

Cape May Warbler Holds Territory During Fall Migration

by H. David Bohlen and Dennis Oehmke

In the fall of 1992 aphids, probably of the genus *Periphyllus*, infested many of the trees, especially black maples (*Acer nigrum*) on the Carillon Hill in Washington Park, an intensively manicured city park in Sangamon County, Springfield. The leaves and branches of these maples were loaded with aphids, and many warblers including Cape May Warblers (*Dendroica tigrina*) and other birds were feeding on them. Cape Mays are decidedly uncommon in fall in central Illinois because the majority migrate eastward at or north of the Great Lakes. Surprisingly, at least one Cape May Warbler was apparently holding a territory.

On 23 September 1992 a brightly colored Cape May Warbler, probably a male (see photo), was seen for

an extended period of time in the same part of a black maple located near a fairly busy road. It actively fed on the aphids and chased away other birds. When it was not feeding or chasing, the bird hid under a leaf and remained quiet.

The Cape May Warbler defended an area in the lower branches from about 10 to 25 feet above ground against a Philadelphia Vireo, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and several kinds of warblers including Tennessee Warblers and even other Cape May Warblers. He did not chase birds in other parts of the tree. About 100 warblers frequented the immediate area; the majority were Tennessee and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Most of the warblers stayed in a loose flock and at times would inundate the Cape May's tree. When this happened, the Cape May busily chased away all the

intruders in its area of the tree which sometimes allowed the other birds to feed in the Cape May's territory for a short while.

The male Cape May Warbler held the same territory for at least 15 days through 7 October. One of us checked the tree nearly every day during this period, and we always found the male Cape May.

For the next two days it moved to another black

maple about 40 yards to the west. This was probably because the first tree lost most of its leaves through normal autumnal leaf fall. On 26 September the Cape May Warbler population on the hill reached seven individuals, the most ever recorded in one day during fall in Sangamon County.

Thus there were at least two warbler feeding strategies in practice at the park: the Cape May Warbler holding an insect-rich area to itself, and the Tennessee Warblers and others roaming the area.

Woolfenden (1962) reported a Myrtle Warbler and Kale (1967) a Cape May Warbler defending food-rich territories in times of food shortage or high competition. In central Illinois the fall of 1992 was very dry and food and water may have been scarce. Few warblers were observed in other parts of Washington Park at that time. Most of them were concentrated on the hill at the aphid infestation.

Literature Cited

Kale, H.W. II, 1967, Aggressive behavior by a migrating Cape May Warbler. *Auk* 84:120-121.

Woolfenden, G. E., 1962. Aggressive behavior by a wintering Myrtle Warbler. *Auk* 79:713-714.



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An adult male Cape May Warbler defends territory in a black maple in Springfield, 2 October 1992. Photo by Dennis Oehmke.