

THE PACIFIC YELLOW-THROAT, ONE OF THE SHY GROUND WARBLERS

Among the bushes at the edge of low, wet ground or in the cat-tails bordering a pond, is where the yellow-throat lives. It is a fidgety little bird that generally keeps hidden, but it is easily recognized by its song that sounds like "Witchety! Witchety!" The female is dull yellow and might be confused with the female yellow warbler or the lutescent warbler. The male is easily recognized from every other bird because he wears a black mask around his eyes and forehead. This bird was first found in the East and was named Maryland yellow-throat.

It is hard to tell when the yellow-throat will return in the spring. He is always secretive about his affairs, and he is just as elusive about his home. You will hear a snatch of "Witchety" one morning in the wet bushes and then silence for a few days. It might have been imagination from looking expectantly at the reedy, cozy little place below the spring.

A real flash of yellow and black gives him away. But try to find his nest a little later when housekeeping has begun. He practices one deceitful trick after another to fool a watcher into thinking that he has no home, no wife, no children. In the meantime, the demurely colored mate sits tight on the nest that is burrowed somewhere deep into the center of a thick tussock of grass. When she has to leave home, she, too, creeps like a shadow through the grass and shows herself only when she is at a safe distance. Ground-dwelling birds must keep quiet about the home lest they invite a stray cat.

One hot summer day, I called unexpectedly at the home of this shy family and witnessed a slight family jar. The two children, as near alike as two peas, sat side by side on a twig. The mother dropped in and gave the nearer one a big worm. Almost behind her came the father and without looking carefully, gave the same child a big caterpillar. The hungry brother set up a wail that was against all the rules.