

Twice each year, millions of beautiful little warblers make epic journeys. In spring they head north to the places where they will build nests and raise their young. In fall, they head south, with most flying to places in Mexico and Central/South America where warmer weather will help ensure a steady supply of the invertebrates and fruit they'll need to survive.

About thirty species of warblers are routinely found in Houston. Most show up for short periods of time in spring and fall, taking brief pit stops in their cross-country travels. Members of a couple of species spend winter here and/or hang around in summer. Yellow-rumped Warblers are the most common and are illustrated in four flashcards.

And that's about the end of the good news. Finding these warblers is a whole other matter. Warblers are tiny, and two could perch side by side on a 3"x5" index card. To make matters worse, warblers are almost always in motion. When you find a warbler, chances are good that you'll only catch glimpses as it darts in and out of brush and among the leaves of trees. You'll fare better if you have a bird bath (keep it clean!), trees and berry bushes in your backyard.

To ID warblers, you'll need to be able to very quickly assemble all the clues you can gather. These clues can include the location of different colors on their bodies; unique markings on faces; the length of their bills; the presence or absence of dark streaks on their backs or undersides; white or yellow edges to wing feathers; diagonal stripes on folded wings (called "**wingbars**"); solid patches of white or another color on folded wings (called "**wing patches**"); and the arrangement of feathers and colors on the underside of tails. Taken as a group, these clues are known as "**field marks**."

When a warbler is overhead, the tail provides good field marks. Each flashcard shows the tail as it looks from the underside – with the rest of the bird drawn as if it's at eye level. The tail has two groups of feathers. First, a set of ten long tail feathers – with only the two outermost feathers showing from below when the tail is held closed. Next, a bunch of little feathers that cover the quills at the base of the long tail feathers. These little feathers are called "**undertail coverts**" and are abbreviated as "**UTC**" in the notes you can print onto the back of the flashcards. Look at the flashcards (and at the birds!) to see if the tail and UTC are the same color or different colors, and if the tail and UTC are long or short. You can visit the [Feather Atlas](#) to look at half-sets of the long tail feathers (the two sides of the tail are mirror images), with the outermost feather that shows from below placed at the left side of each photo.

If and when a warbler sits still for a second, the patterns on the face are great field marks. Look to see if there are complete or broken circles around the eyes ("**eyerings**" or "**eye arcs**") or dark "**eyelines**" that cross through the eyes. Some warblers have darker colors on the top of the head ("**crown**"), on their "**cheeks**" and/or wear a "**mask**." A few warblers look as if they are wearing white or yellow-rimmed glasses, or "**spectacles**." Others have light "**eyebrows**."

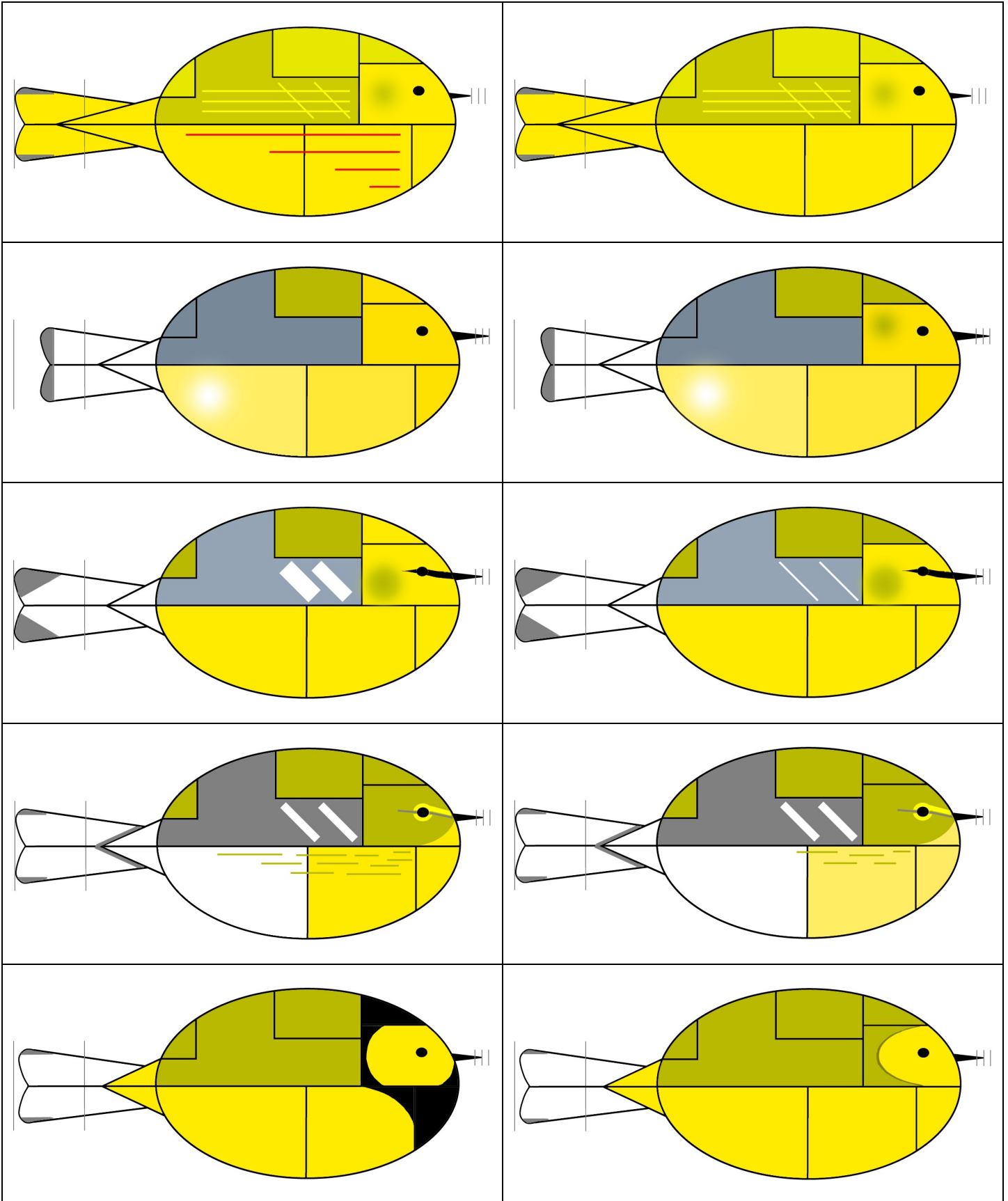
You can use the flashcards to memorize field marks and practice your ID skills. The flashcards illustrate adults in spring, when their colors are brightest. Cut out the flashcards, sort them into various categories (yellow underneath, bold wingbars, black throats, etc.) and then mix them up and see how quickly you can make the IDs. Look at lots of photos of each species, comparing what you see to the flashcards so that the field marks will begin to jump out.

You'll want to get more help. The [Warbler Guide app](#) (about \$13 for [iOS](#) or [Android](#)) is an amazing resource and you should begin by viewing the intro videos so you'll be able to put the app to its best possible use. Start by studying just a couple of warblers at a time so that you don't get totally frustrated. The (free) BirdsEye Texas app also has excellent sets of photos and will tell you where warblers are currently being found. You can find a link to instructions for using the BirdsEye Texas app at WhiteOakBayou.org/resources-and-zines. You should also use the (free) [eBird media catalog](#). There, you can view photos, play videos and hear sound recordings. It's helpful to sort the catalog so that instead of seeing the "Recently Uploaded" media, you jump right to the "Best Quality" media. It's also helpful to filter the media to whatever season and state you are in, since warblers' colors vary both seasonally and regionally. Note that most warblers are much duller in the fall and that some young warblers can be next to impossible to ID. Whatever you do, be sure to go outside and make the most of each spring, when warbler watching is at its finest!

Yellow below with a light tail: Yellow Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Pine Warbler, Hooded Warbler

Males on the left. Females on the right.

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Print the Warbler Flashcards double-sided and then cut them out. More info and suggestions are at WhiteOakBayou.org.

Yellow Warbler (Female)

Yellows are the only warblers who have both yellow tails and yellow UTC. Males are streaked with red below; females have little to no red streaking. May be found feeding in brush or anywhere up in trees. Spring migration peaks between late April and late May.

Prothonotary Warbler (Female)

Male Prothonotaries are the easiest warblers to ID due to their golden yellow heads; females are duller and the top of their heads are olive. They usually feed in the lower branches of trees or in brush below. They are relatively uncommon, passing through from mid March to mid May.

Blue-winged Warbler (Female)

The thin “Zorro” mask on the plain yellow face sets Blue-wings apart. Males have very wide wingbars; those of females are narrow. They usually feed in the lower branches of trees or in brush below. Spring migration peaks between late March and early May.

Pine Warbler (Female)

Pines have a lot of field marks, but complicate matters by ranging from very bright to almost a two-toned gray. They usually feed in the upper branches of pine trees, but in winter they will come down closer to the ground in search of insects. Some remain in town year-round.

Hooded Warbler (Female)

Wearing their black hoodies, males are virtually unmistakable; females’ hoods are olive and sometimes have a slightly darker edge in front. They usually feed in the lower branches of trees or in the brush below. Spring migration peaks between mid March and early May.

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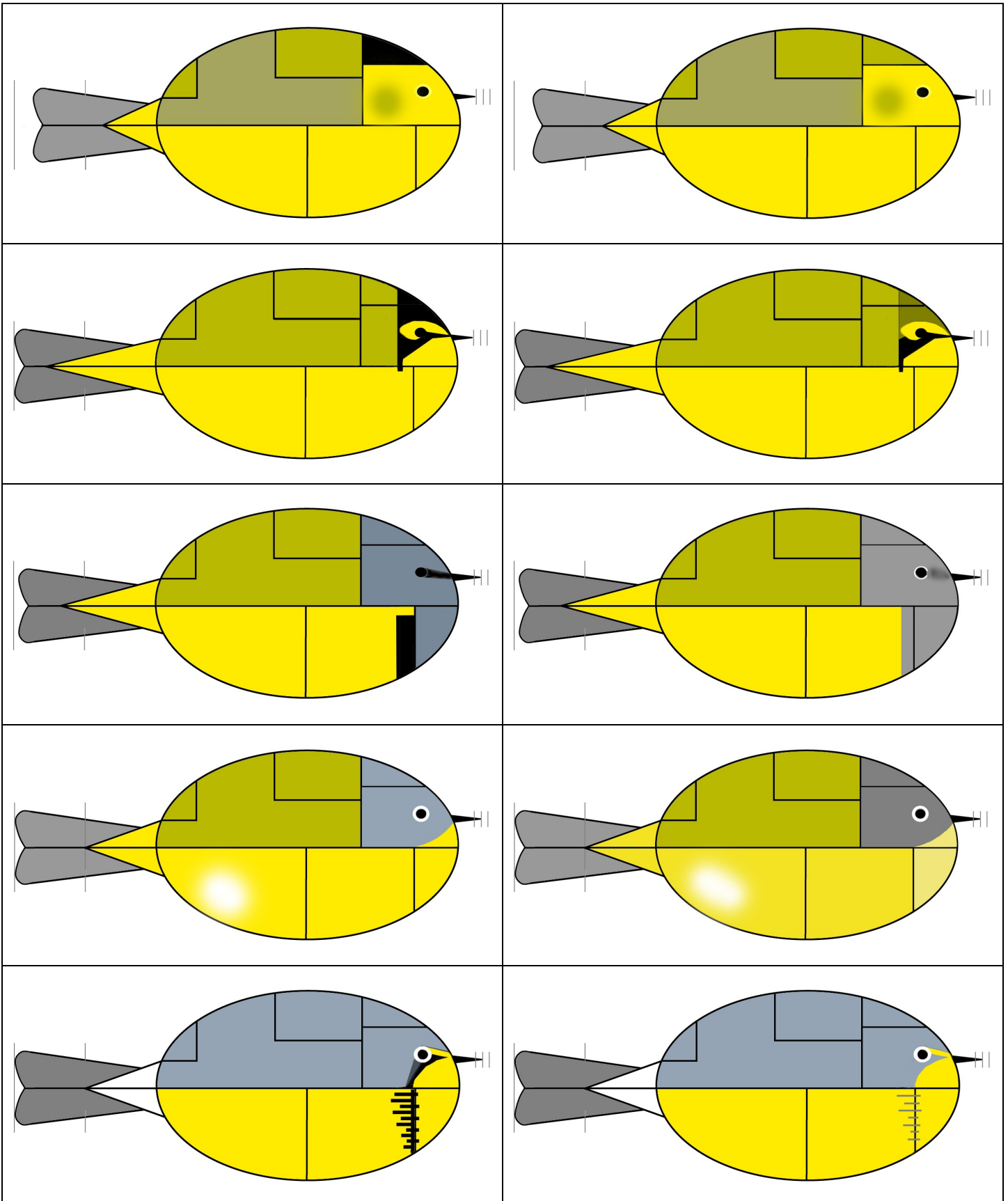
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Yellow below with a dark tail: Wilson's Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Canada Warbler

Males on the left. Females on the right.

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Wilson's Warbler (Female)

A round black cap sets the males apart; females have an olive cap and can be confused with female Hooded Warbler in #1 (check the cheek pattern and the tail color). They usually feed in brush close to the ground. Wilson's are in Houston from September through May.

Kentucky Warbler (Female)

Kentuckys have yellow eyebrows that wrap around below their eyes. Males have a black crown and a triangular patch under/behind the eye. Females' facial markings are dark olive. They feed on or close to the ground. Spring migration peaks between mid April and early May.

Mourning Warbler (Female)

The Mourning was named for its somber colors. Males usually have a dark patch on the breast; females lack this patch, have a light gray head and throat, and just a hint of a white eyering. They feed on the ground in dense brush. Spring migration peaks in early to mid May.

Nashville Warbler (Female)

Nashvilles have a bright white eyering that stands out on the blue-gray head. Other than the eyering, they are rather plain, with the males more brightly colored than females. They feed at all levels from the ground up. Spring migration peaks between mid March and mid May.

Canada Warbler (Female)

Canadas have an eye ring, a yellow stripe between the eye and bill, and a "necklace." The necklace is bold and black on males, and a faint gray on females. They usually feed in brush or on the lowest branches of trees. Spring migration peaks between mid April and late May.

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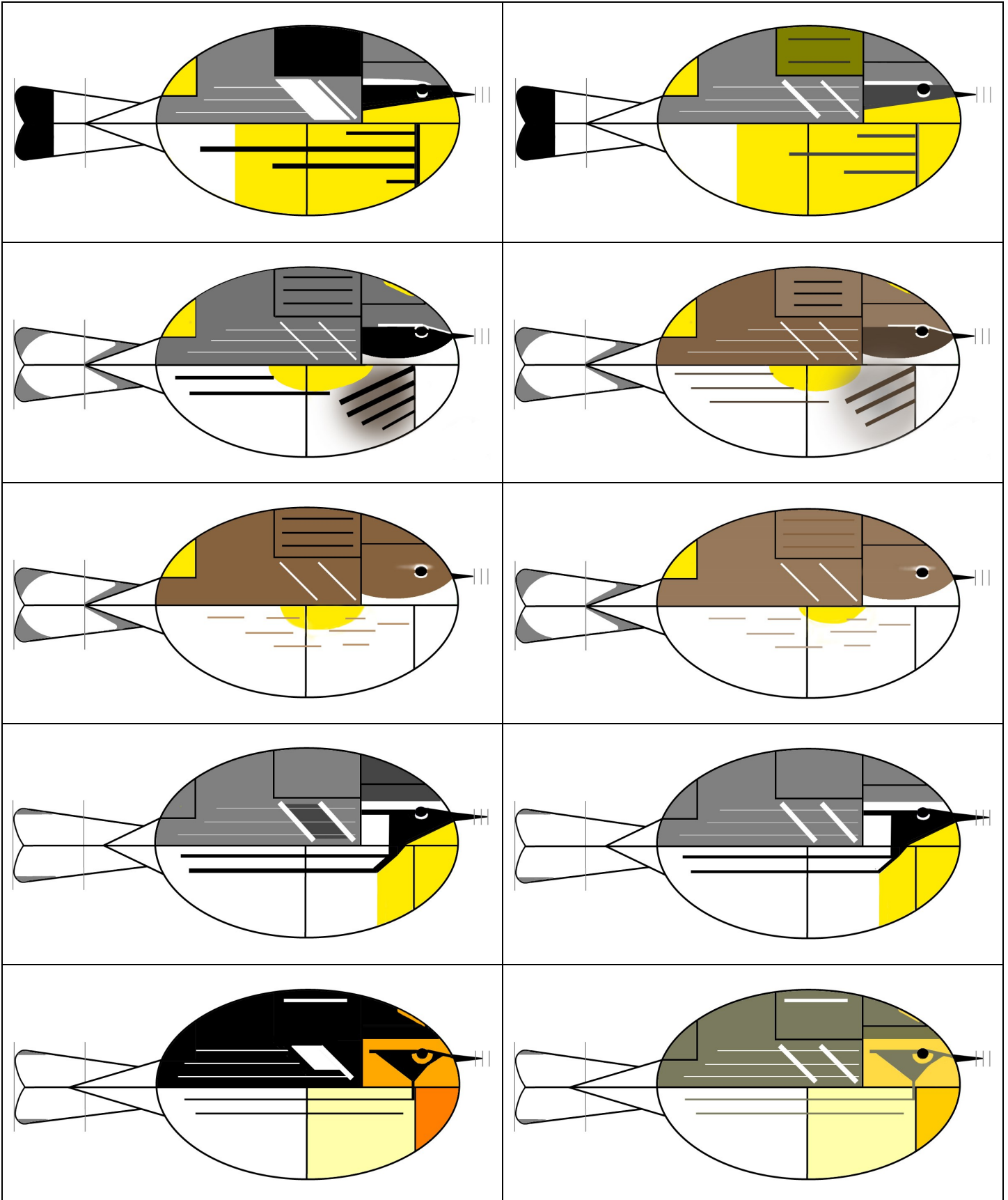
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Masked marvel warblers: Magnolia Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler (Spring), Yellow-rumped Warbler (Winter), Yellow-throated Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler

Males on the left. Females on the right.

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Magnolia Warbler (Female)

The bright yellow on Magnolias extends from the bill to mid-way down the belly, while the black mask stretches all the way back to the shoulders. They usually feed in brush or on the lowest branches of trees. Spring migration peaks between late April and mid to late May.

Yellow-rumped Warbler (Female in Spring)

Yellow-rumps are our most common warbler. Study their markings so that you can ID them easily, even as they transition from their brownish winter coloring to bold spring plumage. Yellow-rumps usually feed in trees, but will also move down into brush. Spring migration ends in April.

Yellow-rumped Warbler (Female in Winter)

Yellow-rumps show a lot of variation, with their topsides ranging from brown to a light brownish-gray. Most show at least a little yellow on their sides, with the bright yellow rump often visible (giving them the nickname "Butter Butt"). Yellow-rumps are common from October through April.

Yellow-throated Warbler (Female)

Yellow-throats have a square-ish white patch behind a triangular black mask. Males have a slightly darker crown than females. They usually feed while clinging to the trunk or a limb at the mid to upper portion of a tree. Present year-round, but very uncommon due to habitat loss.

Blackburnian Warbler (Female)

Blackburnians have orange feathers around all sides of a triangular mask and down through the neck. Males have much deeper colors than females. They usually feed in the mid to upper portions of trees. Spring migration peaks between mid April and mid to late May.

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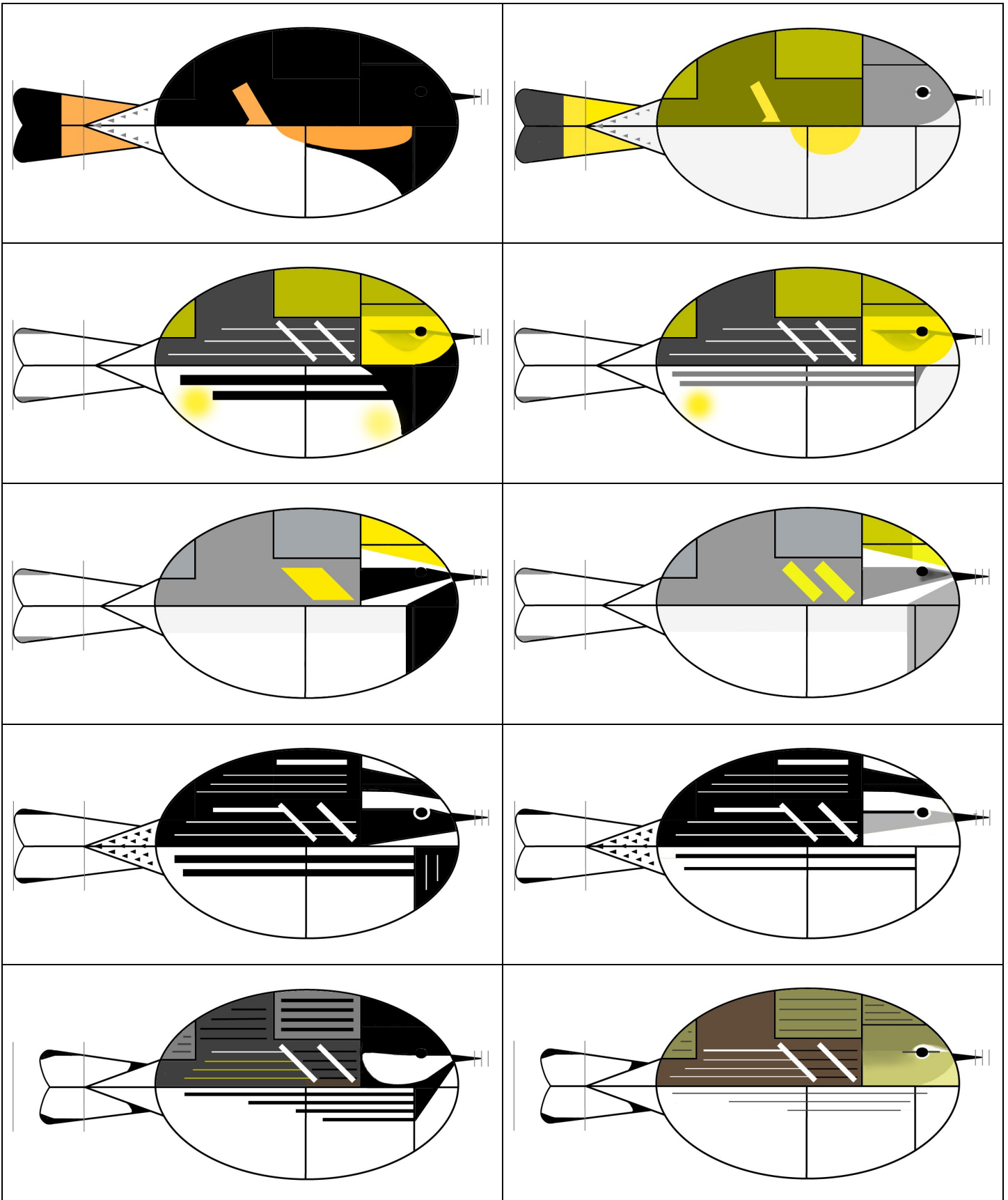
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Black-throated warblers (the males' throats, anyway, with some cheating involved on the Blackpoll): American Redstart, Black-throated Green Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler

Males on the left. Females on the right.

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American Redstart (Female)

The male is an easy ID with his Halloween colors. The female is drab, but is easily IDed with a look at her tail, which is often fanned open to show the broad bands of gray and yellow. They usually feed in mid-sized trees or in brush below. Spring migration peaks between mid April and late May.

Black-throated Green Warbler (Female)

The male looks unlike any other warbler seen regularly in our area. Compare the female to the female Blackburnian (in #3) and note the reach of the yellow. Black-throated Greens usually feed in the middle portions of trees. Spring migration peaks between mid March and mid to late May.

Golden-winged Warbler (Female)

Normally, the racing stripe design on the head gives an easy ID. But when only the underside is visible, Golden-wings can be confused with Carolina Chickadees. They usually feed in the lower branches of trees or in brush below. Spring migration peaks between mid April and mid May.

Black-and-white Warbler (Female)

The males are extra-stripy. Females tone it down, replacing the mask with an eyeline and some faint shading. Note the spotted UTC on both genders. They feed on what they find while creeping along the trunk and branches of trees. Spring migration extends from March through May.

Blackpoll Warbler (Female)

Male Blackpolls look a bit like Black-and-whites, but wear a solid black cap and have white cheeks. Females are rather drab. They usually feed in the mid to upper portions of trees. They are very uncommon in Houston, with a few found each year from mid April to mid May.

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