



**Natural Heritage
& Endangered Species
Program**

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

**Black-and-white Warbler
*Mniotilta varia***

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The Black-and-white Warbler is a long-distance migrant songbird with a unique black and white striped plumage. It is one of the first warblers to return in spring and can easily be identified by its song, which is often likened to the sound of a squeaky wheel barrel. Black-and-white Warblers forage along tree trunks and limbs as they search for arthropods, a strategy unique in the wood warblers, but similar to the Brown Creeper or White-breasted Nuthatch.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: The Black-and-white Warbler has a large breeding range that extends across most of the deciduous forest across eastern North America and includes much of the boreal forest extending into western Canada. Similarly, they have a large overwintering range that includes northern South America, Central America, the Caribbean Islands, Mexico, and parts of the southernmost United States. According to the Breeding Bird Survey, this species has undergone a -0.7% and a -2.3% annual decline range-wide and in Massachusetts, respectively. The Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas indicates that this species remains common in the heavily forested regions of western and central portions of the state, but that a decline is evident throughout much of eastern Massachusetts.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: Black-and-white Warblers nest in hardwood and mixed coniferous-hardwood forests across a range of ages from relatively young (10-20 years post-disturbance) to old-growth forests. This species can also nest in a range of moisture conditions from wetland areas to dry hillsides. As is the case with many warblers, Black-and-white Warblers nest on the ground, often in a depression at the base of a tree or stump. This species is considered to be area-sensitive and generally absent from forest patches <10 ha in size.



Photo by Cephas: Simon Pierre Barrette

THREATS: The main threat to this species is thought to be habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation on both the breeding and wintering grounds. As a result of its sensitivity to patch size, the disappearance of this species from heavily fragmented habitat is well documented. Black-and-white Warblers may be particularly vulnerable to habitat fragmentation in urban, suburban, or exurban landscapes. Such areas often have an inflated nest predator community, including domestic cats, raccoons, and skunks, which take a high toll on the eggs and young of ground-nesting birds. Another major threat facing this species is collision with manmade structures like windows, buildings, towers, and wind turbines.

REFERENCES:

- Kricher, J.C. 2014. Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America.
- Walsh, J., and W.R. Petersen. 2013. *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas 2*. Massachusetts Audubon Society and Scott & Nix, Inc.

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A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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