

This Week in the Woods May: Week Three

MAY: WEEK THREE



Blackburnian warbler (male)



Hobblebush



Marsh marigold



Trailing arbutus



Yellow-rumped warbler (male)



Common morel

This Week in the Woods, we spied this male **blackburnian warbler** hopping between branches in a hemlock tree and running his bill along the flat needles (no doubt to glean insects). Despite their bright colors, these birds are awfully hard to see when they're high up and moving quickly – which is most of time. We've had better success detecting them by their whistle-like calls. As noted in this [species profile from Audubon](#), blackburnian warblers typically build their nests high up in conifers.

Here are some other nature sights (clockwise):

Hobblebush is blooming in the forest understory. As noted in this [profile from Adirondacks Forever Wild](#), each inflorescence includes larger edge flowers, which are showy but sterile, and smaller, fertile flowers in the center. Hobblebush twigs, leaves, and fruit all have value as food for wildlife, and the shrub also provides bird nesting habitat. Here's an [Outside Story article about the plant](#) by Tom Slayton.

Marsh marigold – also known as cowslip and king's cup – is blooming in the wetlands. As noted in this [foraging column by Ben Lord](#) from our Spring 2016 magazine, this species isn't an actual marigold, but a shade-and-wetlands-loving member of the buttercup family. As Lord notes, the leaves can make tasty cooked greens...but it's already getting a bit late to gather them, and they should never be eaten raw.

Speaking of foraging... we stumbled on a patch of **common morels** in the woods. And no, we're not saying where. See [last week's post](#) for information on how to distinguish between real morels and toxic imposters. And here's [an interesting NPR story](#) about a Vermont man who is trying to perfect a process for growing these sought-after mushrooms. (Note: there are two very similar looking species of morels, *Morchella esculenta* and *Morchella vulgaris*, that go by the "common morel" name, as well as other names).

In the same buggy hemlock stand where we saw a blackburnian warbler, we also encountered a flock of **yellow-rumped warblers**, which were foraging along the branches and performing multiple swoops out into the air, presumably after flying insects. As noted in this [Cornell Lab species profile](#), these birds have more expansive diets than most other warblers (for example, we've found them in meadows harvesting weed seeds during fall migration), and they're also fairly flexible on nest height, building nests "on the horizontal branch of a conifer, anywhere from 4 to about 40 feet high." This combination of traits makes them one of the easier forest warblers to see.

Trailing arbutus, a creeping evergreen in the heath family, is blooming now. Its flowers range from white to intense pink. This acid-loving plant is a notoriously tricky customer that doesn't recover well from changes to habitat. As noted in this [profile from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#), a good place to look for trailing arbutus is in "sandy to peaty woods or clearings."

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