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# Conserving South Carolina's At-Risk Species:

## *Species facing threats to their survival*

### Golden-winged warbler

(*Vermivora chrysoptera*)



Golden-winged warbler / Tom Benson / Flickr  
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### Description

The Golden-winged warbler is a small, striking songbird averaging 12.1 cm (4.75 in.) in length and 8.8 g (0.31 oz.) in weight. Adult males have a yellow crown, a black mask, and a black throat. This bird has a white belly, gray back, and a yellow wing patch. Adult females and juveniles appear similar to the males but have a duller overall appearance and a greenish-yellow crown.

### Range

The Golden-winged warbler is a northern breeding bird found in Southern Canada, the Northeastern United States, and extending south into the Appalachians. South Carolina composes the southernmost extent of the range where these birds occur in small numbers in the extreme northwestern part of the State. The Golden-winged warbler overwinters in Central America and northern South America.

### Habitat

The Golden-winged warbler is an early-successional specialist species. They require shrubby habitat in upland or wetland areas, with sporadic tree cover and an understory of grass and forbs. They nest in

disturbed sites such as abandoned farmland, aspen clearcuts, and burned forest stands. These early-successional habitats are short-lived and turn into mature forests, forcing the warblers out of the habitat.



### Status

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) was petitioned to list the species in 2010. In 2011, the Service found that listing the species may be warranted but to date, a 12-month finding has not been issued. According to Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend data (1966-2010), Golden-winged warblers are declining at a rate of 2.6% per year in the Eastern BBS region. While the Golden-winged warbler is not currently ranked in South Carolina, it is considered of Highest Conservation Priority in South Carolina's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).

### Threats

Golden-winged warblers are currently facing declines from habitat loss, hybridization (Blue-winged warblers hybridize with Golden-winged warblers, producing viable offspring), and competition. Their preferred habitat is currently in decline in the face of urban sprawl, reforestation,

and lower numbers of abandoned farmlands. Historically fire, floods, windstorms, and herbivores maintained habitat conditions conducive to disturbance-dependent species. Fire suppression, the loss of large canopy trees, and the extirpation of mega herbivores (e.g. - elk, bison) following European settlement, reduced the availability of early-successional habitat throughout the Eastern United States.

### Management/Protection Needs

A variety of management techniques are available to create, maintain, or restore habitat for Golden-winged warbler. These techniques can be used to generate the preferred vegetation structure and configuration and are outlined at [www.gwwa.org](http://www.gwwa.org). Continue to survey and monitor for the species and protect known breeding locations.

### References

- Confer, John L., Patricia Hartman and Amber Roth. 2011. Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/020>
- Roth, A.M., R.W. Rohrbaugh, T. Will, and D.A. Buehler, editors. 2012. Golden-winged Warbler Status Review and Conservation Plan. [www.gwwa.org](http://www.gwwa.org)

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources - State Wildlife Action Plan: 2010-2015.

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