

Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*)



Photo by
Chan Robbins

Photograph of male Baltimore Oriole perched on a hand, courtesy of Chan Robbins, USFWS



Photo by
Deanna Dawson

Photograph of female Baltimore Oriole perched on a hand courtesy of Deanna Dawson, USFWS

Baltimore (Northern) Orioles were named because their striking orange and black plumage resembled the coat of arms colors of 17th-century Sir George Calvert, 1st Lord of Baltimore. In 1947, Maryland declared the Baltimore Oriole the official state bird, and in 1954 its major league baseball team adopted the same name.

Description & Range:

Male Baltimore Orioles are flame orange and black with a solid black head and orange sides, with orange in the tail. Females and immature Baltimore Orioles are brown above and burnt orange below with two white wing bars. Many adult females have traces of black on their head, suggesting the hood of a male. They are about the size of a robin.

Baltimore Orioles are grouped with birds known as Neotropical migrants, birds that breed in North America and winter in Central and South America. Baltimore Orioles rarely winter in Maryland but can be attracted to backyard feeders in the summer. Look for the migrating orioles to return to Maryland in March through April.

Habitat:

Open deciduous forests, shade trees, and also at backyard feeders.

Diet:

The Baltimore Oriole eats caterpillars (including fall webworm, tent and gypsy moth caterpillars), beetles, scale insects, woodborers, aphids, sawfly larvae, grasshoppers, and others. It supplements its insect diet with fruit. Preferred food trees and shrubs include serviceberry, apple (seeds), mulberry, cherry, blueberry, and blackberry. Birds will also drink nectar in summer. They are particularly attracted by flowers such as scarlet trumpet honeysuckle called “Dropmore”, hollyhock, rose of Sharon, wood lily, turk’s cap lily and tiger lily.

Reproduction:

The Oriole breeds throughout Maryland in large trees in open areas along country roads, in towns, or edges of woods near streams. Favorite nest and shelter trees include maples, sycamore, birches, apples, black cherry, and oaks. The male Baltimore Oriole builds a sturdy hanging pouch nest. It will accept short pieces of colored yarn (no longer than four inches) for nest building. Female Orioles lay four to six eggs in May through June. Oriole young hatch twelve to fourteen days later and leave the nest twelve to fourteen days after hatching. Both parents feed the nestlings. The bird can be enticed to nest in backyards with the appropriate habitat.

Sounds:

Song is rich with piping whistles. Its call is a low whistled hewli.

Migration:

Migrates in flocks. Fall migration begins early, with many birds departing in July and August.



Similar Species:

- Orchard Oriole
- Bullock’s Oriole

Population Status:

- Baltimore Orioles have declined significantly in the eastern U.S.
- In Maryland, the decline may approach a rate of 2% annually.