

Yellow-breasted Chat

Icteria virens

The Yellow-breasted Chat offers a cascade of song in the spring, when males deliver streams of whistles, cackles, chuckles, and gurgles with the fluidity of improvisational jazz. It's seldom seen or heard during the rest of the year, when both males and females skulk silently in the shadows of dense thickets, gleaning insects and berries for food. The largest of our warblers, the chat is a widespread breeder in shrubby habitats across North America, venturing to Central America for the winter.

Keys to Identification

Size & Shape

Chats are small songbirds but are large and bulky compared to other warblers. They have a long tail, large head and a relatively thick, heavy bill.

Color Pattern

Chats are olive-green above with a bright yellow breast and bold face markings. The face is gray, with a white eyering that connects to the bill, forming "spectacles." They also have a white malar or mustache stripe bordering the cheek. The lower belly is white.

Behavior

These are loud birds that tend to skulk in low, thick brush. In spring, males may sing from an exposed perch, but otherwise these birds typically stay well hidden.

Habitat

Yellow-breasted Chats live in thickets and other dense, regrowing areas such as bramble bushes, clearcuts, powerline corridors, and shrubs along streams.

Cool Facts

- Though a small percentage of males have two mates at once, most appear to be monogamous during the breeding season. Female aggression may help enforce this monogamy. However, some infidelity happens behind the scenes: in a Kentucky study, one-third of nests contained at least one chick sired by another male.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 7.1 inches
- Wingspan - 9.8 inches
- Weight - 0.8 - 1.1 ounces

