.