



## Golden-winged Warbler

The Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) only breeds in north-eastern North America. Very rare in Canada, it only occurs in southern Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba. In Quebec, it is mostly found in the Outaouais, Montérégie and Estrie regions, and there may only be 25 to 75 breeding pairs altogether in the Province.

### Key features

This small bird only weighs about 9 grams. The Golden-winged Warbler can be distinguished from other species by its yellow wing spot and crown. Males display a white breast, black throat and ear patch. Females are similar but duller, displaying shades of grey where the males are black and white.



Paruline à ailes dorées : mâle © Glenn Bartley, www.glennbartley.com; femelle © travelbeat.net

### Biology

Golden-winged Warblers prefer regenerating forests and places with abundant shrubby and herbaceous vegetation near mature forest stands. Hydroelectric corridors form narrow bands of regenerating vegetation and represent a typical example of habitat favoured by this species.

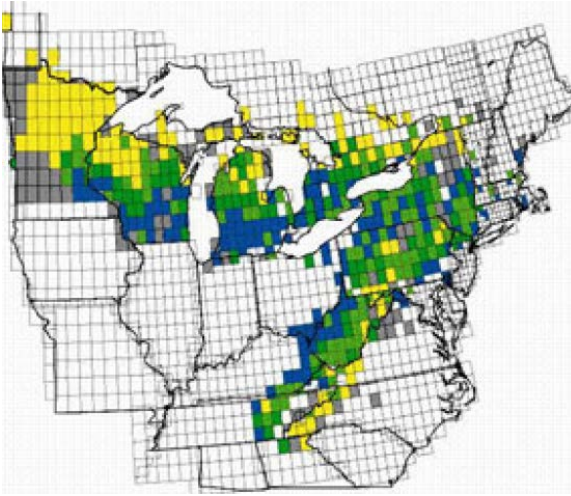
The Golden-winged Warbler prefers alder stands, wetlands, beaver ponds, regenerating forests after logging activities, as well as mines and abandoned fields. In Quebec, Golden-winged Warblers tend to breed in abandoned agricultural land colonized by shrubs, and seldom in regenerating forests as may be the case elsewhere. This warbler species nests on the ground and uses habitats adjacent to forested areas with scattered trees to perch on, sing and feed. Its diet includes a variety of insects and arthropods. In the fall, Golden-winged Warblers migrate towards Central or South America, where they stay throughout the winter season.

### A threatened species

Historically, the Golden-winged Warbler only used to breed in the southern part of its current area of occurrence. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the species extended its range northward and it was seen in Quebec for the first time in 1957, in the *Cap Tourmente* National Wildlife Reserve. However, over the last few decades the species has declined and it has now disappeared from several U.S. localities where it used to be common. The Canadian population of Golden-winged Warbler has dropped 79% between 1993 and 2002.

The main cause of decline is thought to be hybridization with Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*). Specialists believe that natural habitat disturbance due to increasing anthropogenic activities led to an overlap in the range of both species, which encourages hybridization. Other causes of decline include loss of wintering habitats and nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*).

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) designated Golden-winged Warbler "Threatened" in Canada, and it is Susceptible of being designated Threatened or Vulnerable in Quebec (MRNF, 2009).



Hybrid index indicating remaining areas of allopatry and areas of contact. Golden-winged Warbler in yellow, Blue-winged Warbler in blue, hybrid zone in green (Data courtesy of K. Rosenberg, GOWAP, Cornell Lab of Ornithology).

Source : COSEWIC, 2006

## Habitat management possibilities

Seeing as the Golden-winged Warbler is often found on private land, landowners can play a key role in the protection of the natural habitats it depends on. An American study in the southern Appalachians revealed that Golden-winged Warbler had a higher breeding success in areas affected by recent logging activities, whereas its presence was increasingly rare in undisturbed forest habitats. A clear link was also established between periodically managed hydro-electrical installation and the occurrence of this bird species. The USDA Forest Service suggests creating artificial disturbance in those forest habitats used by Golden-winged Warbler, including tree cutting or controlled fires, so as to reproduce the natural disturbances (storms, ice storms, fires, etc) creating regenerating areas the species relies on.

It should be borne in mind that professional supervision is necessary before undertaking such management activities. A detailed follow-up should also be planned and implemented in order to assess the effectiveness of such interventions on Golden-winged Warbler and the impact on other species.

The Golden-winged Warbler is being surveyed throughout its Quebec range and Appalachian Corridor (ACA) contributes actively to this process. Through the promotion of research projects on its territory and by raising awareness to landowners, Appalachian Corridor aims to protect this bird species and the natural habitats it relies on. For more information on practical measures to protect Golden-winged Warbler habitats or to know more about conservation tools available to landowners for the protection of natural habitats in perpetuity, please contact your local conservation group or land trust, or email the Appalachian Corridor team at [info@corridorappalachien.ca](mailto:info@corridorappalachien.ca) (or phone us at 450-297-1145).

## Sources

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Regroupement Québec Oiseaux. *Connaître et protéger la paruline à ailes dorées*. 2-page leaflet.

**Appalachian Corridor is a conservation organisation with a mission to implement, in collaboration with Nature Conservancy Quebec and local conservation organisations, a transborder conservation strategy for the protection of a natural corridor extending from the Green Mountains of Vermont to Mount Orford, passing through the Sutton Mountains in the Eastern Townships.** The following partners support Appalachian Corridor's global vision: Mount Echo Conservation Association, Association pour la conservation de la nature de Stukely-Sud, Ruiter Valley Land Trust, Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton, Mount Pinnacle Land Trust, Alderbrooke Marsh Land Trust, Memphremagog Wetlands Foundation, Brome Lake Land Foundation, Société de conservation du corridor naturel de la rivière au Saumon, Conservation des vallons de la Serpentine, Société de protection foncière du lac Montjoie, Les Sentiers de l'Estrie, Conservation Espace Nature Shefford and Massawippi Conservation Trust.