

## Yellow-headed Blackbird (YhBb)

I have finally written about all the birds I have personally seen in Eldorado, so now I'm looking in other neighborhoods. I have seen a Yellow-headed Blackbird (YhBb) relatively nearby at the Marty Sanchez golf course (and I've heard of a sighting in Eldorado). The YhBb is about 9.5 inches long, with a wingspan of 15 inches, and has the general size and shape of most other medium-size blackbirds. The distinguishing marking is a yellow head! There is some black around the eye, and the yellow extends down the breast. The rest of the body is black. The wings show a white bar when the bird is perched. Females have some pale yellow from chin to breast and generally are a drab brown-black. Birds winter from southern New Mexico to southern Mexico.

The male YhBb defends a small territory of prime nesting reeds. He may attract up to eight females to breed and nest within his area (called a "clumped territory"). He bows and spreads his wings to the female and utters his loud rusty hinge call. In two to four days, the female builds a nest on reeds growing in water. The nest is made with wet vegetation and lined with dry grasses. As the nest dries, it forms a tight cup. Three to five eggs are laid which hatch in 11 to 13 days and fledge in 9 to 12 days. The male is polygamous and helps feed only the first female who settles in his territory.

Other females who have bred with him are on their own! For the first two days, only regurgitated food is fed to the hatchlings. The diet on days 3 and 4 has some regurgitated food. Adults feed on spiders, aquatic insects, grasses, and forb seeds.

The red-winged black bird and the YhBb often breed and raise young in the same marsh, but the slightly larger YhBb is dominant and secures the best nesting locations. Usually seen near marches, in non-breeding season the YhBb can be found in large flocks with other blackbirds, eating seeds in meadows and farm lands, possibly even in Eldorado.

*-Pam Henline*