

Blue-headed Vireo

Vireo solitarius

Although it had been previously classified as a separate species, the Blue-headed Vireo along with the Plumbeous Vireo (*Vireo plumbeus*) and the Cassin's Vireo (*Vireo cassinii*) were lumped in the 1950s into a single species, based on physical structure and appearance. This group of vireos was collectively known as the "Solitary Vireo" (*Vireo solitarius*).

This taxonomy prevailed until 1997 when new molecular data showed that there were in fact three distinct species. The taxonomy reverted to that prior to the 1950s, and the Blue-headed Vireo was once again its own species.

The scientific name *Vireo solitarius* is now associated with only the common name Blue-headed Vireo. So the names Solitary Vireo and Blue-headed Vireo are now synonymous.

Vireos of the family *Vireonidae* are known to habitually perch motionless for minutes, rather than actively flit about like warblers. The name "*Vireo*," meaning "greenish or becoming green," refers to the greenish hue of their plumage.

The Blue-headed Vireo has similar plumage year round and does not radically change its appearance during the breeding season. It is a small, stocky bird with a short tail and stout, slightly hooked bill and is common among the dense brush and leafy trees of mixed deciduous-coniferous forests.

Characteristic traits include conspicuous white feathers on the throat, outer tail and white spectacles (eye rings connected by a central band across the bill).



Males display a solid, blue-gray hood, *above*, hence the name "Blue-headed," which distinguishes them from other vireos and kinglets. Females, *bottom*, and immature birds are hooded in gray, *below*. All age classes have bright, olive backs, yellowish-white wing bars, and yellow-green tinged secondary feathers, sides and flanks.

Juveniles will not always have the completely formed spectacles, *right*.

Blue-headed Vireos are mainly insect eaters, but during the winter, they will also eat fleshy berries and fruit. Their short, strong bills are used for processing insect prey with a tough carapace such as beetles.

Usually, foraging occurs in the mid level of trees with the foraging vireo hop-

ping from branch to branch on the same tree or to an adjacent tree and then flying towards its prey to capture it. Occasionally it will hawk flying insects from its perch.

Typical prey consist mostly of caterpillars, butterflies, and moths but may also include tree bugs, stink bugs, beetles, bees, ants, flies, dragonflies, grasshoppers, crickets, and spiders. Fruit feeding occurs primarily during migration and overwintering, especially when overwintering in more tropical regions where fruit is more abundant or if the insect populations are low.

The song is slow, slurred and sweet consisting of clear, high, one to four syllable phrases: *See ya, cheerio, be-seein-u, so-long, seeya...*

Their call, which is more what is heard here in the winter, is a series of rapid, harsh notes: *ship, shep, shep, shep, shep, shep, shep, shep, shep.*

Blue-headed Vireos are northern nesters, migrating south for the winter and arriving in Corkscrew toward the very end of October and returning north to nest again in the first week or two of April.

The longest known lifespan of a Blue-headed Vireo in the wild was approximately 7 years and 5 months.



Blue-headed Vireo Odd Fact

In general, it is a myth that an adult bird will abandon its young if a human handles them. However, this does seem to be the case for the female Blue-headed Vireo. If the female witnesses her young being handled, she will abandon the nest leaving the male to try and raise the nestlings alone. If she is captured first and placed in a bag where she cannot see the nest, she will not abandon the young!