

GENUS I.—ICTERIA, *Vieill.* CHAT.

Bill of moderate length, stout, slightly arched, broad at the base, compressed toward the end; upper mandible with the sides convex, the edges sharp, destitute of notch, the tip acute and a little declinate; lower mandible with the dorsal line nearly straight, the edge-line slightly arched and inflected. Nostrils roundish, half covered by a vaulted membrane. General form rather robust; head ovate, neck short, body moderate. Legs of moderate length, slender; tarsus compressed, anteriorly covered with eight scutella, of which the upper are blended; two lateral toes nearly equal, the hind one not much stouter. Claws moderate, arch much compressed, laterally grooved, very acute. Plumage soft and blended. Bristles very small. Wings of moderate length, rounded, third and fourth primaries longest, second little shorter, first longer than sixth. Tail rather long, rounded.

## THE YELLOW-BREADED CHAT.

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†ICTERIA VIRIDIS, *Gmel.*

## PLATE CCXLIV.—MALES, FEMALE AND NEST.

This singular bird is extremely plentiful in Louisiana, Georgia, and the Carolinas, during spring and summer. It arrives in the first of those States as soon as the blossoms of the dog-wood mark the return of the vernal season. Many continue their migrations eastward as far as Connecticut, but beyond this the species is seldom if ever seen. I have found it equally abundant in Kentucky, particularly in the barrens of that State; and it ascends the Ohio, spreading over the country, and extending as far as the borders of Lake Erie in Pennsylvania. It never enters what is properly called the woods, preferring at all periods of its short stay with us, the large



*Yellow-breasted Chat*

1. 2. 3. Male. 4. Female.

*Sweet briar.*



tangled and almost impenetrable patches of briars, sumach, prickly ash, and different species of smilax, wherever a rivulet or a pool may be found.

As in other migratory species, the males precede the females several days. As soon as they have arrived, they give free vent to their song at all hours of the day, renewing it at night when the weather is calm, and the moon shines brightly, seeming intent on attracting the females, by repeating in many varied tones the ardency of their passion. Sometimes the sounds are scarcely louder than a whisper, now they acquire strength, deep guttural notes roll in slow succession as if produced by the emotion of surprise, then others clear and sprightly glide after each other, until suddenly, as if the bird had become confused, the voice becomes a hollow bass. The performer all the while looks as if he were in the humour of scolding, and moves from twig to twig among the thickets with so much activity and in so many directions, that the notes reach the ear as it were from opposite places at the same moment. Now the bird mounts in the air in various attitudes, with its legs and feet hanging, while it continues its song and jerks its body with great vehemence, performing the strangest and most whimsical gesticulations; the next moment it returns to the bush. If you imitate its song, it follows your steps with caution, and responds to each of your calls, now and then peeping at you for a moment, the next quite out of sight. Should you have a dog, which will enter its briary retreat, it will skip about him, scold him, and frequently perch, or rise on wing above the thicket, so that you may easily shoot it.

The arrival of the females is marked by the redoubled exertions of the males, who now sing as if delirious with the pleasurable sensations they experience. Before ten days have elapsed, the pairs begin to construct their nest, which is placed in any sort of bush or briar, seldom more than six feet from the ground, and frequently not above two or three. It is large, and composed externally of dry leaves, small sticks, strips of vine bark and grasses, the interior being formed of fibrous roots and horse-hair. The eggs are four or five, of a light flesh colour, spotted with reddish-brown. In Louisiana and the Carolinas, these birds have two broods in the season; but in Pennsylvania, where they seldom lay before the 20th of May, they have only one brood. The eggs are hatched in twelve days. The male is seldom heard to sing after the breeding season, and they all depart from the Union by the middle of September. Their eggs and young are frequently destroyed by snakes, and a species of insect that feeds on carrion, and burrows in the ground under night. The young resemble the females, and do not acquire the richness of the spring plumage while in the Union.

The food of the Yellow-breasted Chat consists of coleopterous insects and

small fruits. They are especially fond of the wild strawberries so abundant in the Kentucky barrens.

When migrating they move from bush to bush by day, and frequently continue their march by night, especially should the moon be out and the weather pleasant. Their flight is short and irregular at all times. When alighted, they frequently jerk their tail, squat, and spring on their legs, and are always in a state of great activity. I never observed them chasing insects on the wing.

I have presented you with several figures of this singular species, to shew you their positions when on the wing performing their antics in the love season as well as when alighted. The wild rose branch with the nest, was cut out of a thicket for the purpose which you see accomplished.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT, *Pipra polyglotta*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. i. p. 90.

ICTERIA VIRIDIS, Bonap. Syn., p. 69.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT, *Icteria viridis*, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 299.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT, *Icteria viridis*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. ii. p. 223; vol. v. p. 433.

#### Adult Male.

Bill of moderate length, strong, slightly arched, broad at the base, compressed towards the end; upper mandible with the sides convex, the edges acute, destitute of notch, the tip acute, and a little declinate; lower mandible with the dorsal line nearly straight, the edge line slightly arched and inflected. Nostrils rounded, half covered by a vaulted membrane. The form is rather robust. Legs of moderate length, slender; tarsus compressed, anteriorly scutellate, sharp behind; two lateral toes nearly equal, the hind one not much stouter; claws small, compressed, acute.

Plumage blended. Wings of moderate length, rounded; third and fourth primaries longest, second almost equal, first a little shorter. Tail longish, rounded. Feathers of the throat and breast with a silky gloss.

Bill black, the base of lower mandible blue. Iris hazel. Feet greyish-blue. The general colour of the upper parts is deep olive-green; the inner webs of the tail-feathers and quills, and the ends of the latter, dusky-brown. A line over the eye, a small streak under it, and a spot at the base of the lower mandible, white. Lore black. Throat and breast bright yellow, abdomen and under tail-coverts white.

Length 7 inches; extent of wings 9; bill along the ridge  $\frac{6}{12}$ , along the edge  $\frac{9}{12}$ ; tarsus  $\frac{10}{12}$ .

#### Adult Female.

The female scarcely differs from the male in any perceptible degree, and is of the same size.

From Texas to Connecticut. Inland as far as Kentucky. Abundant. Migratory.

In an adult male preserved in spirits, the roof of the mouth is nearly flat behind, anteriorly arched and decurved, with a prominent median ridge. The posterior aperture of the nares is linear, 5 twelfths long, with the margins papillate. The tongue is 7 twelfths long, deeply emarginate and papillate at the base, channelled above, tapering to a horny point, which is rather blunt, but terminates in a number of slender bristles, of which there are also some on its edges. The œsophagus is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, funnel-shaped at the commencement, then 3 twelfths in width, and so continuing. The stomach is rather small, considerably compressed, roundish, 7 twelfths long, 6 twelfths broad; its muscles moderate and distinct, its tendons rather large; its cuticular lining thin, tough, brownish-red, with six rugæ on one side, and four on the other. Its contents are remains of insects. The intestine is  $6\frac{1}{4}$  inches long,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  twelfths in width; the cœca are extremely minute, being only  $\frac{1}{4}$  twelfth in length.

The trachea is 1 inch 9 twelfths long, considerably flattened, its breadth 1 twelfth. The rings are 70 in number, and 2 dimidiate rings. The bronchi are short, of 10 half rings. There are four pairs of inferior laryngeal muscles, similar to those of the Shrikes.

### THE SWEET BRIAR.

ROSA RUBIGINOSA?—ICOSANDRIA POLYGYNIA, *Linn.*—ROSACEÆ, *Juss.*

The *sweet briar* is very generally distributed in the United States. I have found it from Louisiana to the extremities of Nova Scotia along the Atlantic coast, and as far in the interior as I have travelled. The delicious odour of its leaves never fails to gratify the person who brushes through patches of it, while the delicate tints of its flowers reminds one of the loveliness of female beauty in its purest and most blooming state. Truly a "sweet home" must be the nest that is placed in an eglantine bower, and happy must be the bird that in the midst of fragrance is cheered by the warble of her ever loving mate.



*Yellow-breasted Chat*

1. 2. 3. Male. 4. Female.

*Sweet briar.*



Audubon, John James. 1842. "The Yellow-Breasted Chat, *Icteria viridis*, Gmel. [Pl. 244]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 4, 160–163. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319357>.

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