

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT

Icteria virens

Family: PARULIDAE

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

B467

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon summer resident and migrant in coastal California and in foothills of the Sierra Nevada. Found up to about 1450 m (4800 ft) in valley foothill riparian, and up to 2050 m (6500 ft) east of the Sierra Nevada in desert riparian habitats (Gaines 1977b, DeSante and Ainley 1980, Garrett and Dunn 1981). Uncommon along coast of northern California east to Cascades and occurs only locally south of Mendocino Co. (McCaskie et al. 1979). In southern California, breeds locally on the coast and very locally inland (Garrett and Dunn 1981). In migration, may be found in lower elevations of mountains in riparian habitat (McCaskie et al. 1979). Numbers much reduced in recent decades (Remsen 1978).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats insects and spiders; also berries and other fruits. Mostly gleans from foliage of shrubs and low trees.

Cover: Requires riparian thickets of willow and other brushy tangles near watercourses for cover.

Reproduction: Nest usually 0.6 to 2.4 m (2-8 ft) above ground in dense shrubs along a stream or river.

Water: Bathing recorded by Kinsey (1934).

Pattern: Frequents dense, brushy thickets and tangles near water, and thick understory in riparian woodland.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity. Nocturnal migrant.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Usually arrives in April and departs by late September for wintering grounds in Mexico and Guatemala. May wander upslope postbreeding (Gaines 1977b). There are a few late fall and winter records, mostly from southern California. Migrants sometimes pass through lower elevations in mountains.

Home Range: Dennis (1958) reported that home range in summer was larger than territory, but gave no sizes. Gaines (1974a) reported 10 per 40 ha (100 ac) in a Sacramento Valley riparian area.

Territory: Thompson and Nolan (1973) reported 28 territories averaging 1.3 ha (3.1 ac) in an abandoned Indiana field. Brewer (1955) reported territory averaging 0.12 ha (0.3 ac), and

varying from 0.04 to 0.28 ha (0.1 to 0.7 ac), in an Illinois swamp thicket. Dennis (1958) reported territory varying from 0.5 to 1.0 ha (1.25 to 2.5 ac) in abandoned fields and fence rows in Virginia.

Reproduction: Breeds from early May into early August with peak activity in June. Monogamous, although pairs may nest near one another (Ehrlich et al. 1988). Lays 3-6 eggs, usually 3 or 4. Incubation 11-15 days; chicks apparently fledge in 8-11 days. Altricial young tended by both parents until fledging (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Subject to occasional predation by accipiters, small mammals, and snakes. Loss and degradation of riparian habitat have caused a marked decline in the breeding population in recent decades in California. Parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds also has contributed to the decline (Gaines 1974a, Remsen 1978).

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