

BIRD EXPLORER

The elusive Yellow-breasted Chat

BY PETER J. THIEMANN



Peter J. Thiemann

Long considered the largest of our wood warblers, the Yellow-breasted Chat is no longer listed among the warbler family—it is now the lone member of

the Icteriidae family. More heard than seen, this elusive, skulking songbird is difficult to photograph. Its call and song are unmistakably louder than those of the Black-headed Grosbeak, which sings nearby.

The Chat's habitat is the riparian zone near rivers and creeks in our area. Willow thickets and blackberries are its favorite haunts. When you do catch a glimpse, it is usually a fleeting flash of yellow. When you try to capture an image when the light

is low, almost dark, you'll find you can rarely freeze this bird in motion. The Chat has to sit still for a successful image hunt. (That explains my somewhat soft photos for this story, which were shot at high sensitivity and slow shutter speed.)

This spring we had several pairs of Chats in residence on our Applegate Valley land. I never saw a nest nor looked for one, as

I was happy to have the birds around and didn't want to disturb them. (Never mind the impossibility of penetrating thickets of vegetation near parts of the riparian zone where they conceal themselves.) Conditions for Chat nesting were good, as insects were plentiful this spring and early summer.

By the end of July, as the creek dries up, I have seen Chats come to our ponds for water, but they soon departed for the south.

So I am missing the songbirds of spring, and especially the Yellow-breasted Chat. I will have to wait for another season to enjoy this unique songbird when it returns from its southern winter homes in California and Baja, Mexico.

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Photos courtesy of peterjthiemann flickr photo stream.



The California Sister

BY LINDA KAPPEN

The California Sister (*Adelpha californica*) is a butterfly of the Nymphalidae family of butterflies. It is very large and can reach up to 3.5 inches across. On a broad display with its wings open, it is brown and black with large orange spots on the tips (apex) of the

forewings. White bands are convex from the base of the hindwing to the tips of the forewing. The ventral (underside) view shows a lighter soft brown with colorful patterns of blue and lilac.

Host plants for the California Sister are evergreen species of oak, which can be golden chinquapin (*Chrysolepis chrysophylla*), canyon live oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*), California live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), and possibly Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*). The eggs are laid singly on host plant leaves. Providing we have good seasonal conditions in southern Oregon, we may witness two to three broods. Some adults may overwinter.

The range for the California Sister is California to Baja and throughout western and coastal Oregon with a rare sighting in Washington state, but that could change with warming temperatures. This butterfly frequents habitats near oaks or watercourses, such

as rivers, parks, or mountain creeks. It is a resident butterfly in California.

It is usually in flight from May to October and can be seen hovering near host plants, sipping nectar from many flowers of plants and shrubs, mud-puddling, or fluttering on scat and sometimes road kill. The

photo to the left shows a sister on our native blackcap raspberry plant. In the photo above, a sister is on a rock by a river.

In the summer of 2011, there were many California Sisters in the greater Applegate area. I recall driving to the mountains on the loop to Applegate Lake via Thompson Creek Road. As the road climbed in the shady sections of the higher reaches, I must have counted at least 50 California Sisters on the drive to the top of the road, where it branches off in three different directions. Of course, I saw more



during that day and the rest of the summer. That was a great butterfly year!

Fun but quirky fact. The common name, California Sister, is said to have originated from someone describing the color arrangement as a nun's habit with colorful, bright-orange hair escaping from the wimple. Imagine that, if you will!

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Butterfly photos by Linda Kappen.

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