

Twice each year, millions of beautiful little warblers make epic journeys. In spring they head north to the places where they will build nests and raise their young. In fall, they head south, with most flying to places in Mexico and Central/South America where warmer weather will help ensure a steady supply of the invertebrates and fruit they'll need to survive.

About thirty species of warblers are routinely found in Houston. Most show up for short periods of time in spring and fall, taking brief pit stops in their cross-country travels. Members of a couple of species spend winter here and/or hang around in summer. Yellow-rumped Warblers are the most common and are illustrated in four flashcards.

And that's about the end of the good news. Finding these warblers is a whole other matter. Warblers are tiny, and two could perch side by side on a 3"x5" index card. To make matters worse, warblers are almost always in motion. When you find a warbler, chances are good that you'll only catch glimpses as it darts in and out of brush and among the leaves of trees. You'll fare better if you have a bird bath (keep it clean!), trees and berry bushes in your backyard.

To ID warblers, you'll need to be able to very quickly assemble all the clues you can gather. These clues can include the location of different colors on their bodies; unique markings on faces; the length of their bills; the presence or absence of dark streaks on their backs or undersides; white or yellow edges to wing feathers; diagonal stripes on folded wings (called "**wingbars**"); solid patches of white or another color on folded wings (called "**wing patches**"); and the arrangement of feathers and colors on the underside of tails. Taken as a group, these clues are known as "**field marks.**"

When a warbler is overhead, the tail provides good field marks. Each flashcard shows the tail as it looks from the underside – with the rest of the bird drawn as if it's at eye level. The tail has two groups of feathers. First, a set of ten long tail feathers – with only the two outermost feathers showing from below when the tail is held closed. Next, a bunch of little feathers that cover the quills at the base of the long tail feathers. These little feathers are called "**undertail coverts**" and are abbreviated as "**UTC**" in the notes you can print onto the back of the flashcards. Look at the flashcards (and at the birds!) to see if the tail and UTC are the same color or different colors, and if the tail and UTC are long or short. You can visit the [Feather Atlas](#) to look at half-sets of the long tail feathers (the two sides of the tail are mirror images), with the outermost feather that shows from below placed at the left side of each photo.

If and when a warbler sits still for a second, the patterns on the face are great field marks. Look to see if there are complete or broken circles around the eyes ("**eyerings**" or "**eye arcs**") or dark "**eyelines**" that cross through the eyes. Some warblers have darker colors on the top of the head ("**crown**"), on their "**cheeks**" and/or wear a "**mask.**" A few warblers look as if they are wearing white or yellow-rimmed glasses, or "**spectacles.**" Others have light "**eyebrows.**"

You can use the flashcards to memorize field marks and practice your ID skills. The flashcards illustrate adults in spring, when their colors are brightest. Cut out the flashcards, sort them into various categories (yellow underneath, bold wingbars, black throats, etc.) and then mix them up and see how quickly you can make the IDs. Look at lots of photos of each species, comparing what you see to the flashcards so that the field marks will begin to jump out.

You'll want to get more help. [The Warbler Guide app](#) (about \$13 for [iOS](#) or [Android](#)) is an amazing resource and you should begin by viewing the intro videos so you'll be able to put the app to its best possible use. Start by studying just a couple of warblers at a time so that you don't get totally frustrated. The (free) [BirdsEye Texas](#) app also has excellent sets of photos and will tell you where warblers are currently being found. You can find a link to instructions for using the [BirdsEye Texas](#) app at WhiteOakBayou.org/resources-and-zines. You should also use the (free) [eBird media catalog](#). There, you can view photos, play videos and hear sound recordings. It's helpful to sort the catalog so that instead of seeing the "Recently Uploaded" media, you jump right to the "Best Quality" media. It's also helpful to filter the media to whatever season and state you are in, since warblers' colors vary both seasonally and regionally. Note that most warblers are much duller in the fall and that some young warblers can be next to impossible to ID. Whatever you do, be sure to go outside and make the most of each spring, when warbler watching is at its finest!