

# PASSERIFORMES

(Songbirds)

# Icterids



Pic1

# Family ICTERIDAE (Blackbirds)

## Yellow-Headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)



Overton WMA; NV



Cornerstone Park; Henderson, NV



Overton WMA; NV



Hend. Bird Viewing Preserve; NV



Hend. Bird Viewing Preserve; NV

### Measurements:

Length: 9.5" Wing Span: 16" Average Weight: 3 oz

### Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-large size; stout body with large head; pointed, conical, black bill; dark eyes; (m) black body, wings, tail; **bright yellow head**, breast; black mask; white wing patches; (f) unmarked olive-brown overall; yellow on head and breast duller and less extensive; no mask or white wing patches; juveniles similar to females

### Notes:

common; gregarious, nesting in colonies; prefers marshy aquatic habitats for roosting; found mainly west of the Mississippi River breeding from CAN south to sw US, wintering in MEX; forages in open areas for insects and seeds

**Mojave presence:** summer range; some year-round residents locally

### Comments:

Being marsh birds, nesting deep in stands of such plants as cattails and reeds, these blackbirds can be a challenge to photograph. But patience and perseverance will be rewarded when they make an appearance to peruse the neighborhood (left; male) or grab a bite to eat in an open area (right; female).



Cornerstone Park; Hend., NV

April 2021



LV Muni GC; Las Vegas, NV

July 2018

**Pic2**

# Family ICTERIDAE (Blackbirds)

## Red-Winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)



Lily Lake; Rocky Mtn NP; CO



Overton WMA; NV



Bosque del Apache NWR; Socorro, NM



Hend. Bird Viewing Preserve; NV



Overton WMA; NV

### Measurements:

Length: 9" Wing Span: 14" Average Weight: 2 oz

### Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; stocky stature; pointed, conical, gray-black bill; dark eyes; (m) glossy black overall; **bright red shoulder patch** and yellow wingbar; (f) sparrow-like appearance; brown overall; paler below with distinct barring; indistinct, rufous shoulder patch; yellowish wash on face and around bill; distinct, pale eyebrow; smaller than male

### Notes:

common; gregarious, in large flocks; favors marshy, aquatic to marine habitats throughout most of NA, south through MEX into CA; among the most extensive bird species in NA; over 20 subspecies; forages in open areas for insects, seeds, grains

Mojave presence: year-round

### Comments:

While technically considered to be year-round residents in the Mojave region, this refers only to specific localities such as oases, wetlands, or other permanent and dependable riparian areas. You'll never see one just out in the desert--any time of the year! Reliable year-round locales include the [Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve](#) and [Overton WMA](#) (right).



# Family **ICTERIDAE** (Blackbirds)

## Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)



Lily Lake; RMNP; CO



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Furnace Creek; Death Valley National Park; CA



Death Valley NP; CA



Lily Lake; RMNP; CO

### Measurements:

Length: 9" Wing Span: 15" Average Weight: 2 oz

### Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; longish, round-tipped tail; pointed, thin, black bill; (m) black overall with purple iridescence on head, blue/green on body; **bright yellow eyes**; (f) brown overall; slight greenish iridescence on wings; brown eyes

### Notes:

common locally; gregarious in small flocks, often mixed with other blackbirds; found in urban and rural open areas (parks, lawns, fields, pastures, etc.) throughout US (rare in east), western CAN, wintering south through MEX; forages for grains, seeds, insects, etc., but opportunistic for any edible scraps

**Mojave presence:** winter range; some year-round residents

### Comments:

Brewer's can easily be confused with the closely related **Rusty Blackbird** where their ranges overlap, which does not include the Mojave area, making identification more straightforward here. However, they are similar in appearance to the distantly related **Great-Tailed Grackle** that is far more prevalent in the region. Males especially have similar iridescence and conspicuous yellow eyes. Note, however, the brewer's smaller stature and shorter, less flamboyant tail. The **Common Grackle** is also similar to both, but is rare west of the Rockies.

# Family ICTERIDAE (Orioles)

## Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*)



Corn Creek; DNWR; NV



Corn Creek; DNWR; NV



Corn Creek; Desert National Wildlife Refuge; NV



Corn Creek; DNWR; NV



Corn Creek; DNWR; NV

### Measurements:

Length: 8" Wing Span: 12" Average Weight: 1.5 oz

### Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; **straight**, pointed, gray-black bill; dark eyes, **(m)** yellow to orange underparts, face; black upperparts (including cap, wings); **black eyeline**; bold white coverts; orange tail with black centerline and tip; **(f)** olive-yellow head, breast, tail; grayish back; **whitish belly**; indistinct eyeline

### Notes:

common; solitary or small groups; prefers treetops in deciduous, riparian, open woodlands throughout western NA from Pacific coast east to Great Plains (rare farther east), and from sw CAN south to wintering grounds in MEX; often hybridizes with **Baltimore Oriole** where ranges overlap; eats insects (especially caterpillars), fruit, nectar, etc.

**Mojave presence:** winter range

### Comments:

The Bullock can be difficult to distinguish from the **Hooded Oriole** in the field; they're constantly moving about and usually obstructed by foliage. Note the male's bright white wing coverts (left) and distinct dark eyeline (right), both at the **Desert NWR** in July, 2020.



# Family ICTERIDAE (Orioles)

## Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*)



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV

### Measurements:

Length: 8" Wing Span: 10" Average Weight: 1 oz

### Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; 2 white wingbars; long, pointed, curved, black bill; dark eyes; (m) yellow to orange underparts, head, rump; black back, wings, face and throat, tail; (f) olive-yellow above; yellow below; gray wings; longer tail

### Notes:

uncommon; social in small groups, though in large flocks during migration; inhabits open woodlands in the sw US southeastward to sw TX, wintering throughout most of MEX; 5 subspecies; eats insects, fruit, berries, nectar

Mojave presence: winter range

### Comments:

The male hooded can be difficult to distinguish from the Bullock's Oriole in the field, as they both prefer to stay concealed high in tree foliage. When the opportunity arises, note the yellow-to-orange head, and the eye completely engulfed in the black face and bib patch, thus the absence of an eyeline. Also, the white coverts are not as bold and extensive. The females shown above and at right were photographed at Corn Creek at the Desert NWR in July, 2020; they present a yellow belly, rather than the white of the female Bullock's.



# Family **ICTERIDAE** (Orioles) **Orchard Oriole** (*Icterus spurius*)



TRNP (South Unit); ND



Theodore Roosevelt NP (South Unit); ND



TRNP (South Unit); ND



TRNP (South Unit); ND



TRNP (South Unit); ND

## Measurements:

Length: 7" Wing Span: 9" Average Weight: .8 oz

## Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-small size; white wingbars; rounded tail; pointed, dark bill; dark eyes; (m) **rusty-red** underparts, shoulders, rump; mostly **black** above; (f) **olive-green** upperparts; **yellow** below (juvenile similar to female, but with black bib)

## Notes:

uncommon; solitary or in small groups; prefers semi-open, deciduous woodlands near water throughout e NA (very rare farther west), wintering south through MEX to nw SA; smallest species of *Icteridae*; 2 subspecies; eats insects, spiders, fruit, seeds, etc.

**Mojave presence:** rare

## Comments:

The orchard is not an oriole that one expects to see in the Mojave, but wayward or adventurous individuals do show up from time to time. If it's a female, she can be easily misidentified as a different oriole (e.g. a Hooded), but males are distinctive; if they're together, congratulations, you know you've seen a rare Mojave visitor! When I first spotted a male at **Theodore Roosevelt NP** it was mostly nestled in the foliage of a large tree, making an ID a bit of a challenge. I actually mistook it for a **Spotted Towhee** at first, since those were also in the area!

# Family ICTERIDAE (Grackles)

## Great-Tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)



Death Valley NP; CA



Bird Viewing Preserve; Henderson , NV



Floyd Lamb SP; LV, NV



Lorenzi Park; LV, NV



Lorenzi Park; LV, NV

### Measurements:

Length: 18" Wing Span: 22" Average Weight: (m) 7 oz (f) 4 oz

### Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-large size; long, stout, black bill; bright yellow eyes (brown in juveniles); (m) glossy black with blue sheen; long, flamboyant, **keel-shaped tail**; (f) smaller than male; brown body, brown-black wings; less audacious tail

### Notes:

common; gregarious; found in rural/urban open areas (fields, pastures, wetlands, parks, etc.) in w US from CA/NV east to IA/LA, south through MEX to nw SA; aka **Mexican Grackle**; forages mainly on the ground for a very diverse diet, including invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, fish, crustaceans, human leftovers, and much more

**Mojave presence:** year-round

### Comments:

These smart and entertaining birds will eat just about anything they can get their beaks on. If you're a golfer, keep a close eye on your lunch and snacks. They'll take off with anything you have, including sandwiches, hot dogs, chips, candy bars...you name it. And, they know all the hiding places on the golf cart!



Floyd Lamb SP; LV, NV



Lorenzi Park; LV, NV

# Family ICTERIDAE (Cowbirds)

## Brown-Headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*)



Clark Co. Wetlands Park; NV



Corn Creek; Desert National Wildlife Refuge; NV



LV Municipal GC; LV, NV



Corn Creek; DNWR; NV



Corn Creek; DNWR; NV

### Measurements:

Length: 8" Wing Span: 13" Average Weight: 1.5 oz

### Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size, stocky; short tail; more finch-like appearance (head, bill) than other blackbird species; dark eyes; (m) black body with bluish iridescence; brown head; (f) gray-brown overall, paler on head; tawny underparts with indistinct streaking; pale throat; smaller than male

### Notes:

common; social, often mixing with other blackbird species; inhabits open areas (often near livestock) throughout NA (except far north); an obligate brood parasite; polygamous, having several different mates per season; 3 subspecies; forages on the ground for insects, seeds, grains, etc.

Mojave presence: summer range

### Comments:



This has to be the most irresponsible bird when it comes to parental care! The female lays her eggs in other birds' nests, and then goes off to party and carouse around! While the method is hardly foolproof, enough nestlings survive to perpetuate the species! This youngster at Ash Meadows NWR in southern NV in September, 2018, was obviously raised by great parents who taught him to be especially tame and friendly--or perhaps he just views everyone as foster parents!

Pic9

# Family ICTERIDAE (Meadowlarks)

## Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*)



Corn Creek; DNWR; NV



Badlands National Park; South Dakota



Corn Creek; DNWR; NV



Claude, Texas



Overton WMA; NV

### Measurements:

Length: 9" Wing Span: 15" Average Weight: 3.5 oz

### Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size, stocky; mottled brown above, yellow below and in front of eyes; **dark spots** on white flanks; **black necklace**; mostly **yellow malar**; paler non-breeding plumage; short tail; long, thin, pointed bill; dark eyes; alternating brown and white stripes on head; no sexual dimorphism

### Notes:

common; social; found in open areas (grasslands, fields, marshes, golf courses, parks, etc.) throughout w NA from CAN south, wintering in c MEX and eastern part of range (IL south to TX/LA); 2 subspecies; forages on the ground for insects and seeds

**Mojave presence:** year-round

### Comments:

The Western Meadowlark is difficult to distinguish from its eastern counterpart--especially where their ranges overlap. The markings on the flanks of the latter are more streaked, and the malar (moustache) is mostly white. The songs and calls of the two species are also unique (more melodic in the western), but this requires an experienced ear to differentiate.



Corn Creek; DNWR; NV