

The Status and Occurrence of the Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Setophaga pensylvanica*) in British Columbia.

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Introduction and Distribution

The Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Setophaga pensylvanica*) is a small passerine that breeds in Canada from eastern Alberta, through central Saskatchewan, southern Manitoba (except the southwest corner), and east through southern Ontario through southern Quebec into New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and locally in Newfoundland (Dunn and Garrett 1997). In the United States the Chestnut-sided Warblers breeds from local parts of North Dakota, throughout the Great Lakes region east through New England to New Jersey, northern Delaware, south into the Appalachian Mountains south to northern Georgia (Curson *et al.* 1994). There are scattered breeding locations found in Iowa, northern Illinois, northern Indiana, and north western Ohio and in Colorado (Dunn and Garrett 1997). There are scattered summer records of Chestnut-sided Warbler to the south and west of their normal breeding range with isolated populations around the main breeding range south to Arkansas (Dunn and Garrett 1997). The Chestnut-sided Warbler winters mainly in Central America from southern Nicaragua to Panama with some birds found in southern Mexico (Curzon *et al.* 1994). This species has been found in winter casually in South America in Ecuador and west to western Venezuela with records in the Greater Antilles (Curzon *et al.* 1994, Dunn and Garrett 1997). It is an uncommon to rare migrant in Bermuda with at least one winter record for the island (Dunn and Garrett 1997). It has been recorded in the winter on a couple of locations in the Lesser Antilles (Curzon *et al.* 1994, Dunn and Garrett 1997). The Chestnut-sided Warbler is a long distance migratory species that in the fall has a large movement of birds that start to move in late August and early September through the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi Valley (Dunn and Garrett 1997). These birds migrate by either following the shoreline of the Gulf of Mexico or crossing the Gulf of Mexico south to the Yucatan Peninsula on their way to spend the winter in Central America (Dunn and Garrett 1997). Other populations move south through Florida to winter in the Greater Antilles (Dunn and Garrett 1997). Spring migration begins in March as birds start to leave the wintering grounds (Dunn and Garrett 1997). The spring migration is greatly compressed with bird crossing directly over the Gulf of Mexico and emerging on the breeding grounds beginning in late April (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

The Chestnut-sided Warbler is a rare but increasing migrant vagrant along west coast. The species is annual in numbers in California with over one thousand records for the State, and it is no longer a review species by the California Bird Records Committee (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). In Oregon, the Chestnut-sided Warbler is no longer a review species by the Oregon Bird Records Committee with thirty-seven accepted State records (OFO 2012). In Washington, the Chestnut-

sided Warbler is a review species by the Washington Bird Records Committee with twenty-one state records (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2012). In British Columbia, the Chestnut-sided Warbler is a rare, almost annually occurring species, as there are fifty-eight Provincial records and one confirmed breeding record for the Province (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1 & 2). There is one fall sight record for Alaska from Middleton Island (West 2008). The Chestnut-sided Warbler has occurred three times in Greenland, once in the fall in the Azores and in twice in the fall in Great Britain (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Dunn and Garrett 1997, Rodebrand 2012).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Chestnut-sided Warbler is well covered in all standard North American field guides. In all ages the Chestnut-sided Warbler likes to cock its tail upward when perched or singing (Dunn and Garrett 1997). The adult males hold their breeding plumage from the months of March to August (Sibley 2000). The adult males have a yellow crown with a white cheek patch (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The stout bill is black and there is a black line that runs from the bill base, through the dark eyes to the nape (Curson *et al.* 1994). There is also a dark line from the bottom of the eye that runs down the inner cheek area (Curson *et al.* 1994). The throat is white in colour, and this white extends down the breast to the undertail coverts (Sibley 2000). From the side of the neck, down the sides onto the flanks is a bright chestnut colour (Dunn and Garrett 1997). The mantle has black and yellow streaks (Lewington *et al.* 1992). The wings have two large yellow wing bars with dark-centered primary, secondary and tertial feathers that have yellow edges (Sibley 2000). The rump is green in colour with dark streaks (Dunn and Garrett 1997). The legs are black in colour (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The tail is long in shape and the upper side of the tail shows the outer three rectrices white with the inner tail feathers all dark (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Sibley 2000). The underside of the tail is mostly white with the outer tail feathers dark (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Sibley 2000). Like the males, the adult females hold their breeding plumage from March to August (Sibley 2000). Adult females in breeding plumage are similar looking to the males but they have less black on the face and are white from the bill base to the eye (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Sibley 2000). The chestnut along the sides doesn't extend as far down the flanks as the adult male (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Sibley 2000). The adults change into winter plumage in August and hold this plumage till March when they change into breeding plumage (Sibley 2000). The fall plumaged adult males become bright yellow from the crown to yellow-green down the back onto the rump (Curson *et al.* 1994). The uppertail coverts have dark-centered feathers that are edged in gray (Dunn and Garrett 1997). There are light dark streaks on the back and on the uppertail coverts (Dunn and Garrett 1997). The face becomes all gray, and this extends down onto the throat and breast to the ventral area (Curson *et al.* 1994). There is a distinct white eye ring around the eye. The chestnut on the sides is extensive from the side of the neck down to the flanks (Curson *et al.* 1994). The wings have two yellow wing bars with the rest of the wing

feathers dark-centered with yellow edges to the feathers (Curson *et al.* 1994). The adult females in winter plumage and immature birds are very similar looking and are not very distinguishable in the field, but the adult females do average more extensively green on the back (Dunn and Garrett 1997). The immature and first winter birds are even more brilliant yellow-lime green from the crown down the back to the rump (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Sibley 2000). This greenish-yellow colour extends onto the wings as well (Curson *et al.* 1994, Dunn and Garrett 1997). There are two yellowish coloured wing bars with the rest of wing dark with light yellowish-green edges to the feathers (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Sibley 2000). These birds have some light dark streaks on back and some dark spots on the uppertail coverts with some gray feathers as well (Dunn and Garrett 1997). The upper side of the tail has dark tail feathers with gray edges and the outer two rectrices showing white (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Dunn and Garrett 1997). There is an obvious complete white eye ring around the eye with the face, throat and breast a clean light grayish-white colour (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). This extends down the flanks to the undertail coverts (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). There is a small light-yellow patch at the ventral area (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Sibley 2000). The underside of the tail is mostly white with both sides of the tail having dark edged outer tail feathers (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Dunn and Garrett 1997). The legs are, like the adult birds, dark in colour (Sibley 2000). The song of the Chestnut-sided Warbler is a clear, musical, emphatic “*very very very pleased-to-meet-you*” or “*witew witew witew WEECHEW*” (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Sibley 2000). This song can be similar to Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) but usually lower in pitch (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Sibley 2000). The call is a low, flat “*chidp*” with the flight call a rather low, buzzy nasal “*jrrt*” (Sibley 2000).

Occurrence and Documentation

In British Columbia, the Chestnut-sided Warbler was first observed in the Province in 1971 (Shepard 1972). Since that time records have come from all corners of British Columbia with the species becoming a rare annual vagrant with fifty-eight Provincial records (Campbell *et al.* 2001, Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1 & 2). These records mirror the timing pattern of vagrancy in California. There are over one thousand records of the Chestnut-sided Warbler in California with 80% of these records occurring in the fall between the dates of September 2 – December 2 and 15% occurring the spring between the dates of May 1 to July 3, with the number of birds peaking in early June (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). In British Columbia, there are seven May records which are not that unusual given that Chestnut-sided Warblers are an eastern species that migrate over the Gulf of Mexico (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1). The earliest of the dates in May could be birds that wintered out of range in western Mexico or possibly California before heading northward. By far, the highest number of British Columbia records for Chestnut-sided Warbler comes from the month of June and almost always refers to adult males singing or trying to find a summer territory (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1 & 2).

This species is much easier for observers to locate when heard singing and likely this is reflected by the twenty-three records there are for the month of June with several birds staying on territory into early July (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1 & 2). There are only seven July records which likely reflects birds either dispersing due to the failure of finding a mate and not successfully nesting or possibly, in a couple of cases, birds that were on territory (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1 & 2). This could have been the case in Revelstoke in the summer of 1988 when a pair was observed for a month in the same area with an immature was seen in the region that fall (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1). Unfortunately a nest was never discovered in the Revelstoke area, but given the frequency of records that are recorded in this area it could happen in the future. The only known nest for the Province was located at Puntchesakut Lake in the Chilcotin, east of Quesnel on August 19, 1998 when one adult bird was observed feeding two fledgling young (Davidson 2007). This is an interesting date as this sighting occurred right at the end of the summer nesting period and at the beginning of fall migration. There are twenty-one records for British Columbia that have been recorded in the fall migration period (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1 & 2). This works out to be the second highest number of Provincial records after the spring and early summer period (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1 & 2). Like the spring migration pattern, the fall migration period closely mirrors California's pattern of occurrence (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1 & 2). The number of fall records per month shows an interesting pattern with August having four records, September having the most records with thirteen records, October having two records and, surprisingly, November having two records as well (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1). The two November records are interesting as they both come from the Queen Charlotte Islands (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1). It is highly likely birds that these birds were lost birds that ended well offshore of California and were carried north by the rapid moving storm track of the Pineapple Express that pushed these individuals onto the Queen Charlottes. The Pineapple Express is a large storm front that comes from Hawaii, and with its fast moving winds and heavy rains moves northeast towards the Queen Charlottes and southeastern Alaska (M. Meredith pers. comm.). This weather pattern could explain late fall records of vagrant eastern warblers that have turned up along the west coast of North America from Vancouver Island to Alaska in the months of October and November. There are no winter records of Chestnut-sided Warbler for British Columbia. Given the increasing frequency of records throughout the Province, it is highly likely as this species will be found again in the future. Observers should watch for potential breeding pairs in the Province as well.



Figure 1: Record #51: Chestnut-sided Warbler at Camosun Bog, U.B.C, Vancouver on June 28, 2011.
Photo © Peter Candido.



Figure 2: Record #51: Chestnut-sided Warbler at Camosun Bog, U.B.C, Vancouver on June 28, 2011. Photo © Peter Candido.



Figure 3: Record #57: Chestnut-sided Warbler found on ship well off Ucluelet. The bird was caught photographed and released in Ucluelet on September 15, 2013. Photo © Christine Rock (WildResearch)

Table 1: British Columbia Records of Chestnut-sided Warbler:

- 1.(1) adult June 22, 1971: (BC Photo 172) Mt. Robson Park (Shepard 1972)
- 2.(1) adult June 21, 1972: (BC Photo 273) Prince George (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 3.(1) adult June 18, 1974: Ft. Nelson (Erskine and Davidson 1976)
- 4.(1) immature or fall female September 29, 1974: Mike Shepard, mobs: Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner (Crowell and Nehls 1975a, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 5.(1) adult July 8, 1978: Podosy Lake (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 6.(1) adult breeding plumage singing male June 19-30, 1979: Richard J. Cannings, Robert A. Cannings, mobs (BC Photo 569) Pt. Grey, UBC, Vancouver (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 7.(1) adult June 23, 1982: Ft. Nelson (Campbell and McNall 1982)
- 8.(1) adult July 9-10, 1982: Bill Merilees: Hamilton Swamp, Qualicum Beach (Merilees 1982, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 9.(1) adult male May 26, 1985: E. T. Jones (banded: BC Photo 1027) Camp McKinney Road, near Oliver (Cannings *et al.* 1987)
- 10.(1) adult June 16, 1985: Coldwater River (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 11.(1) adult breeding plumage June 22, 1986: G. Allan Poynter: Burnaby Lake, Burnaby (Mattocks 1986, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 12.(2) adults June 19-July 10, 1988: (BC Photo 1222) Revelstoke (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 13.(1) immature September 18, 1988: Revelstoke (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 14.(1) adult female June 13, 1989: Steve Cannings: Penticton (Weber and Cannings 1990, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 15.(1) adult male June 23-July 13, 1989: John Woods, mobs: Mt. Revelstoke, near Revelstoke (Weber and Cannings 1990)
(1) adult August 12, 1989: Mt. Revelstoke (Campbell *et al.* 2001)[Possibly the same bird as above]
- 16.(1) adult male August 22-27, 1989: Phil Gehlen, mobs: Okanagan Falls (Weber and Cannings 1990, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 17.(1) adult July 6, 1990: Beaton Provincial Park, Ft St. John (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 18.(1) adult female July 27, 1990: Margaret Bensen: Stanley Park, Vancouver (Dorsey 1996a, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 19.(1) adult breeding plumage singing male June 24, 1991: Wendy Frith: Jericho Park, Vancouver (Dorsey 1996a, Toochin 2012a)
- 20.(1) adult male May 28, 1992: Michael Force, Ken Mackenzie: Hazelton (Bowling 1992, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 21.(1) adult May 22, 1993: Brent and Wayne Diakow: Revelstoke (Siddle and Bowling 1993)
- 22.(1) immature September 4, 1993: Rick Toochin, mobs: Wickaninnish, Pacific Rim National Park (Siddle 1994, Toochin *et al.* 2013)

- 23.(1) adult breeding plumage singing male June 22, 1995: Henry Davis, mobs: Cecil Green Pk., UBC, Vancouver (Elliot and Gardner 1997, Plath 2000)
- 24.(1) adult male May 27, 1996: Mike Henry, Rick Howie, Syd Roberts: Kamloops (Bowling 1996, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 25.(1) adult breeding plumage singing male June 8, 1997: Durrell D. Kapan, Rick Toochin, mobs (photo) 2720 Acadia Dr., UBC (Bowling 1997, Plath 2000, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 26.(1) adult female July 14, 1998: Mark Gawn, Simon Gavin: Cheam Wetlands, Popkum (Shepard 1998, Toochin 2012c)
- 27.(1 adult feeding 2 fledgling young) August 19, 1998: Gary Davidson: Puntchesakut Lake, Chilcotin, e. of Quesnel *first nest for BC (Campbell *et al.* 2001, Davidson 2007)
- 28.(1) adult male June 27, 1999: Ralph & Clara Ritcey: Tranquille, Kamloops (Shepard 1999)
- 29.(1) adult breeding plumage male May 29, 2001: Daniel Bastaja: Grant Narrows Dyke Pitt Meadows (Cecile 2001, Toochin 2012a)
- 30.(1) adult male singing June 3, 2001: Keith Taylor, mobs (photo) Summit Park, Victoria (Bain 2001)
- 31.(1) adult male June 15-22, 2001: Peter Hall, mobs: McKinney Road, Oliver (Bain 2001)
- 32.(1) adult male June 15, 2001: Chris Charlesworth: Halfmoon Bay, Sunshine Coast (Toochin *et al.* 2013)
- 33.(1) adult male June 5, 2002: RR: Fort St. James (Bain 2002)
- 34.(1) adult male September 6, 2003: Linda van Damme: Creston Wildlife Management Area, Creston (Cecile 2004)
- 35.(1) adult breeding plumage singing male June 17-20, 2004: Christine Adkins, mobs (photo) Camosun St., Camosun Bog, UBC (Cecile 2004, Toochin 2012a)
- 36.(1) fall plumage September 2, 2004: Danny Tyson: Chopaka Road, Osoyoos (Cecile 2005)
- 37.(1) adult male July 22-23, 2005: Gord Gadsden, mobs: Cheam Wetlands, Popkum (Cecile 2005, Toochin 2012c)
- 38.(1) adult male May 2, 2006: Roger Taylor, mobs: Beaver Pond, Nanoose Bay (Toochin *et al.* 2013b)
- 39.(1) adult male June 7, 2006: Adrian Dorst, mobs: Wickaninnish, Pacific Rim National Park (Cecile 2006)
- 40.(1) adult female July 16, 2006: Chris Charlesworth: Kelowna (Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 41.(1) immature September 4, 2006: Calvin You: Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner (Toochin 2012a)
- 42.(1) adult female May 1, 2007: Rick Toochin: Jordan River (Cecile 2007, Toochin 2012b)
- 43.(1) adult male August 4, 2007: Steve Ogle: Tatayoko Lake (Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 44.(1) immature September 16, 2007: Gord Gadsden: Island 22 Regional Park, Chilliwack (Toochin 2012c)

- 45.(1) immature October 5, 2008: George Clulow: Maplewood Conservation Area, North Vancouver (Toochin 2012a)
- 46.(1) adult male June 14, 2009: mobs (photo) Rocky Point Bird Observatory Banding Station (Tatum 2009)
- 47.(1) adult male June 19, 2010: Rick Toochin: Columbia Valley (Charlesworth 2010d, Toochin 2012c)
- 48.(1) immature August 20, 2010: Mitch Meredith, Rick Toochin: Cheam Wetlands (Toochin 2012c)
- 49.(1) immature September 18, 2010: *fide Russ Cannings* (banded: photo) Machete Island, Revelstoke (Charlesworth 2011a)
- 50.(1) immature November 6-8, 2010: Jukka Jantunen, mobs (photo) Sandspit, Queen Charlotte Islands (Charlesworth 2011a)
- 51.(1) adult breeding plumage singing male June 25-July 6, 2011: Christine Adkins, mobs (photo) Camosun St., Camosun Bog, UBC (Charlesworth 2011b, Toochin 2012a)
- 52.(1) immature/female September 20, 2011: George Bradd, mobs (photo) Wickaninnish, Pacific Rim National Park (Toochin *et al.* 2013b)
- 53.(1) immature September, 2011: Gregory Lis (photo) Manning Provincial Park (Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 54.(1) female September 15, 2012: Doug Brown: Vaseux Lake (Toochin *et al.* 2013)
- 55.(1) immature September 22, 2012: Rick Toochin, Greg Stuart: Hope Airport (Toochin 2012c)
- 56.(1) immature November 14, 2012: Peter Hamel: Sandspit, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel pers. comm.)
- 57.(1) immature September 15, 2013: Paul Levesque, mobs (photo) 20km off Ucluelet (P. Levesque pers. comm.)
- 58.(1) immature October 9, 2013: Rick Toochin (FN) Hougen Park, Abbotsford (R. Toochin pers. obs.)

Hypothetical Records:

- 1.(2 nests found with eggs) July 4, 1944: T. E. Randall: Tupper (Salt 1972)
- 2.(1) adult July 27, 1966: Lowell Orcutt, GPS: Pt. Grey, Vancouver (Orcutt 1967)

Table 2: Seasonal distribution of Chestnut-sided Warbler records in British Columbia:

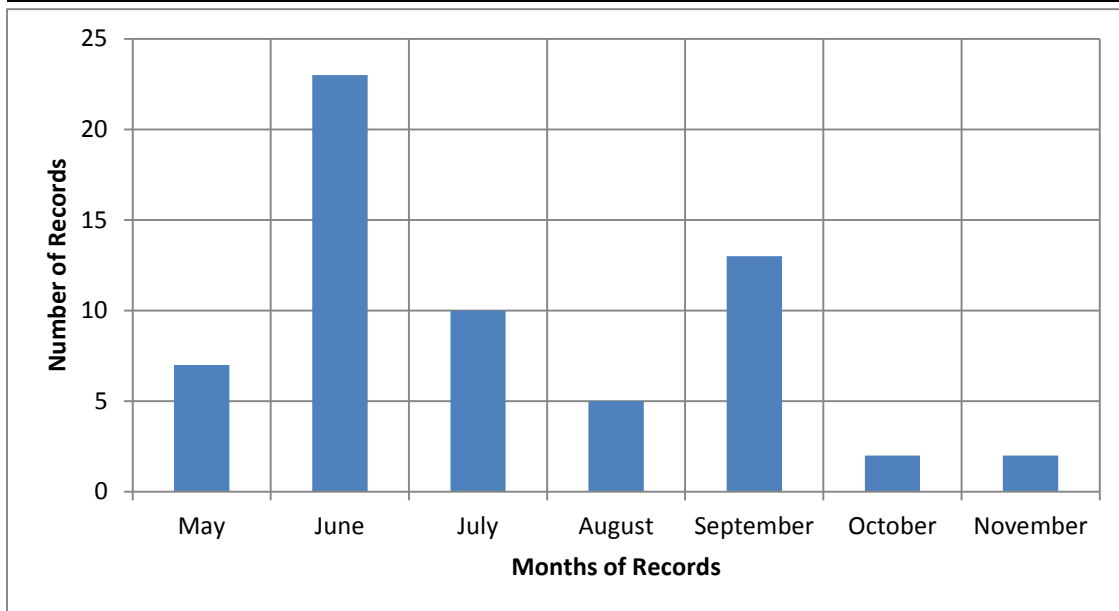


Table 2: Note the sharply defined occurrence in the summer and fall of this species with June and September having the highest number of records.

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