

1941

Garter Snake eats Grey Black + White Warbler

On the morning of July 9, 1941, around 10 a. m. while making a survey of the birds of a wooded area at North Fishtail Bay on Douglas Lake, Cheboygan County, Michigan, we found a Black and White Warbler hopping close to the ground and carrying food in its bill. We approached the bird cautiously hoping to find a nest. But the ground vegetation was very dense and as we saw no nest at first we sat down and watched the bird. It continued moving about and began chirping excitedly. We looked down and saw a small garter snake (Thamnophis s. sirtalis Linne'; probably about a year old) crawl by us and disappear into the brush. The excitement of the adult warbler increased and in a few minutes the snake returned with and to our surprise had a large lump in his body. We suddenly realized that the snake must have eaten a Black and White Warbler nestling. So we tried to catch the snake but did not succeed. About a foot from the place where the snake had reappeared we found the warbler nest with one young bird and a warm depression where a second nestling had been. After taking notes on the bird and nest we left to do more birding. An hour later we returned to the nest. It was empty! The other nestling was probably in the stomach of the reptile too. If we had been able to catch the garter snake we would have had more conclusive evidence of its being an enemy of ground-nesting birds.

Eugenie Clark
 Norma W. Deussen