

# Northern Waterthrush – Louisiana Waterthrush

*Seiurus noveboracensis* – *Seiurus motacilla*

Waterthrushes are wood warblers, not thrushes. The name *waterthrush* comes from their thrush-like appearance.

These two wood warblers and the Ovenbird belong to the genus *Seiurus*, which means “wagtail.” All three are known for their horizontal body-posture, a bobbing walk, and habitual tail-flicking

Neither waterthrush breeds in Southwest Florida. The Northern Waterthrush breeds in the northern part of North America in Canada and the extreme northern U.S. states including Alaska. The Louisiana Waterthrush breeds in southern Ontario and the eastern United States from Minnesota and central New England south to Texas and Georgia. Range maps are below.

Both birds migrate through Florida to their wintering grounds in Central America, the West Indies, and northern South America. Some Northern Waterthrushes will stay in South Florida over the winter, but no Louisiana Waterthrushes will.



They consume large aquatic and terrestrial insects such as weevils, beetles, caterpillars, moths, slugs, crustaceans and small fish. By consuming harmful insect pests, they provide an important economic benefit.

The Northern Waterthrush is among the first to move south during the fall migration; southern migrants are regularly reported by the middle of July or earlier. They are territorial in both winter and summer. On the breeding grounds the male proclaims its territory with its loud, ringing song. On the wintering grounds it uses its “chink” calls, together with chasing and fighting to keep out intruders.

Northern Waterthrushes spend much of their time on the ground, wading through standing water, walking along the ground, and hopping over downed logs and other obstacles. They will forage in foliage, but most foraging is on the ground, in shallow water, or around partially submerged logs and other objects. They toss aside dead and soggy debris as they search for food.

The Louisiana Waterthrush is also primarily a ground forager, but occasionally it searches trees during insect outbreaks. It primarily takes quick-jab-like strokes directly at food items, or at substrates such as herbaceous plants, leaf litter, soil, rocks, and moss. Other strategies include leaf-pulls, where the bird grasps a dead leaf submerged in the water, pulls it upward, then flips it over to expose hidden prey; it occasionally hover-gleans prey from vegetation too high to be reached from a standing position.

Preferred prey of the Louisiana Waterthrush are aquatic insects and invertebrates as well as small to medium-sized flying insects. They may sometimes eat small fish or small frogs. They tend to take larger prey than the Northern Waterthrush.

The identification of both species of waterthrush appears quite difficult at first but is a rather straight-forward affair in most birds once the following key features are checked. Due to individual and geographic variation, not all birds show the field characters normally typical for the species, so the identification should thus always rely on as many of the field marks mentioned below as possible.

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH

LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH

- movement of the tail and rear end ..... up-and-down only ..... up-and-down and also sideways
- patterning of the chin ..... with stripes ..... all white, no stripes
- stripe above the eye ..... small and often yellowish ..... bold and white
- coloration of breast and belly ..... whitish to pale yellowish/buffy ..... pure white
- leg coloration ..... dull ..... bright pink

Key to range maps:

**GREEN**– breeding range

**YELLOW**– migration

**BLUE**– winter

maps from National Audubon Society  
“About Birds”

