

Yellow-breasted Chat a surprising treat

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

I first heard about the Yellow-breasted Chat when I lived in Portland.

One or two were reported at the Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge — a great place to walk or run if you are in the Washougal area.

According to my bird ID book, the Yellow-breasted Chat has a long tail, heavy gray bill, plain gray-olive upper parts, white spectacles and a brilliant yellow neck and breast.

I listened to representative calls and songs on some smartphone apps and then ventured out to find this bird at Steigerwald. I never did see it or hear it. That's how birding can be when you chase a rare bird.

Two years later I moved to



Bruce McCammon is retired, color-blind and enjoys photographing the birds in north central Washington.



Wenatchee.

I'm fortunate to live near Number Two Canyon Road. You gain elevation fairly quickly as

you drive up the canyon road and there are many great shrub and tree clumps as you head up. I stopped at one roadside turn-

out just past the gun club and sat still to listen for birds that I saw in the area.

I had to refresh my awareness of the Yellow-breasted Chat calls and songs using my phone's bird app to make sure that what I was hearing was the elusive Chat.

I started looking at the mix of birds with my binoculars and then, unexpectedly, a Chat flew into a mock orange beside me. My pulse picked up as I grabbed the camera to get a record shot.

I left my truck and found a good vantage point to photograph the bird against a clean background. Several hundred photos later I retreated and headed home.

This was the first time I'd seen one of these birds — a life bird for me. What a thrill.

As I looked at the photos I was reminded how fortunate we are to live in such a wonderful area.

I know now that Yellow-breasted Chat can be found in many other areas of our shrub-steppe landscape.

Keep your eyes open for this bright bird. You can hear its calls on the national Audubon website (<http://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/yellow-breasted-chat>).

Good luck with your search.