

Pionus menstruus (Blue-headed Parrot)

Family: Psittacidae (Parrots and Macaws)

Order: Psittaciformes (Parrots, Macaws and Cockatoos)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Blue-headed parrot, *Pionus menstruus*.

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/gallery?p_p_spp=195416, downloaded 7 March 2017]

TRAITS. *Pionus menstruus*, also known as the blue-headed parrot or blue-hooded parrot, is one of the most commonly found parrot species in South America (Juniper and Parr, 2010). The blue-headed parrot is not sexually dimorphic (Wikipedia, 2017). Adult males and females are usually 28cm in height and weigh between 234-295g. They are generally green with a distinctive blue head and neck, and a small red band on the throat (World Parrot Trust, 2017). They have red undertail coverts with green at the tips, a dark grey bill with faint red markings at the base (Myers, 1998), black or grey ear coverts, and a light grey ring around their dark brown eyes (World Parrot Trust, 2017) (Fig. 1). Immature blue-headed parrots are easily distinguishable because they are mostly green with little blue plumage (Fig. 2), they become fully coloured by the age of 2 years (STAR, 2011).

DISTRIBUTION. Blue-headed parrots are native to Central and South America (Fig. 3), including Trinidad and Tobago, Panama, Brazil, Costa Rica, Columbia, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela (IUCN, 2017). Some may venture out of their native range between breeding seasons (Juniper and Parr, 2010).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Habitats include lowland rainforest up to 600m (Beauty of Birds, 2017), plantations, subtropical formations, and seasonally in Brazil's caatinga forest. They search for food in the upper canopy and nest in the cavities of old trees (Fig. 4) that may have been used previously by other species (World Parrot Trust, 2017). Throughout the breeding season, they fly from the breeding site to the feeding areas and can be seen roosting in trees at dusk or dawn (Beauty of Birds, 2017). Calls can be high pitched and shrill (World Parrot Trust, 2017).

FOOD AND FEEDING. Blue-headed parrots feed on assorted fruits, flowers and seeds (World Parrot Trust, 2017). In some areas they are considered to be crop pests because of the damage they can do feeding in cornfields (Beauty of Birds, 2017).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. Blue-headed parrots are very social and energetic birds. They can usually be seen in small flocks of around 15, but during the breeding season, they tend to fly in pairs or singly (Animal world, 2017). Flocks gather in large groups where food is abundant, also at mineral sources where they ingest clays (Fig. 5). They may also gather when roosting (World Parrot Trust, 2017). The lifespan of the blue headed parrot can reach up to 40 years, however due to poor nutrients and accidents, the average lifespan is 25 years (STAR, 2011).

REPRODUCTION. The breeding season for the blue-headed parrots usually begins in May, but the month may vary according to location. They nest in cavities of trees in their native habitat. Throughout the course of the breeding season the parrots can get very boisterous. The males tend to become aggressive with their mates during this time (Beauty of Birds, 2017). The average clutch size is 3-4 oval white eggs, typically 2.5 x 3cm in size (World Parrot Trust, 2017). Incubation usually takes 24-26 days (Animal world, 2017). The parents feed the young until they are 10 weeks old and can leave the nest. At three months old, they are usually independent (STAR, 2011) and can begin breeding at 3-5 years old (Beauty of Birds, 2017).

BEHAVIOUR. Blue-headed parrots are quieter when compared to other parrots (Beauty of Birds, 2017), however their screeches can sometimes be high pitched (World Parrot Trust, 2017). When frightened, they make a wheezing sound (STAR, 2011) and during the breeding season the males can become very aggressive. Otherwise their temperament is very peaceful and even affectionate to their owners. Because of their easygoing temperament when training, intelligence and independence, they are becoming more popular as household pets (Beauty of Birds, 2017). In the wild, they are very social, large numbers share feeding and roosting areas and can be seen flying in small flocks.

APPLIED ECOLOGY. The blue-headed parrot is listed on the IUCN red list as Least Concern (IUCN, 2017). Whilst the population is decreasing, it is not at a rapid rate. The threats they face are deforestation and their increasing popularity as pets. They depend on trees for food and nesting so the increased deforestation is rapidly decreasing their resources and homes. Commonly kept as pets, they can be affectionate to the owners, territorial with its cage and quieter when compared to other parrot species (Lafeber, 2017). This results in hunters capturing

the adults to breed them or killing the parents to take the young. These threats contribute to the declining population as it destroys nests and kills reproducing adults. The blue-headed parrot is susceptible to the Aspergillosis disease and if they are pets they need a large cage or else they would become stressed (STAR, 2011).

REFERENCES

- Animal World. (2017). Blue-headed *Pionus*. Pet and Animal Information. <http://animal-world.com/encyclo/birds/pionus/blupion.php>
- Beauty of Birds. (2017). Blue-headed Parrot (*Pionus menstruus*). <https://www.beautyofbirds.com/blueheadedpionus.html>
- IUCN. (2017). *Pionus menstruus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/45429607/0>
- Juniper and Parr. (2010). Parrots: A Guide to Parrots of the World. London: A & C Black.
- Lafeber. (2017). Blue-Headed *Pionus*. <https://lafeber.com/pet-birds/species/blue-headed-pionus/>
- Myers, S.H. (1998). Aviculture of *Pionus* Parrots Breeding, Care and Personality. <https://journals.tdl.org/watchbird/index.php/watchbird/article/viewFile/1402/1380>
- STAR. (2011). The Blue Headed *Pionus*. Southeast Texas Avian Rescue. <http://www.starescue.org/htm/species/parrot-pionus-blue-headed.htm>
- Wikipedia. (2017). *Pionus*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pionus>
- World Parrot Trust. (2017). Blue-headed Parrot (*Pionus menstruus*). <https://www.parrots.org/encyclopedia/blue-headed-parrot>

Author: Abigail Mansingh

Posted online: 2017



Fig. 2. Young blue-headed parrot.

[<http://www.avesint.com/images/bhp8-11-99.jpg>, downloaded 9 March 2017]



Fig. 3. Blue-headed parrot geographic distribution.

[<http://maps.iucnredlist.org/map.html?id=45429607>, downloaded 7 March 2017]



Fig. 4. Pair of blue-headed parrots nesting in a tree cavity.

[<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/92/98/81/929881b6c35b607a3dc1dfb70c2b95fc.jpg>, downloaded 9 March 2017]



Fig. 5. Flock of blue-headed parrots at a mineral source.

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/gallery?p_p_spp=195416, downloaded 9 March 2017]

For educational use only - copyright of images remains with original source