Population biology of the Yellow-breasted Chat (Icteria virens auricollis) in the south Okanagan, BC

Christine Bishop1, Tawna Morgan2, Lutz Tischendorf3, Tony Williams4, Kathryn Lindsay5, Doug Olson6, Jason Emery7 and Rene McKibbin8

1, 8Canadian Wildlife Service, 5421 Robertson Rd, Delta, BC, < cab.bishop@ec.gc.ca phone: 604-940-4671.
2, 4Simon Fraser University, Dept. Biology, Burnaby, BC. 3Elutis Modelling and Consulting Inc., Ottawa, ON.
5Canadian Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Research Centre, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON. 6Olson and Olson Planning and Design Consultants Inc, Calgary, AB. 7Solitudo Environmental Services Inc, Vancouver, BC.

The British Columbia population of the Yellow-breasted Chat is listed as Endangered by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). This population in Canada is essentially restricted to the Okanagan Valley south of Penticton and the south end of the adjacent Similkameen valley. The south Okanagan population has been surveyed intensively during 2001-2003, and we find there are approximately 35 breeding pairs of Chats in the south Okanagan in each of these years. The location of breeding territories have been extremely consistent from year to year, and although less than 40 breeding adults and 100 fledglings have been banded in three years, there have already been re-sightings of both adult and fledged birds on territory in years succeeding the initial banding. This indicates a high rate of fidelity to the south Okanagan for this population. Despite this, a comprehensive population and habitat viability analysis for the Yellow-breasted Chat indicate that the minimum viable population may be as large as 200 breeding pairs. The YBCH may face an extinction risk of about 30 percent over 100 years and about 10 percent over 30 years. About 20 percent of the assumed extinction risk are attributed to the low population size and about 10 percent to the high degree of habitat fragmentation and dispersion.