



**Natural Heritage
& Endangered Species
Program**

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

**Cerulean Warbler
*Setophaga cerulea***

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

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The Cerulean Warbler is a small neotropical migrant songbird that breeds in eastern North America and winters in the foothills of the Andes Mountains in northern South America, where many overwinter on shade-coffee plantations. The plumage of the adult male is distinctive, but the female and young are more cryptic and could be confused with other warbler species. The Cerulean Warbler has a buzzy song that can easily be mistaken for that of the closely related Black-throated Blue Warbler.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: Cerulean Warblers were once one of the most common birds in the Ohio and Mississippi River Valleys, but since at least the mid 1900s, this species has undergone one of the fastest declines of any North America bird. The core of its current range is in the Ohio Hills physiographic region, but breeding populations can be found as far north as Ontario and west as Missouri. During the 1st Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas, this species was only reported in a single block, and that had increased to 14 blocks during the 2nd Atlas. This increase is thought to primarily be a result of a warming climate, and Cerulean Warblers can be reliably found at specific sites along the Quabbin Reservoir and in the Pioneer Valley. Increases among their northern populations contrasts sharply with declines throughout the core of their range.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: The Cerulean Warbler nests in large patches of mature, deciduous forests that are characterized by large trees and an uneven canopy structure. This type of habitat was historically provided within old-growth forests and is found today in forest gaps, riparian bottomlands, and ridge-top forests. Cerulean Warblers generally place their nest high off the ground in either oaks or hickories.

THREATS: The biggest threat to the Cerulean Warbler is habitat loss and degradation on both the breeding and wintering grounds. The most substantial threats on the breeding grounds are habitat fragmentation and loss of suitable breeding habitat along river valleys. The primary threats on the wintering grounds are deforestation and conversion of shade-grown coffee plantations to monotypic sun coffee or pasture.

REFERENCES:

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- Buehler, D.A., P.B. Hamel, and T. Boves. 2013. Cerulean Warbler (*Setophaga cerulea*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology.
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Updated 2015

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

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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