



Blackpoll Warbler

MIGRATION NEWS

UNLOCKING THE MYSTERIES OF BLACKPOLL WARBLER MIGRATION

Every year, Blackpoll Warblers migrate in large numbers from their breeding grounds in Alaska and Canada to the Northeastern United States in preparation for their journey south to their wintering grounds. Once there, they fuel up and wait for a cold front to pass before taking flight over the Atlantic, riding tailwinds south to the Caribbean and northern coast of South America. After around three days of continuous flight, they arrive at their stopover sites depleted and in need of food to replenish the fat and muscle they have burned during their arduous journey.

Migration is the most dangerous period in these birds' annual cycle. They expend enormous amounts of energy to make the journey south to their wintering grounds and again when they travel north in the spring. According to SELVA and the work of the Neotropical Flyways Project, the dry thorny scrub of Colombia's Guajira Peninsula serves as an unlikely but vital stopover site during fall migration for thousands of Blackpoll Warblers and other migratory species. The arrival of these birds coincides with the peak of the region's short rainy season, when blooming vegetation brings the emergence of caterpillars, the perfect food source for warbler recovery. If the birds do not find sufficient food when they arrive, they must continue to their wintering grounds without regaining enough mass to fully recover from their journey.

According to research presented by Camila Gomez (SELVA) at a recent webinar put on by the Partners in Flight (PIF) Migration Ecology Subcommittee, as Blackpoll Warblers travel north in the spring, mortality is highest over the Caribbean and Southeastern United States. Blackpoll Warblers rely on healthy habitats in South America to prepare for the journey north. 350 million Blackpoll Warblers have been lost over the last 50 years as a result of habitat loss and other threats. This work

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NFP Tree Nursery



highlights the critical nature of full annual cycle conservation, demonstrating that on-the-ground conservation is particularly important for non-breeding grounds and pre-breeding migration. The Neotropical Flyways Project has been critical to identifying the limiting factors and restoring habitats essential to the survival of this and other species.

Over the last decade, the Neotropical Flyways Project has worked to identify neotropical stopover sites for more than 50 species of migratory birds across seven countries through surveys, mist netting, and radio tracking. Putting this information into action, the project has established ten native tree nurseries and planted over 30,000 native trees in critical stopover sites, restoring habitats and preserving the food sources that migratory birds depend on.

Looking forward, the Neotropical Flyways Project seeks to expand restoration efforts to additional stopover sites throughout Central America and northern South America. To generate ever more detailed information on stopover use, the NFP is also focusing on training local biologists and students in the research techniques they need to study migratory birds, building conservation capacity in the places it is most critical. Knowing the dangers faced by millions of migratory birds along their journey, investing in the conservation of stopover sites is critical to ensuring that the species we consider part of our natural heritage can continue to return year after year.



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