

Common Yellowthroat

Geothlypis trichas

A broad black mask lends a touch of highwayman's mystique to the male Common Yellowthroat. Look for these furtive, yellow-and-olive warblers skulking through tangled vegetation, often at the edges of marshes and wetlands. Females lack the mask and are much browner, though they usually show a hint of warm yellow at the throat. Yellowthroats are vocal birds, and both their witchety-witchety-witchety songs and distinctive call notes help reveal the presence of this, one of our most numerous warblers.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Common Yellowthroats are small songbirds with chunky, rounded heads and medium-length, slightly rounded tails.

Color Pattern

Adult males are bright yellow below, with a sharp black face mask and olive upperparts. A thin whitish line sets off the black mask from the head and neck. Immature males show traces of the full mask of adult males. Females are a plain olive brown, usually with yellow brightening the throat and under the tail. They lack the black mask.

Behavior

Common Yellowthroats spend much of their time skulking low to the ground in dense thickets and fields, searching for small insects and spiders. Males sing a very distinctive, rolling witchety-witchety-witchety song, and both sexes give a full-sounding chuck note that is easy to learn. During migration, this is often the most common warbler found in fields and edges. It sometimes joins other warbler species in mixed foraging flocks.

Habitat

Yellowthroats live in open areas with thick, low vegetation, ranging from marsh to grassland to open pine forest. During migration, they use an even broader suite of habitats including backyards and forest.



Cool Facts

- The Common Yellowthroat was one of the first bird species to be catalogued from the New World, when a specimen from Maryland was described by Linnaeus in 1766.
- Adult Common Yellowthroats sometimes fall prey to carnivorous birds such as Merlins and Loggerhead Shrikes. Occasionally they have more unexpected predators: one migrating yellowthroat was eaten by a Chuck-will's-widow, while another was found in the stomach of a largemouth bass.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 4.3 - 5.1 inches
- Wingspan - 5.9 - 7.5 inches
- Weight - 0.3 - 0.4 ounces