

Chrysomus icterocephalus (Yellow-hooded Blackbird)

Family: Icteridae (New World Blackbirds)

Order: Passeriformes (Perching Birds)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Yellow-hooded blackbird, *Chrysomus icterocephalus*.

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p_p_spp=671916, downloaded 3 February 2017]

TRAITS. *Chrysomus icterocephalus* is a bird whose common name, yellow-hooded blackbird, comes directly from its general appearance (Fig. 1). Their height ranges from 17-19cm (Hoyo et al., 1992) and weight from 24-31g (female) and 31.5-40g (male) (Animalia Life Club, 2017). These birds are sexually dimorphic in colour as the male has a very black, shiny coat with a yellow covering of the head to the chest (Fig. 1) while the top of the females is slightly olive with a brown belly and a faded yellow hood as seen in Fig. 2 (Animalia Life Club, 2017). The young bird has similar appearance to that of the female but the adolescent male is larger than that of the adolescent female. The voice of this blackbird comes across as two types of whistle or chirp where the initial sound has a low undertone but the final sound of the chirp had a loud dominant sound (Bouglouan, 2017).

DISTRIBUTION. The yellow-hooded blackbird has a very wide range (Fig. 3) in the neotropics. This species can be found in marshy areas along the Amazon River, Aruba, Barbados, Brazil, Colombia, French Guiana, Guyana, Netherlands Antilles, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela (Shears, 2007).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. In the breeding season, *Chrysomus icterocephalus* are commonly found in swampy freshwater wetlands and the male uses emergent aquatic plants to construct nests (Hoyo et al., 1992). These birds are normally found in low lying marshes but can also be found at about 2600m in the Andes of Colombia (Animalia Life Club, 2017). They share similar habitat characteristics to red-winged blackbirds. When both blackbirds exist in the same habitat, the yellow-hooded blackbirds occupy the middle of the marshes while the red-winged blackbirds inhabit the periphery. In non-breeding season, *Chrysomus icterocephalus* may occur in open fields (Seattle Audubon Society for Birds and Nature, 2005).

FOOD AND FEEDING. *Chrysomus icterocephalus* feed mainly on insects and seeds (Hoyo et al., 1992). These birds widely search for food such as rice, seeds and grains in marshes and fields and sometimes catch insects in midflight and often share feeding space with birds of similar characteristics such as the red-winged blackbird (Wikipedia, 2016). Yellow-hooded blackbirds are diurnal in activity as they migrate during the day in irregular flocks and meet at wetlands with other species of blackbirds during the night (Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 2015). Most arrive to marshes during the breeding period with males arriving before females and leave for the winter between August to September. Males fly further north for the winter than the females (Seattle Audubon Society for Birds and Nature, 2005).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. The population of the yellow-hooded blackbird is very large and its exact population size is unknown. However, the population status seems to be stable and there are no current threats/dangers to the species (Butchart and Symes, 2012). Populations of the yellow-hooded blackbird follow two main patterns of the spacing and seasonal duration of male territories. These patterns arise from variation of food resources and of predators and brood parasites such as *Molothrus bonariensis* (shiny cowbird). Brood parasites are organisms that manipulate other animals (a host) to raise their young as if it was their own. In areas where there are limited seasonal changes, like the Caribbean region, male territories usually range over a wide area of 15-50m, and nests are about 2-10m apart, occupied throughout the wet (rainy) season. In areas where there are many seasons such as Venezuela, these the birds nest in groups closer to the end of the rainy season (Wiley and Wiley, 1980).

REPRODUCTION. In the breeding season, males congregate and build nests in colonies. They then use their beautiful plumage along with high pitched whistles to attract the females to their territory. When the females arrive, they choose their nest within a male's territory, usually a space over the swamp (Seattle Audubon Society for Birds and Nature, 2005). Males can mate with up to five different females in a single season. Males usually stay at the nesting site after mating until incubation of the eggs begins, at this point the male leaves the nest and goes in search of another nest and mate. The clutch is usually 2-3 eggs at a time. Mating seasons are between May–October in Trinidad, October–November in Venezuela (Animalia Life Club, 2017), March–September in Suriname, and March–May in Colombia (Hoyo et al., 1992).

BEHAVIOUR. During the mating season, males are very territorial and gather in flocks to build nests. They display themselves in their territories with musical sounds to attract females. They approach females with fluttering flight which then leads the receptive females to follow them back to their nests to mate (Animalia Life Club, 2017). The female builds the lining inside of the nest created by the male, and then lays her eggs a few days after arriving at the nest. Males stand

perched on the nest site with aggressive stance to protect against any rivals that may be approaching (Bouglouan, 2017).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. *Chrysomus icterocephalus* is spread over an extremely wide range. The population of size of this bird is estimated to be about 23 million individuals but its true population size remains unknown. The population trend is stable as no decrease or fluctuations in the population was observed. Since this bird occurs over such a wide range and population trends are stable, the yellow-hooded blackbird is listed as of Least Concern (IUCN, 2016).

REFERENCES

- Animalia Life Club. (2017). Yellow-hooded Blackbird. <http://animalia-life.club/birds/yellow-hooded-blackbird.html>.
- BirdLife International. (2017). Yellow-hooded Blackbird (*Chrysomus icterocephalus*) - BirdLife species factsheet: <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/Yellow-hooded-Blackbird>.
- Bouglouan, N. (2017). Yellow-hooded Blackbirds. <http://www.oiseaux-birds.com/card-yellow-hooded-blackbird.html>.
- Butchart, S., and Symes, A. (2012). *Chrysomus icterocephalus* Yellow-Hooded Blackbird. Encyclopedia of Life: <http://eol.org/pages/284088/details>.
- Cornell Lab of Ornithology. (2015). Yellow-headed Blackbirds. https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Yellow-headed_Blackbird/lifehistory.
- Hoyo, J. D., Elliott, A., Sargata, J., Cabot, J., and Christie, D. A. (1992). Handbook of the Birds of the Worlds Alive. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.
- IUCN. (2016). *Chrysomus icterocephalus*. Red List of Threatened Species. <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/full/22724200/0>.
- Seattle Audubon Society for Birds and Nature. (2005). Yellow-headed Blackbird. BirdWeb: http://birdweb.org/birdweb/bird/yellow-headed_blackbird.
- Shears, T. M. (2007). Yellow-hooded Blackbirds (*Chrysomus icterocephalus*). Beautyofbirds.com: <https://www.beautyofbirds.com/yellowhoodedblackbirds.html>.
- Wikipedia. (2016). Yellow-headed blackbird. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellow-headed_blackbird.
- Wiley, R. H. and Wiley, S. M. (1980). Spacing and Timing in the Nesting Ecology of a Tropical Blackbird: Comparison of Populations in Different Environments. <http://www.unc.edu/~rhwiley/pdfs/EcologyTropicalBlackbird.pdf>

Author: Karen Bhim

Posted online: 2017



Fig. 2. Female yellow-hooded blackbird.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Yellow-hooded_Blackbird_female_RWD5.jpg, downloaded 3 February 2017]



Fig. 3. Distribution map of the yellow-hooded blackbird.

[<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/yellow-hooded-blackbird-chrysomus-icterocephalus/distribution>, downloaded 3 February 2017]