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Common Yellowthroat

Geothlypis trichas

The Common Yellowthroat is the only wood warbler that breeds commonly in all of the lower 48 states. It is also found in southeast Alaska and much of Canada. This impressive distribution and abundance appears to be due to its broad choice of habitat just about any dense, low vegetation.

With Florida's wealth of freshwater and saltwater marshes, swamps, fields, and prairies, it is hardly surprising that Common Yellowthroats are common residents throughout the state.

The subspecies *G. t. ignota* breeds in Florida, but 6 other races have been collected in winter and during migration (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

The Common Yellowthroat winters across the entire southern United States, to Panama and the West Indies.

Habitat. The Common Yellowthroat inhabits a broad spectrum of low, moist habitats throughout Florida.

Diet consists chiefly of insects and other invertebrates found near or on the ground.

Nests are usually constructed of reeds or blades of grass and lined with finer grasses (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The nest is well hidden, placed on or near the ground, often in a tussock close to the base of a bush. The typical clutch is 4 white eggs, beautifully speckled, blotched, and scrawled with browns. The female incubates them for 12 days, and the young fledge at about 10 days of age.

Seasonal Occurrence. Resident populations of Common Yellowthroats are joined in the fall and spring by large numbers of migratory birds. Along the east coast, the species reaches its maximum abundance during migration.

In Florida, Common Yellowthroats raise 2 broods between mid-April and early July.

Status. The well-hidden nests and the very secretive, almost mouse-like behavior of the parents make breeding rather difficult to confirm. Only the bird's abundance and wide range resulted in the number of breeding confirmations found during the Atlas project. South of Tampa Bay and Cape Canaveral, Common Yellowthroats do not breed along the coastal fringe; one must move inland several miles before encountering them. Despite breeding abundantly in south Florida, including Cape Sable (Holt and Sutton 1926), Common Yellowthroats do not nest in the Keys.

Other apparent absences follow no obvious pattern, but its distinctive chuck call, loud, characteristic "witchety-witchety-witch" song, and quick response to "pishing" and "squeaking" make it hard to believe Atlas fieldworkers missed them, except for those quadrangles that were only briefly surveyed.

Duncan Stuart Evered



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