
SPECIES ACCOUNT

Species Data

Common Name:	Yellow-Breasted Chat
Scientific Name:	<i>Icteria virens</i>
Species Code:	B-YBCH
BC Status:	Red-listed
Identified Wildlife Status:	Not yet identified.
COSEWIC Status:	Endangered

Project Data

Project Name:	Bella Vista / Goose Range Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory
Project Type:	Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping
Area:	North Okanagan
Ecoprovince:	Southern Interior
Ecoregions:	Thompson-Okanagan Plateau
Ecoregions:	Northern Okanagan Basin (NOB)
BGC Units:	IDFxb1
Map Scale:	1:20 000

Distribution

Provincial Range

Yellow-breasted Chats are restricted primarily to the valley bottoms of the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys, north through Vernon to Alkali Lake (BC Environment 1997). They have been found in the Chilcotin, lower Kootenay, and at the coast (RBCM 1996).

The majority of the breeding population occurs from Vaseux Lake and Cawston south (RBCM 1996), with scattered pairs occurring in upland areas above the main river valleys, and north through Vernon (Chapman 1995, BC Environment 1997). A small breeding population has recently been established near Mission and Chilliwack (BC Environment 1997).

Elevation Range

Low elevations (Cannings *et al.* 1987, Chapman 1995).

Distribution in the Project Area

One non-breeding record at the Commonage (Siddle pers.com.)

Ecology and Habitat Requirements

Yellow-breasted Chats arrive in BC in mid-May, and departure occurs from mid-July to mid-August (Cannings *et al.* 1987). Most nests are built in mid-June, and the young are fledged by Mid-July (Cannings *et al.* 1987). Three to four eggs are generally laid, with brood size usually one or two at fledging (Cannings 1995).

Restricted to lowland riparian habitat, chats prefer dense riparian thickets occurring along hedgerows, streams, lakeshores or damp gullies, within dry, open habitats (BC Environment 1997). Typically found in low elevation riparian areas with extensive thickets of wild rose or snowberry, or in upland thickets of hawthorne (Cannings *et al.* 1987).

Minimum territory size is probably 0.5 ha (Cannings 1995). Gibbard and Gibbard (1992) found the minimum size of occupied rose thickets to be 9 m². Territories occur further away from buildings and closer to water than random (Bishop, CWS unpub.data).

Foraging and nesting usually occur in the riparian undergrowth, and in tree and shrub branches below 3 m (BC Environment 1997). Dense cover is important for nest cover and foraging on insects (BC Environment 1997).

Chats are insectivorous, but will eat berries as well (Cannings 1995). Insect prey is gleaned from shrub and tree foliage near the ground or on lower branches (Chapman 1995).

Predators of chat eggs and young include snakes, jays, chipmunks and cowbirds (Thompson and Nolan 1973). In a recent study, of 19 nests that survived to the nestling stage, six were parasitized by cowbirds (Bishop, CWS unpub.data).

General Living during Growing Season

Food and Security/Thermal Habitat

Chats nest in dense riparian thickets in dry, open habitats, including those near streams, lakes, ponds and swamps, or at the edges of woods, particularly cottonwood (Chapman 1995). May also use shrubby old pastures (Bryan and Mulholland 1992). Chats prefer dense wild rose thickets containing or near shrubs and small deciduous trees such as cottonwood, willows, waterbirch, hawthorn, elderberry and saskatoon (BC Environment 1996, RBCM 1996, Gibbard and Gibbard 1992). Chat territories have a higher percent of rose and total shrub cover than random sites in similar habitat (Bishop, CWS unpub.data). Snowberry is also a common component of nest territories. One territory was at a site where big sagebrush and rabbitbrush were prevalent (Gibbard and Gibbard 1992).

Thickets with tall overstories appear to be avoided (BC Environment 1996). Nest sites were located in rose thickets with an average height of 1.25 m, in close proximity to large shrubs or medium size trees 3.5 m to 6 m in height (Gibbard and Gibbard 1992). While 5 m plots around nest sites had no significant difference from random plots outside of territories, 11.3 m plots had more shrub cover and less grass and forb cover (Bishop, CWS unpub.data).

Chats avoid thickets fragmented by cattle trails (Chapman 1995), and have shown significant population increases within four years after excluding cattle from riparian habitat (Krueper 1992).

Nests are generally located less than 1 m above ground in bushes, with rose and snowberry favoured (Cannings *et al.* 1987). Nest shrub height ranged from 1 m to 2.5 m, with nests located at an average of 0.7 m, and tended to have more small branches than random shrubs (Bishop, CWS unpub.data).

Ratings

This model employs a 4-class rating scheme because there is insufficient knowledge of habitat requirements to use a 6-class scheme yet there is sufficient knowledge to go beyond a 2-class rating scheme. This complies with the recommended rating scheme in the RIC standards manual (1999).

Provincial Benchmark

Ecosection	Southern Okanogan Basin (SOB)
Biogeoclimatic Zones	BG, PP
Habitats	Dense, lowland riparian thickets of wild rose, with some small decid. trees.

Map Themes

Habitat Use	Life Requisite	Season	Rating Code	Ecosystem Attributes
Living	Security/ Thermal, Food	Growing season	LIG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> low elevation riparian thickets

Ratings Assumptions

Living during growing season – Security/Thermal, Food (LIG)	
Site Series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Riparian habitats rated up to High if shrubby understory
Structural Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stages 3 and 4 rated up to High, stages 5 to 7 rated up to Moderate
Shrub Density	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dense rated up to High, moderate density up to Low, low density rated Nil
Range Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rated down 2 if understory heavily fragmented or reduced
Aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No effect on rating
Slope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No effect on rating
Soil Texture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No effect on rating
Soil Depth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No effect on rating

Map Interpretation

One map theme is portrayed through this model, general living during the growing season (LIG), which includes nesting and foraging. This theme is displayed by the highest suitability rating for units occurring in the polygon (highest-value method).

Literature Cited

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Yellow-breasted Chat Suitability Map

