Species
Black-capped Vireo (Vireo atricapilla) - BirdLife species factsheet

**VU** Black-capped Vireo **Vireo atricapilla**

**Key facts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current IUCN Red List category</th>
<th>Vulnerable</th>
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<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Vireonidae (Vireos and allies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Species name author</td>
<td>Woodhouse, 1852</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population size</td>
<td>5300 mature individuals</td>
</tr>
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<td>Population trend</td>
<td>Decreasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution size (breeding/resident)</td>
<td>141,000 km²</td>
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<td>Country endemic?</td>
<td>No</td>
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**Links to further information**

- Additional Information on this species

**Justification**

This species qualifies as Vulnerable owing to rapid population declines throughout most of its contracting range. The population is already small and fragmented, but the disappearance of isolated populations and remaining breeding habitat indicate that these rapid declines will continue.

**Taxonomic source(s)**

American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

Sibley, C. G.; Monroe, B. L. 1990. *Distribution and taxonomy of birds of the world*. Yale University Press, New Haven, USA.


**Taxonomic note**

Gender agreement of species name follows David and Gosselin (2002a).

**Synonym(s)**


**Identification**

12 cm. Well-marked and distinctive vireo. Male has black head, white lores and eye-ring (giving spectacled appearance), olive upperparts, blackish wings fringed olive and two yellowish wing-bars. Whitish underparts with olive flanks. Red iris. Female duller and with grey head. Juvenile browner. **Similar spp.** Cassin’s Vireo *V. cassini* differs from female in larger size and bill, and lacks red iris. **Voice** Song a series of rapid 2-3 note phrases. Call a dry chit-it.

**Distribution and population**

*Vireo atricapilla* once bred from Kansas through Oklahoma to south-west Texas, **USA**, into central Coahuila and southern Nuevo Leon, **Mexico**, wintering along the Pacific coast of western Mexico from southern Sonora (Río Yaqui, Alvaro Obregón Dam) to Oaxaca (Salina Cruz on the Pacific coast and Matias Romero, and inland) (Grzybowski 1995, Howell and Webb 1995, S. N. G. Howell *in litt.* 1998, Rivera et al. 2011). The species’s distribution in Texas was assessed on private and public land in 57 counties across the state and found 13% of 10,700 point survey locations were occupied (McFarland et al. 2012). The species was found to be more common in
the western part of the state (McFarland et al. 2012). In Oklahoma it is now restricted to a few sites in the Wichita Mountains where breeding habitat is fragmented (Grzybowski 1995). The total wintering area has been calculated to be 141,000 km² (Rivera et al. 2011).

**Population justification**
The population is estimated to number 8,000 individuals, equating to 5,300 mature individuals, having declined to c.6,000–10,000 by 2003. However, numbers for south-west Texas and Mexico are uncertain (J. Lyons in litt. 1999). The decline is not uniform: numbers are stable in the southern 25–30% of the historic breeding range, and management has arrested declines elsewhere (J. A. Grzybowski in litt. 1999).

**Trend justification**
A rapid and on-going population decline is estimated to be occurring, based on survey results (J. Lyons in litt. 1999).

**Ecology**
It nests in low, very dense deciduous shrubland maintained by disturbances, such as fire, and in forest-grassland ecotone in Oklahoma, northern, and central Texas (Grzybowski 1995). Oaks *Quercus* spp. and densely foliaged shrubs (such as *Dyosorus texana*, *Rhus virens* and *Sophora secundiflora* [M. Lockwood in litt. 1999]) frequently occur in the species's habitat. In west Texas, it occurs in xeric thornscrub vegetation (Smith et al. 2012). In Mexico, it breeds at elevations of 1,000–2,000 m (Howell and Webb 1995). It winters from the lowlands up to 1,600 m (Howell and Webb 1995), often in arid deciduous scrub and bushy thickets associated with various woodland-types (S. N. G. Howell in litt. 1998). Wintering density in Sinaloa has been calculated to be 7.68 individuals per km² (González-Medina et al. 2009).

**Threats**
Fire suppression is probably the most serious threat, but urban development and agricultural conversion (especially to pasture) have caused significant habitat loss in Oklahoma, northern and central Texas (Grzybowski 1995, J. Lyons in litt. 1999). Intensive grazing by livestock and native grazers has further degraded habitat (Grzybowski 1995). The wintering habitat has been modified by changes in land use by reducing the potential suitable area or causing habitat fragmentation and reduced quality of winter habitat (González-Medina et al. 2009). Brown-headed Cowbirds *Molothrus ater* inflict high rates of brood-parasitism, as high as 100% of nests, in some locations (Grzybowski 1995, Farrell 2011). Rates of nest predation are as high as 50% in some locations; primarily from snakes, fire ants *Solenopsis* spp. and mammals (Stake and Cimprich 2003, Campomizzi et al. 2009). Frequency of parasitism and nest predation have been documented in <50% of locations in west Texas where the most common nest predators were brown-headed cowbirds, snakes, and greater roadrunners (*Geococcyx californianus* [Smith et al. 2012]). The high return rates of birds to breeding territories suggests few threats on the wintering grounds (Grzybowski 1995). However, only 7.1% of its predicted wintering area is protected (Rivera et al. 2011).

**Conservation actions underway**
Conservation actions are occurring on public and private land. Management programs to restore vegetation and manage cowbirds have occurred at various locations including Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge (Sexton 1997), Fort Hood (Kostecke et al. 2005), Ker Wildlife Management Area, and Wichita Mountains (Grzybowski 1995). On private land, conservation has occurred through various programs including Habitat Conservation Plans, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department’s Wildlife Management Plans, the Landowner Incentive Program, and the Leon River Restoration Project. Research is ongoing on breeding and wintering areas in Mexico and USA.

**Conservation actions proposed**
Monitor the status and trends in occupancy, abundance, or both to determine abundance and trend. Clarify the distribution in Mexico and estimate breeding numbers. Develop conservation actions through engagement with private landowners to balance conservation actions with other land uses. Assess threats on wintering grounds (J. Lyons in litt. 1999). Coordinate a range-wide action plan (J. A. Grzybowski in litt. 1999). Restore suitable habitat within its breeding range. Locate and protect wintering habitats, focusing primarily on sites linked to rivers and streams /or fresh water resources in tropical dry forest. Establish a monitoring program for the wintering population in key areas.

**References**


Further web sources of information
Audubon WatchList

Hear sounds for this species from xeno-canto, the community database of shared bird sounds from around the world.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Recovery Plan

View photos and videos, and hear sounds of this species from the Internet Bird Collection

Text account compilers
Bird, J., Derhé, M., Harding, M., Isherwood, I., Pople, R., Sharpe, C J, Wege, D.

Contributors

IUCN Red List evaluators
Butchart, S., Symes, A.

Recommended citation


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Additional resources for this species