

Touit huetii (Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet)

Family: Psittacidae (Parrots and Macaws)

Order: Psittaciformes (Parrots, Macaws and Cockatoos)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet, *Touit huetii*.

[http://farm1.static.flickr.com/46/181112770_ab930dadcd.jpg, downloaded 7 April 2017]

TRAITS. *Touit huetii* has a body mass of 60g (Figueria et al, 2015) and length of 16cm (IUCN, 2016). The parrotlet's plumage is mainly green, paler on the undersides (IUCN, 2016), with a prominent dark blue colour on the upperwing-covert and between the yellow narrow crown of the forehead and yellow beak (Fig. 1). Its face has blue cheeks and white eye-rings with black eyes. Also observed are, an olive-brownish nape which turns dark green on the sides of the upper back, dull blue thighs with grey feet, olive-brownish ear coverts and black flight feathers with green on the outside (Johnson, 2017). The tail is wedged-shaped with green at the centre; red and yellow feathers are found under the tail. Easily overlooked since it is so small but its voice is known to be high pitched in flight, although usually soft (Whittaker, 2009). Both male and female have similar features, with the exception of greenish yellow undertail-coverts rather than red found on females (IUCN, 2016). Juveniles are similar to females but the region between the crown and beak is green (Johnson, 2017).

DISTRIBUTION. *Touit huetii* is found in widely spaced areas in northern South America (Fig. 2). It is also found, locally at rare occasions, in south and north-east Venezuela. Its movement patterns are nomadic (IUCN, 2016). This species occasionally occurs in Guyana, northern Brazil, eastern Ecuador, Suriname and eastern Colombia. Infrequently found in Trinidad and Tobago, and Amazonian Brazil (Rosenberg, 2011). A flock of 15 parrotlets was recorded flying toward the Northern Range of Trinidad, therefore accidental in Trinidad (Gibbs, 1975). Its current status is listed as extirpated in Trinidad (Wikipedia, 2016). *Touit huetii* was detected 60 times in Amazon Brazil. It is listed as a vulnerable species because of its fragmented distribution in Amazonian forests (Figueria et al., 2015).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. *Touit huetii* usually occupies humid lowland forests. These forests are chiefly with no flooding (*terra firme*) or with seasonal flooding (*várzea*). These diurnal birds are often found below 900m, however it has been recorded up to 1300m (IUCN, 2016). Actively found on trees during the day (Fig. 3). *Touit huetii* are rarely found for more than a few weeks in one location. Species numbers decline locally with deforestation and is expected to lose 24.4% to 28.8% of appropriate habitat over 15 years (IUCN, 2016). These parrotlets occupy *terra firme* forests as nesting sites with surrounding trees and bamboo, in which they lay their eggs in an arboreal termite mound 3.5-4m above ground (Brightsmith, 2005).

FOOD AND FEEDING. The parrotlet's diet includes a variety of fruits, nuts, seeds, nectar, flowers and sometimes insects (Brightsmith, 2005). Fruits may be ripe or half-ripe, such as berries (Fig. 4). These omnivores either silently feed or call when they are feeding. They search for food by flight and climbing trees or obtain any dispersed seeds on the ground of forests. The scarlet-shouldered parrotlet does not have to compete with other parrots to maintain a sufficient diet since it consumes a variety of edible materials in small amounts. Captive birds are usually fed oats, canary seeds, wheat, weed seeds, fruits and vegetables. A collection of soft foods as well as insects are usually given during the breeding season (Johnson, 2017).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. Scarlet-shouldered parrotlets are often found in mixed species groups. Orange-cheeked parrots and cobalt-winged parakeets are also found at some sites (Fig. 5), in flocks of approximately 50. These birds are nomadic and occupy a place for no more than a few weeks. Although the population trend is stable, *Touit huetii* may not have a long life due to Amazonian deforestation; and is expected to decline by $\geq 30\%$ over 15 years. No extreme fluctuations in the population occur but these species are rare and not detected in agricultural habitats. Its generation length is 5 years (IUCN, 2016).

REPRODUCTION. Breeding occurs between September and December in Brazil and at April in Venezuela (IUCN, 2016). As mentioned before, they lay eggs in the dry season in arboreal termite mounds. Parrotlets are able to lay an average of 4-7 eggs, which are incubated by both parents. Once hatched, the parents provide food and protection to the juvenile parrotlets until they are able to fly. They are usually blind and featherless. Once able to fly, they fend for themselves (Brightsmith, 2005).

BEHAVIOUR. Anti-predator behaviour is observed as the small parrotlets easily camouflage themselves in trees (Fig. 3). They also move slowly and stealthily within the foliage of the canopy. In addition, the birds are extremely quiet in fruiting trees as they climb. If disturbed,

they suddenly launch from trees and quickly fly away with soft calls or are silent (Hilty, 2002). *Touit huetii* are gregarious in flight. They move in flocks of approximately 50 and are either silent or make high-pitched calls in flight as a form of communication. They also make calls while feeding (Hilty, 2002).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. These birds are susceptible to both hunting and Amazonian deforestation and expected to decline by $\geq 30\%$ over three generations. As a result, it is listed as Vulnerable by IUCN. The main threat is Amazonian deforestation as lands are cleared for roads, cattle ranching or soy production. Conservation actions proposed include; the expansion and management of protected areas, maximizing biodiversity conservation, and reduction of carbon emissions. It is also essential to prevent forest destruction of areas unsuited for agriculture. Apart from hunting, *Touit huetii* are used as domestic pets.

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Fig. 2. Scarlet-shouldered parrotlet geographic distribution.

[<http://maps.iucnredlist.org/map.html?id=22686014>, downloaded 23 February 2017]



Fig. 3. Scarlet-shouldered parrotlet active during the day, camouflaged among leaves.

[<http://www.hbw.com/ibc/video/scarlet-shouldered-parrotlet-touit-huetii/bird-small-tree-looking-and-opening-beak>, downloaded 27 February 2017]



Fig. 4. *Touit huetii* feeding on a fruit.

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p_p_spp=191736, downloaded 27 February 2017]



Fig. 5. Scarlet-shouldered parrotlet at clay lick with orange-cheeked parrots and cobalt-winged parakeets.

[<http://www.hbw.com/ibc/video/scarlet-shouldered-parrotlet-touit-huetii/group-birds-visiting-clay-lick-orange-cheeked>, downloaded 27 February 2017]