



Sweet Home, Alabama!



Many birds in the Bankhead National Forest are only seasonal visitors. Staying only during the spring and summer while the weather is warm and insects abundant, these birds breed and raise their young. Known as neotropical migrants, these birds fly over a thousand miles south during the fall seeking the warm, tropical climate of Central and South America.

Cerulean Warblers are only one example of neotropical migrants. They breed each year along the Sipsey River and other rivers across the eastern United States. Other species often found in these extensive tracts of hardwoods include Worm-eating and Black-throated Green warblers, Northern Parula, Wood Thrush, and Hairy Woodpecker.

Bankhead National Forest is one of the few places in Alabama that this bird can still call home. While this neotropical migrant once flourished, studies show that Cerulean Warblers are now declining at an alarming rate. Researchers suggest over 70% of the population of this handsome bird has disappeared due to habitat loss, both here and on their Central and South American wintering grounds.

Listen Before You Look

Cerulean Warblers glean for insects in the canopies of tall trees along the river. Therefore, although you may get lucky and spot one high overhead, flitting through the branches, you are more likely to hear one first. The song of the Cerulean Warbler is a high-pitched musical buzz resembling *tzeedl tzeedl*

tzeedl ti ti ti tzeeee, with each part rising higher than the last. The best way to find this bird is to focus on its song so you can locate the tree or group of trees from where the song is emanating. Scan the ends of branches carefully for movement or a flash of blue.



Cerulean Warbler/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, John Heidecker



Sipsey River Wilderness/ADCNR Photos

Habitat and Forest Fragmentation

Alabama's Cerulean Warblers are pickier than their northern cousins. Cerulean Warblers further north breed in small forest areas of 25-50 acres. On the southern and western ends of their range, they prefer forest areas of 1,000 acres or more. Inside these large forest patches, the birds prefer hardwood-dominated forests. Forests of this size are difficult to find as more areas are developed or fragmented with roads and houses.



Cerulean Warbler/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Bill Dyer

Cerulean Warbler Populations and Habitat

There has been much concern about population declines of the Cerulean Warbler. Throughout its range, it maintains low relative abundance and is dependent on large tracts of mature, contiguous forest cover. Several areas of the Bankhead National Forest within and outside of the Sipsey Wilderness provide suitable habitat for these birds. Their ideal nesting habitat is mature hardwood floodplain forests along large streams.