

## **Invasion of the Golden Swamp Warbler**

A dart of gold flashes through the understory, a loud ringing song breaks the still air, and a small, luminous bird appears on a bare twig hanging over the water. A wonderful sight! Who doesn't love the brightly-colored Prothonotary Warbler?

Originally called the "Golden Swamp Warbler" by John James Audubon, the Prothonotary was unfortunately already named by the Dutch naturalist, Pieter Boddaert, for a group of Catholic Church notaries who wore yellow hoods! We are now stuck with a rather uninteresting name for this gorgeous bird. I suggest we start a campaign to rename this species to its more appropriate and evocative name. After all, it's golden and lives in swamps – perfect! It's also one of the two North American wood warblers which nests in cavities, often close to the surface of the water. (Lucy's Warbler of the southwestern US in the other species.)



Every year we get a few mainly spring reports of this southerly breeding warbler and it's always a special treat when one brightens a morning during spring migration. Most years it's seems to be just a single bird that appears in our area and, according to eBird data, spring 2018 has been the best ever for this uncommon warbler. With at least 4 males seen this year by multiple observers, it's been a rare privilege for many of us. Most of the reports come from our own Beaver Lake Bird Sanctuary, but this spring there have been sightings from Asheville School, Azalea Park in East Asheville and Charles D Owen Park in Swannanoa.

So what does this increase in sightings mean? We could be getting more individuals moving north as the summers get warmer. It could simply be an aberrant year or we could have more and better birders out in the spring reporting more birds. It would be nice to think that the Prothonotary Warbler will increase as a visitor in our area and maybe even breed one day. Breeding reports have occurred in nearby counties with historical data indicating past breeding in Henderson County and probably yearly breeding occurring lower down in Polk County.

Maybe we should put up a few nesting boxes along the creek at Beaver Lake or Owen Park. After all, it would certainly be an honor to add the Golden Swamp Warbler to our list of locally-breeding warblers.

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