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Kevin C. R. Kerr and Christopher M. Milensky. Early Nest Record for Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) in Virginia. *Banisteria* 37: 41-42. (2011)

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The journal *Banisteria* is named
for John Banister (1650-1692),
who was the first university-trained
naturalist to work in Virginia.



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EARLY NEST RECORD FOR WORM-EATING WARBLER (*HELMITHEROS VERMIVORUM*) IN VIRGINIA. — On 7 May 2011 the ground nest of a Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) was discovered in Leesylvania State Park, Prince William County, Virginia, after one of the authors (KCRK) inadvertently flushed an adult from the nest. The bird called in alarm from a nearby ground perch but did not engage in an open wing display. The nest was in typical microhabitat for this species (Bent, 1953): on a wooded slope descending to a creek. The forest floor was layered thickly with oak leaves (*Quercus* spp.). Ground cover was relatively sparse but a patch of Blue Ridge Blueberry (*Vaccinium pallidum*) mostly concealed the nest (Fig. 1A).

The nest contained six eggs of Worm-eating Warbler, plus a single egg from Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) (Fig. 1B). While the clutch size is within the normal range for this species (4-6 eggs), it has been observed that final clutch size is generally smaller in parasitized nests (Hanners & Patton, 1998). Nest parasitism rates of Worm-eating Warbler evidently vary by region (Hanners & Patton, 1998; Dececco et al., 2000; Gram et al., 2003;), but the rate has been known to decrease with nesting date (S. Robinson, pers. comm. *in* Hanners & Patton, 1998).

Our observation represents an early nesting record for this species in Virginia. Like most passerines, the Worm-eating Warbler lays only a single egg per day (Hanners & Patton, 1998; McMaster et al., 1999), and was likely already incubating on the date of discovery, so the first egg must have been laid at least as early as 2 May 2011. The previous early record for the state



Fig. 1. (A) Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) sitting on a ground nest hidden by a patch of Blue Ridge Blueberry (*Vaccinium pallidum*). (B) Six eggs of the host species were present plus one egg from a Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*); an arrow indicates the latter.

was 11 May based on a Chalk Mountain nest containing three eggs found on 13 May 1967 (Clapp, 1997). Early egg dates for Maryland and Pennsylvania are 29 May and 15 May, respectively (Robbins & Blom, 1996). Mean temperatures in Virginia for both April and May of 2011 were above normal (National Climate Data Center, <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate/research/cag3/cag3.html>). The effect of environmental temperature (versus genotype) on lay date remains unclear (Brommer et al., 2008), but there is evidence from other avian species that nesting dates are averaging earlier in parallel with the changing climate (see Crick, 2004, and references therein).

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