

Yellow Headed Blackbird

Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus

General Information:

-Brilliant yellow plumage and white wing patches contrasting with its all-black body make this robin-sized marsh bird easy to identify. Often nesting in colonies, it is highly aggressive in defending its grounds and will attack other birds and even human intruders, especially if young are in the nest. The song of the male is considered by many to be the poorest vocalization of any North American songbird.

Song:

-High-pitched raspy honking gurgle, ending with a descending buzz, *klee-klee-klee-ko-kow-w-w-w-w-w*.

Behavior:

-Gregarious; forms breeding colonies and flocks outside breeding season. Flocks forage and roost together and range from small to enormous, containing millions in the winter. Males often segregate from females and juveniles in the winter.

Breeding:

-Polygamous and colonial.

Nesting:

-Incubation of 11-13 days by the female. The 2 broods per year of altricial young are brooded by the female, fed by both sexes, and stay in the nest for 9-12 days.

Population:

-Common in freshwater marshes, reedy lakes and irrigation ditches, and open farmlands



Conservation:

-A neo-tropical migrant that is vulnerable to loss of habitat due to draining of wetlands and freshwater marshes.

Shoreline Restoration Issues:

- If you would like to create an environment friendly to the Yellow-headed Blackbird on your shoreland property the most important thing in my opinion to do is to create an area in which it can nest. However since this bird is polygamous and colonial you are going to have to have a big area for nesting. If you would like to try, I would suggest planting extensively in Cattail, River Bulrush, Hard-stem Bulrush, and Soft-stem Bulrush, but remember that Cattails can be a pretty invasive plant.