



# Identification of Citrine, Pale-legged and Black-crested Warblers

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## Resumen

Este artículo describe la taxonomía y la identificación de tres especies de *Parulinae*: *Basileuterus luteoviridis*, *B. signatus* y *B. nigrocristatus*. *B. nigrocristatus* es monotípico y relativamente fácil para identificar, pero está incluido aquí porque es superficialmente parecido a las otras dos especies y es un pariente cercano. *B. luteoviridis* y *B. signatus* son ambos politípicos (*luteoviridis* tiene 5 raíces, *signatus* tiene 2) y pueden ser muy parecidos y difíciles de identificar. Afortunadamente, las raíces simpátricas de estas dos especies tienen características claras para distinguirlos, pero las raíces nominales alopatricas de cada una están más o menos parecidas. La mejor manera para separar las raíces nominales de *B. luteoviridis* y *B. signatus* es por el color y la prominencia de la media luna abajo del ojo, la cual es amarillo-oliváceo apagado y no muy bien definido en *B. luteoviridis* y bastante amarillo y bien definido en *B. signatus*, dando a las dos especies expresiones faciales sutilmente distintas. Esta diferencia también se aplica a las raíces simpátricas de las dos especies, pero estas pueden ser más fácilmente separadas por los patrones de plumaje en las cabezas; en particular el superciliar amarillo, el cual es largo en *B. luteoviridis* (casi hasta la nuca) y corto en *B. signatus* (solo hasta detrás el ojo). El color de las patas de las dos especies no es una característica confiable para separarlos, aunque hay una tendencia de que las patas de *B. signatus* son más palidas y amarillas.

## Introduction

**Citrine and Pale-legged Warblers** (*Basileuterus luteoviridis* and *B. signatus*) can appear very similar to each other and the literature tends to treat their separation in the field somewhat inadequately, particularly as both are polytypic (*luteoviridis* has five races, *signatus* two). The **Black-crested Warbler** *B. nigrocristatus* is relatively distinct from both other species and confusion should not be a problem: however, it is closely related to them and is somewhat similar to the southern race of *luteoviridis*, in fact the southern race of *luteoviridis* was originally described as a southern race of *nigrocristatus*. This paper deals in detail with the identification of this group, with a particular view to the separation of the sympatric races of *luteoviridis* and *signatus*. The material in this paper derives from personal field observations, museum stud-

ies and literature searches undertaken whilst researching a new guide in the Christopher Helm series *American Wood-warblers: an identification guide*, due to be published by A & C Black in June 1994.

### Taxonomy and Distribution

The **Citrine Warbler** *B. luteoviridis* is divided into five races as follows:

- *Basileuterus luteoviridis richardsoni* occurs locally on the Pacific slope of the western Andes in Cauca, Colombia. The race *richardsoni* has been considered a full species, due to its dull plumage and isolated range in the western Andes of Colombia, although it is essentially part of a cline in which *B. luteoviridis* becomes increasingly bright from west to east.
- *B. luteoviridis quindianus* occurs locally in the central Andes of Colombia, from the Medellín area of Antioquia south to Cauca.

• *B. luteoviridis luteoviridis* occurs from Mérida and Táchira in south-western Venezuela, south along the eastern Andes of Colombia and south along the eastern slope of the Ecuadorian Andes to the Río Upano area.

• *B. luteoviridis striaticeps* occurs in the Peruvian Andes, from Amazonas south to Cuzco, and possibly north into extreme south-eastern Ecuador.

• *B. luteoviridis euophrys* occurs in the Andes from Puno, southern Peru, south to the Santa Cruz area of Bolivia.

The Pale-legged Warbler *B. signatus* is divided into two races as follows:

• *B. signatus signatus* which occurs in the Peruvian Andes, from Salta south to western Cuzco.

• *B. signatus flavovirens* which occurs in the Andes, from eastern Cuzco, Peru, south through Bolivia to Jujuy, northern Argentina.

The Black-crested Warbler *B. nigrocristatus* is monotypic: it occurs widely in the Andes, from western Venezuela south to central Peru (though it is probably not sympatric with *B. signatus*), but is also found in the northern Cordillera of Venezuela (Aragua to Distrito Federal), the Sierra de Périja on the Colombia–Venezuela border, and in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in northern Colombia.

*B. nigrocristatus* (**Black-crested**) and *B. luteoviridis* (**Citrine**) are widely sympatric, but the two are easily separable: the southern race *B. luteoviridis euophrys* which most resembles *B. nigrocristatus*, occurs far to the south of the southern limit of *B. nigrocristatus*. As far as is known, the southern range of *B. nigrocristatus* approaches, but does not overlap with the northern limit of *B. signatus signatus* (**Pale-legged**), and these two are also easily separable anyway.

*B. luteoviridis striaticeps* (**Citrine**) is sympatric with *B. signatus signatus* (**Pale-legged**) in central Peru, and also possibly with *B. signatus flavovirens* in eastern Cuzco, Peru. *B. luteoviridis euophrys* is only sympatric with *B. signatus flavovirens* from Puno, southern Peru south to central Bolivia; there is however an anomalous

record of *B. signatus* (race unknown) from Cundinamarca, Colombia, which is within the range of *B. luteoviridis luteoviridis*.

#### Field identification

The Black-crested Warbler *B. nigrocristatus* has a broad, glossy black crown-stripe extending over the centre of the crown. This feature makes it easily separable from the other two species. It also has a broader and longer yellow supercilium than the races of **Citrine Warbler** *B. luteoviridis* with which it is widely sympatric: it is generally a brighter, “cleaner cut” bird. The southern race *B. luteoviridis euophrys* is also quite bright with a long yellow supercilium and black on the crown, but the black is on the sides of the crown, not the centre, the eye-stripe is broader and less sharply defined and the ear-coverts are darker olive. *B. nigrocristatus* and *B. luteoviridis euophrys* are also widely separated by range.

The **Citrine Warbler** *B. luteoviridis* is the most variable of the three species. The widespread race *luteoviridis* is olive-green above and rather dull yellow below with a heavy olive wash to the breast-sides and flanks. The lores are black, as is a short, narrow eye-stripe, the crown is uniform olive-green, the lower eye crescent is dull olive-yellow and quite indistinct and the supercilium is short, bright yellow in front of the eye on the supraloral and olive-yellow

#### The 'Citrine' Group of *Basileuterus* Warblers

1a Citrine Warbler *Basileuterus luteoviridis luteoviridis*: adult

1b Citrine Warbler *B. l. luteoviridis*: juvenile

1c Citrine Warbler *B. l. richardsoni*: adult

1d Citrine Warbler *B. l. striaticeps*: adult

1e Citrine Warbler *B. l. euophrys*: adult

2a Pale-legged Warbler *Basileuterus signatus signatus*: adult

2b Pale-legged Warbler *B. s. signatus*: juvenile

2c Pale-legged Warbler *B. s. flavovirens*: adult

3a Black-crested Warbler *Basileuterus nigrocristatus*: adult

3b Black-crested Warbler: moulting juvenile

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The 'Citrine' group of *Basileuterus* Warblers by David Beadle



behind the eye, merging into the olive head not far behind the eye (well before the rear edge of the ear-coverts). The legs are flesh-colour. The race *richardsoni* is noticeably duller than *luteoviridis*; the underparts are pale yellow to yellowish-white, the upperparts are duller olive with a greyish wash and the supercilium and throat are whitish. The race *quindianus* is intermediate between *luteoviridis* and *richardsoni* in plumage and also occurs between them in range; it is slightly duller than *luteoviridis* with a yellowish-white supercilium. The supercilium is much the same in shape and extent (though not colour) in all these three races.

Moving south, the *striaticeps* race of **Citrine** is brighter than *luteoviridis*, particularly on the underparts (which have less of an olive wash on the sides) and it has a stronger head pattern, with a longer and brighter yellow supercilium (reaching almost to the rear edge of the ear-coverts) and some black on the sides of the crown, sometimes forming a very narrow and obscure lateral crown-stripe. The southernmost race, *euophrys* is even brighter than *striaticeps*, has a longer and broader supercilium (generally reaching at least to the rear edge of the ear-coverts) and more black on the sides of the crown, often forming fairly obvious dull black lateral crown-stripes which meet over the forehead. It also has darker olive ear-coverts which often become blackish on the upper edge, merging with the eye-stripe. These two races share the indistinct, olive-yellow lower eye crescent with the other races of **Citrine**.

The two races of **Pale-legged Warbler** *B. signatus* are very similar. The main difference is that *signatus* has a uniform olive-green crown, whereas *flavovirens* has narrow dusky-blackish lateral crown-stripes which usually meet over the forehead; *flavovirens* also averages slightly brighter overall. Both races have a short yellow supercilium, ending just behind the eye, and a distinct yellow lower eye crescent, more obvious than on *B. luteoviridis* (**Citrine**). *B. signatus* is very similar in size and shape to *B. luteoviridis*; it averages slightly smaller and has a slightly smaller

bill but this is of marginal (if any) value in the field. As its name suggests, its legs average slightly paler and yellower than those of *B. luteoviridis* but there is much overlap and it is not safe to go on this character alone. Note particularly that *B. signatus* can have quite grey-looking legs.

#### **Sympatric races**

As regards plumage, the nominate races of *B. signatus* (**Pale-legged**) and *B. luteoviridis* (**Citrine**) are very similar. They do not occur together, but the anomalous record of *B. signatus* from Colombia indicates that *B. signatus* could possibly occur again within the range of nominate *B. luteoviridis*, and this should be borne in mind if a strange-looking *B. luteoviridis* is encountered. The best feature for separating the nominate races of *B. signatus* (**Pale-legged**) and *B. luteoviridis* (**Citrine**) is the lower eye crescent; quite bright yellow and distinct in *B. signatus*, dull olive-yellow and indistinct in *B. luteoviridis*. Although a subtle point, it is usually quite noticeable and creates a subtly different facial expression ("jizz") between the two species. Supporting characters are the slightly brighter underparts, with less of an olive wash on the sides, the slightly paler and yellower legs (usually) and the marginally shorter supercilium of *B. signatus*. Voice may also help (see below).

The sympatric races of *B. luteoviridis* (**Citrine**) and *B. signatus* (**Pale-legged**) are not as difficult to separate. The *striaticeps* race of **Citrine** is sympatric with the *signatus* race of **Pale-legged**. Actually they apparently segregate by altitude, with *B. signatus* occurring at lower elevations, and therefore, strictly speaking, are not sympatric; this should only be used as a guide, however, and in any case, separation by plumage should not be too difficult. The race *striaticeps* (**Citrine**) has a noticeably longer supercilium than *signatus* (**Pale-legged**), extending almost to the rear edge of the ear-coverts rather than becoming indistinct behind the eye. The supercilium is often very narrowly bordered above with black (which it is not on *signatus*) and, as already mentioned, the lower eye crescent is considerably brighter and more noticeable

on *signatus*. The underparts are more or less equally bright on both these races. The race *striaticiceps* (**Citrine**) may also occur with *B. signatus flavovirens* (**Pale-legged**) in eastern Cuzco, Peru. The race *flavovirens* is slightly more like *striaticiceps* in having black on the sides of the crown, but it usually has more, forming a dull but noticeable lateral crown-stripe. The differences listed under the race *signatus* also apply to *flavovirens*.

The *euophrys* race of **Citrine** is sympatric with the *flavovirens* race of **Pale-legged** in extreme south-eastern Peru and central Bolivia, but these two races are quite distinct and identification should not really be a problem. They are similar in both having blackish lateral crown-stripes which meet over the forehead, but *euophrys* (**Citrine**) has a long and broad supercilium, generally reaching at least to the rear edge of the ear-coverts, darker olive ear-coverts, becoming blackish on the upper edge and merging with the black eye-stripe, as well as the indistinct lower eye crescent. This combines to give a quite different facial "jizz" from *flavovirens* (**Pale-legged**), which has a short supercilium, only just extending behind eye, olive-green ear-coverts, uniform with sides of head, virtual lack of a black eye-stripe behind the eye and distinct yellow lower eye crescent.

#### Voice

The song of *B. nigrocristatus* (**Black-crested**) is quite distinctive: it starts with two or more "chup" notes, then goes into an ascending and accelerating series of fairly musical "chew" notes, which ends very abruptly. However, the songs of *B. luteoviridis* (**Citrine**) and *B. signatus* (**Pale-legged**) are very similar: that of *B. luteoviridis* is a prolonged series of short, high-pitched notes, delivered rapidly and rising and falling in pitch erratically, with the overall effect of a long, erratic, high-pitched pulsating trill, often with a few clear introductory notes; and the song of *B. signatus* is of shorter duration and is usually slower and less trilling, with the individual notes clearer and not run together. The calls of all three species are very similar, although that of *B. nigrocristatus* is

slightly louder and harsher than those of the other two.

#### Conclusion

The sympatric races of *B. luteoviridis* (**Citrine**) and *B. signatus* (**Pale-legged**) have quite different head patterns and should not be too difficult to identify. The nominate races of the two species are very similar and difficult to separate, the distinctness of the lower eye crescent being the most useful feature. Other features (including leg colour) are only really useful as supporting characteristics. The songs of the two can be told apart, with experience, and this may also assist identification. The nominate races of the two are widely separated by range, but a record of nominate *B. signatus* from within the range of nominate *B. luteoviridis* illustrates the importance of being able to separate them. *B. nigrocristatus* should always be easily separable from both other species.

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