BALTIMORE ORIOLE - ICTERUS GALBULA

Taxonomy: Kingdom: Animalia Phylum: Chordata Class: Aves Order: Passeriformes Family: Icteridae Genus: Icterus Species: I. galbula

Habitat:

Biomes: On their breeding grounds in eastern and east-central North America, you'll most often find Baltimore Orioles high in leafy deciduous trees, but not in deep forests; they prefer open woodland, forest edge, river banks, and small groves of trees. They also forage for insects and fruits in brush and shrubbery. Baltimore Orioles have adapted well to human settlement and often feed and nest in parks, orchards, and backyards. On their winter range in Central America, Baltimore Orioles occupy open woodlands, gardens, and shade-grown coffee and cacao plantations. They frequently visit flowering trees and vines in search of fruit and nectar.

Distribution:

In US: Baltimore orioles are found in the Nearctic in summer, including the Canadian Prairies and eastern Montana in the northwest eastward through southern Ontario, southern Quebec and New Brunswick and south through the eastern United States to central Mississippi and Alabama and northern Georgia. They migrate to winter in the Neotropics as far north as Mexico and sometimes the southern coast of the United States, but predominantly in Central America and northern South America.

In Other Countries: ^^^^^^

Holistic Description: The rich, whistling song of the Baltimore Oriole, echoing from treetops near homes and parks, is a sweet herald of spring in eastern North America. Look way up to find these singers: the male's brilliant orange plumage blazes from high branches like a torch. Nearby, you might spot the female weaving her remarkable hanging nest from slender fibers. Fond of fruit and nectar as well as insects, Baltimore Orioles are easily lured to backyard feeders.

Species Richness: NO SUBSPECIES

Population Dynamic: CHECK THREATS

Evolution and Systematics:

Evolution: NONE

Systematics: NONE

Number of Species: NO SUBSPECIES

Number of Genera: NO SUBSPECIES

Physical Characteristics:

Size and Length: Length: 6.7-7.5 in (17-19 cm) Weight: 1.1-1.4 oz (30-40 g)

Wingspan: 9.1-11.8 in (23-30 cm)

Coloration: Adult males are flame-orange and black, with a solid-black head and one white bar on their black wings. Females and immature males are yellow-orange on the breast, grayish on the head and back, with two bold white wing bars.

General Body Features: Smaller and more slender than an American Robin, Baltimore Orioles are medium-sized, sturdy-bodied songbirds with thick necks and long legs. Look for their long, thick-based, pointed bills, a hallmark of the blackbird family they belong to.

Special Features of the Body: NONE

Special Features of the Head and Sensory Organs: NONE

Dentition: BEAK/LAMELLAE/GIZZARD

Special Features of the Limbs and Digits: NONE

Any Special Internal Anatomy: NONE

Sexual Dimorphisms: The male oriole is slightly larger than the female, although the size dimorphism is minimal by icterid standards. Adults always have white bars on the wings. The adult male is orange on the underparts shoulder patch and rump, with some birds appearing a very deep flaming orange and others appearing yellowish-orange. All of the rest of the male's plumage is black. The adult female is yellow-brown on the upper parts with darker wings, and dull orange-yellow on the breast and belly.

Differences Between Juvenile Stage and Adult: The juvenile oriole is similar-looking to the female, with males taking until the fall of their second year to reach adult plumage.

Behavior:

Diurnal, Nocturnal, or Crepuscular: Diurnal

Activity: Baltimore Orioles are agile feeders that comb the high branches of trees in search of insects, flowers and fruit. They are acrobatic foragers, clambering across twigs, hanging upside down, and fluttering to extend their reach. They also fly out

from perches to snatch insects out of the air. Because they forage in the treetops, they are more often seen than heard, but males often sing from conspicuous posts at the tops of trees, where their blazing orange breast attracts the eye. Both males and females may be glimpsed fluttering among the leaves, and come readily to bird feeders supplied with fruit or nectar. Many other birds defend large feeding territories, but orioles defend only the space near their nests, and so you may see several neighboring orioles feeding close to each other. When courting, the male displays by hopping around the female, bowing forward and spreading his wings to reveal his orange back. A receptive female responds by fanning her tail, lowering and fluttering her wings, and making a chattering call.

Locomotion: Makes short hops, often assisted by wings, when foraging in trees, bushes and on forbs. Can hang upside down, clinging to branch for extended period when foraging or to nest when building or inspecting it. Strong and agile flier; wing-strokes complete and powerful, in contrast with those of Orchard Oriole, whose flight is light and buoyant.

Communication and Perception: The pure, liquid, whistling tones of the male Baltimore Oriole are a herald of springtime in eastern North America. His song consists of a short series of paired notes, repeated 2–7 times, lasting 1–2 seconds. The flutelike sound has a full, rich tone. The male sings to establish and defend a breeding territory, so you won't hear the full song on the wintering grounds. The female Baltimore Oriole also sings. Her shorter songs may be communications with her mate. Occasionally, mated pairs may sing a duet.

Home Range: Although territory size varies with habitat quality, food availability, population density, and time of breeding season (largest when male is attempting to attract female; smallest after eggs laid), it is generally agreed that Baltimore Orioles defend type B territories (only nesting area defended). May feed 50 to > 100 m from nest, in areas where neighbors are also likely to forage; thus, while nesting territories do not overlap.

Degree of Sociality: Not generally social. Males are territorial on breeding grounds and infrequently territorial on wintering grounds. Fledglings gather in small flocks before migration, but adults are solitary at this time.

Level of Aggression: Agonistic responses may involve close passes, in-flight chases, or actual attacks in the air, on a perch, or on the ground; may use wings, feet, and/or beaks as weapons; Chatter Call, alarm calls, or even sustained Screams often accompany these actions. In tests using taxidermy mounts of varying plumage brightness levels, older males attacked brightly colored mounts of older males significantly more often than mounts of yearling males or females. Yearling males also reacted with most hostility toward models of older males, whereas females often attacked the most dull-colored models, but were only rarely hostile toward any male models.

Migration: Medium- to long-distance migrant. Baltimore Orioles spend summer and winter in entirely different ranges. From early April to late May, flocks arrive in eastern and central North America to breed from Louisiana through central Canada. They start to leave as early as July for wintering grounds in Florida, the Caribbean, Central America, and the northern tip of South America.

Predators:

Predators: Predation is a common source of mortality, typically also occurring with eggs, nestlings and fledglings. Common predators at Baltimore oriole nests can include common grackles, American crows, blue jays, black-billed magpies, tree squirrels and domestic cats, which most commonly capture newly fledged orioles or adults engaged in brooding behavior. Rapacious birds commonly prey on both young and fully-grown orioles, the most prolific being the eastern screech owl and Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks. Somewhat larger rapacious birds also sometimes opportunistically prey on the oriole, including peregrine falcons, great horned owls, and barn owls, while merlins may do so while orioles are migrating.

Anti-Predator Defenses: Both male and female give alarm calls, and chase and mob predators. Contrary to Predator Deflection Hypothesis, which suggests that males with conspicuous plumage show reduced parental care, bright, older male Baltimore Orioles are frequently seen near nest and attacking predators, as in other oriole species.

Diet and Nutrition:

Adult Diet: Baltimore Orioles eat insects, fruit, and nectar. The proportion of each food varies by season: in summer, while breeding and feeding their young, much of the diet consists of insects, which are rich in the proteins needed for growth. In spring and fall, nectar and ripe fruits compose more of the diet; these sugary foods are readily converted into fat, which supplies energy for migration. Baltimore Orioles eat a wide variety of insects, including beetles, crickets, grasshoppers, moths, and flies, as well as spiders, snails, and other small invertebrates. They eat many pest species, including tent caterpillars, gypsy moth caterpillars, fall webworms, spiny elm caterpillars, and the larvae within plant galls. However, orioles can also damage fruit crops, including raspberries, mulberries, cherries, oranges and bananas, and some fruit growers consider these birds a pest.

Juvenile Diet: Type of food fed to young varies geographically and seasonally, but caterpillars and soft parts of other insects, including grasshoppers, dragonflies (Odonata), etc., often predominate. As season progresses and ripe fruits become

abundant, nestlings may also be fed mulberries, cherries, and other fruits. During outbreak of forest tent caterpillars in southern Manitoba, adults removed pupae from cocoons and fed them whole to young.
Special Adaptations for Getting Prey: Adaptable species, with broad foraging niche. Hunts insects and spiders by gleaning or probing-usually in trees or bushes, rarely on ground; in southern Manitoba, almost always forages by gleaning from leaves and branches. Picks insects from spiderwebs, and can be important predator of orchard tent caterpillars.
Reproduction:
Mode of Reproduction: Monogamous
Mating System: Generally considered monogamous, but at least one case of polygyny described from Kansas, and evidence suggests that extra-pair copulation (i.e., cuckoldry) is reasonably common.
Mating Season: April to May
Courtship: Males solicited copulation in 14 of these sequences, by approaching mate with song, Bow Displays, or in 1 case, with a chase. Females initiated the other 4 courtship sequences, with Wing-Quiver Display. This display given by females in 6 out of 10 sequences that led to copulation. After 4 of 10 copulations, males sang Postcopulation Flight Song: a rapid song given while flying slowly upward with exaggerated wing beats. Majority of copulations between mated pairs occurred early in nest-building stage, between 06:00 and 07:30.
Territoriality: HOME RANGE
Mating: NONE
Nest Placement: The female chooses a nest site within the territory defended by her mate. She anchors the nest firmly to a fork in the slender upper branches of a tree. Baltimore Orioles often nest in American elms, but will build in other trees, especially maples and cottonwoods. The distinctive nest usually hangs below a branch, but is sometimes anchored along a vertical tree trunk.
Nest Description: Baltimore Orioles build remarkable, sock-like hanging nests, woven together from slender fibers. The female weaves the nest, usually 3 to 4 inches deep, with a small opening, 2 to 3 inches wide, on top and a bulging bottom chamber, 3 to 4 inches across, where her eggs will rest. She anchors her nest high in a tree, first hanging long fibers over a small branch, then poking and darting her bill in and out to tangle the hank. While no knots are deliberately tied, soon the random poking has made knots and tangles, and the female brings more fibers to extend, close, and finally line the nest. Construction materials can include grass, strips of grapevine bark, wool, and horsehair, as well as artificial fibers such as cellophane, twine, or fishing line. Females often recycle fibers from an old nest to build a new one. Males occasionally bring nesting material, but don’t help with the weaving. Building the nest takes about a week, but windy or rainy weather may push this as long as 15 days. The nest is built in three stages: first, the female weaves an outer bowl of flexible fibers to provide support. Next, springy fibers are woven into an inner bowl, which maintains the bag-like shape of the nest. Finally, she adds a soft lining of downy fibers and feathers to cushion the eggs and young.
Egg-Laying: Clutch Size: 3-7 eggs Number of Broods: 1 brood Egg Length: 0.8-1.0 in (2.1-2.5 cm) Egg Width: 0.6-0.7 in (1.5-1.7 cm) Incubation Period: 11-14 days Nestling Period: 11-14 days Egg Description: Pale grayish or bluish white blotched with brown, black, or lavender.
Hatching and Incubation/Gestation: Helpless, eyes closed, with sparse white down.
Development: Nearly naked; eyes closed; helpless. Pink skin, sparsely covered with long whitish down. Mouth reddish; gape flanges yellow. ALTRICIAL.
Parental Care: Parents feed nestlings by regurgitation during first few days of nesting period; later, adult places food in open mouth of young; sometimes adult removes and replaces a large item placed into nestling's gape several times until nestling finally eats it.
Lifespan: The record lifespan for a wild bird was 12 years and 0 months (based on a banded bird killed by a peregrine falcon), with captive orioles living up to 14 years.
Conservation:
Official Federal Status: Least Concern
Special Statuses in Individual States: NONE
Threats: Baltimore Oriole populations have been declining throughout their range with Canada experiencing over a 3 percent loss per year (resulting in a cumulative loss of 24 percent) between 1966 and 2010, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Partners in Flight estimates the global breeding population at 12 million, with 82 percent spending part of the year in the U.S., 18 percent breeding in Canada, and 24 percent wintering in or migrating through Mexico. They rate a 10 out of 20 on the Continental Concern Score and are not on the 2012 Watch List. Because they breed in North America and winter in Central and South America, Baltimore Orioles are vulnerable to deforestation and habitat loss in many nations; their conservation requires international cooperation. Spraying insecticides onto trees not only kills off Baltimore Orioles’ insect

food, but may poison the birds directly. Orioles and many other songbirds migrate at night, when they can become disoriented by lights or rainstorms and crash into tall structures such as skyscrapers and radio towers.
Conservation Efforts: ^^^^^^^
Extra Facts:

1. Unlike robins and many other fruit-eating birds, Baltimore Orioles seem to prefer only ripe, dark-colored fruit. Orioles seek out the darkest mulberries, the reddest cherries, and the deepest-purple grapes, and will ignore green grapes and yellow cherries even if they are ripe.
2. The Baltimore Oriole hybridizes extensively with the Bullock's Oriole where their ranges overlap in the Great Plains. The two species were considered the same for a while and called the Northern Oriole, but in the 1990s, after genetic studies, they were separated again.
3. Young male Baltimore Orioles do not molt into bright-orange adult plumage until the fall of their second year. Still, a few first-year males in drab, female-like plumage succeed in attracting a mate and raising young. Females become deeper orange with every molt; some older females are almost as bright orange as males.
4. The orioles of the Americas were named after similar-looking birds in the Old World, but the two groups are not closely related. Orioles of the Old World are in the family Oriolidae, whereas American orioles are in the same family as blackbirds and meadowlarks. Both New and Old World orioles are brightly colored with red, yellow, and black; have long tails and long pointed bills; build hanging, woven nests; and prefer tall trees around open areas.
5. Baltimore Orioles got their name from their bold orange-and-black plumage: they sport the same colors as the heraldic crest of England’s Baltimore family (who also gave their name to Maryland’s largest city).
6. Baltimore Orioles sometimes use their slender beaks to feed in an unusual way, called “gaping”: they stab the closed bill into soft fruits, then open their mouths to cut a juicy swath from which they drink with their brushy-tipped tongues.
7. The oldest recorded Baltimore Oriole was over 12 years old when it was caught and killed by a raptor in Minnesota.

Notable Species: NONE