

Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*)

Description: This golden ray of light is unique among warblers with its beady black eye and blue-gray wings. Golden yellow head and chest, white under tail, blue-gray wings and tail with white tail spots. Rather short tail and large bill for a warbler. Female duller than male. The Prothonotary Warbler got its name from the bright yellow robes worn by papal clerks, known as prothonotaries, in the Roman Catholic church. It is also one of two warblers that build their nests in holes in standing dead trees. Often called a "swamp warbler" in the southeast, it also occurs surprisingly far to the north along rivers.



Photo by Peter Brannon

Trend: Declining – on some watch lists

Habitat: Prothonotary Warblers breed in flooded bottomland forests, wooded swamps, and forests near lakes and streams. They tend to avoid forest patches smaller than about 250 acres or forest borders less than 100 feet wide. During migration they stop in coastal areas, marshes, citrus groves, and scrub to refuel. Prothonotary warblers will also nest near borders of lakes, rivers and ponds, normally only in areas with slow moving or standing water. They primarily eat insects (especially aquatic insects) and snails.

Ways You can help with Conservation: Prothonotary Warblers populations declined approximately 0.7% per year, resulting in a cumulative loss of about 31% from 1966 to 2019, according to the [North American Breeding Bird Survey](#). As habitat specialists, these warblers are vulnerable to the loss and alteration of forested wetlands on their breeding grounds.



Photo by Peter Brannon

Install nest boxes with predator guards in suitable riparian or wooded wetland habitat and leave standing dead trees where safety allows. Monitor nest boxes on public land and report any activity. New Hope Bird Alliance built and installed Prothonotary Warbler nest boxes in Durham, Orange and Chatham counties. Locations are: Brumley Forest North & South, Mason Farm Biological Reserve, Sandy Creek Park, Johnston Mill Nature Preserve, White Pines Nature Preserve, Blackwood Farm Park, Eno River Confluence Natural Area. All boxes are in the water. To help NHBA know which boxes are being used, you can leave comments under sightings of Prothonotary Warbler in your eBird checklist such as "at the beginning of the boardwalk going clockwise at Mason Farm," or "silo pond Brumley North," or "left corner of the lake near the kiosk at Sandy Creek". If you see signs of Prothonotary nest box use, please write in eBird checklist species comments or email Don Pelly at donpelly73@gmail.com. eBird submissions will be monitored daily. [Help us with surveys to better understand the health of local bird populations.](#)



Photo by Gary Robinette