

A YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT ENTANGLED IN BEGGAR'S LICE

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On the afternoon of 29 July 1997, I encountered a hatching year Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*) caught in the prickly fruits of a single beggar's lice (*Hackelia virginiana*) plant 14.5 km east of Rohwer, Desha County, Arkansas. Weather conditions were clear and humid with a high temperature of 36° C. This unusual discovery was within a tract of bottomland hardwood forest located on ridge and swale topography bordering the Mississippi River and actively managed for sawtimber.

The bird's plumage was grayish olive above and below, brownish olive-green on the wings and tail, and there was a hint of white over the eye, matching the juvenal plumage of a Yellow-breasted Chat that has yet to undergo a postjuvinal molt into first basic plumage (Bent 1953). I found the chat alive, hanging upside down in the beggar's lice, caught by its primaries, secondaries, and rectrices. From the bird's fatigued appearance, its rapid breathing, and the high afternoon temperature, I suspect that it would have died in the beggar's lice. The bird was rescued with only minimal damage to its rectrices and appeared to be in good health upon release.

No other record is known of a Yellow-breasted Chat found caught in vegetation (C.F. Thompson, Illinois State University, pers. comm.), although a Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*) was found caught in burdock (*Arctium minus*) in New York (Burnett 1970). I collected a sample of the beggar's lice plant and Dr. Charles Bryson (U.S.D.A. Agriculture Research Service, Stoneville, Mississippi, identified it.

Yellow-breasted Chats are abundant in the lowlands of southern Arkansas and adjacent Mississippi, reaching densities as high as 27.9 birds per Breeding Bird Survey route in Chicot County, Arkansas (James and Neal 1986). As a result of previous work in the area I had noticed that the number of Yellow-breasted Chats encountered on the Desha County site appeared to increase during the breeding seasons following a severe

ice storm which occurred in February 1994. Ice damage decreased canopy cover by 12% allowing a thick understory of saplings, vines, and herbaceous plants -- including beggar's lice -- to develop on many parts of the site.

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