

Colibri delphinae (Brown Violet-ear)

Family: Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

Order: Trochiliformes (Hummingbirds)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Brown violet-ear hummingbird, *Colibri delphinae*.

[<https://www.flickr.com/photos/allandrewitt/8229568119>, downloaded 8 March 2017]

TRAITS. *Colibri delphinae* is not the most spectacular of the hummingbirds (Fig. 1), it has a mostly dull brown body with grey below and an olive brown tail. However, its true beauty lies in the small patches of violet, blue and green feathers near its “ears” and throat (Hilty, 2002). Females of this species tend to have a smaller patch of coloured feathers near the throat, and young birds show more of an orange barring on the upperparts with little or no violet near the eyes (Johnson, 2016). The average weight is approximately 7g and it can be between 11-12cm in length with a relatively short, thin, nearly straight bill (Stiles and Kirwan, 2017).

DISTRIBUTION. As seen in Fig. 2, this species is patchily distributed in Central America and western and northern South America (Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, Guyana). There are isolated population in Trinidad and in the Brazilian state of Bahia (BirdLife International, 2016).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Generally, it is found at medium heights in the rainforest, in secondary growth and in open areas like coffee plantations. It can be found at heights between 400-1600m but can move to lowlands outside of the breeding season (Johnson, 2016). It can also be found at lower levels at edges and clearings where it feeds (Brooke, 2017).

FOOD AND FEEDING. *Colibri delphinae* feeds on nectar from small flowers from trees, shrubs and epiphytes and tends to favour flowers with very high sugar contents. The birds are inclined to aggressively protect the areas in which these flowers are located while these flowers tend to rely on the birds for pollination as they are usually tubular flowers that are not pollinated by any insects (Fig. 3). In order to feed on these flowers, the thin straight beak is useful. The hummingbird may be seen hovering with their tails upward at an angle or can even be seen hanging from the flowers (Johnson, 2016). It can also hawk insects during flight, which serves as a source of protein. A female that is nesting can catch up to 2000 insects in one day. This species is also seen visiting local hummingbird feeders, bird baths and even water fountains. However, they sometimes appear more focused on territory than feeding in these areas (Hilty, 2010).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. *Colibri delphinae* is a solitary species, except when breeding. The males are territorial, establishing feeding territories in which they determinedly chase away other males and larger threatening insects with the employment of intimidating displays and aerial flights. These birds do not live or migrate in flocks. Males only copulate and no pair bonding occurs, one male can mate with several females. The males court the females by forming a lek (communal display) and flying in a U-shape with the ear patches on display in the female's view (Fig. 4). Females are solely responsible for nesting. The nest is small and cupped, and lined with supple plant tissue and green moss. It is usually built 1-3m above the ground on a branch. They are often seen perched on boulders near streams (Johnson, 2016).

REPRODUCTION. The breeding period is usually in the late wet to early dry seasons, exact months can vary based on the country (Stiles and Kirwan, 2017). Males play no role in nesting. The females incubate the eggs alone while the males defend their territory. The average clutch is small, consisting of two white eggs. Chicks are brooded for about one or two weeks and are even left unaccompanied after about 12 days (Johnson, 2016).

BEHAVIOUR. Juvenile behaviour: The chicks are born sightless and immobile with no down. They can leave the nest at around 10 days old. The females feed the chicks by regurgitation; she uses her long thin beak to push the food right down into their stomachs (Johnson, 2016).

Communication: Produces a sharp, rough "chit" sound that it utters relentlessly for 4-7 repetitions. These sounds are produced by groups of a few dozen breeding males at a time (Hilty, 2010).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. This species is listed as Least Concern by IUCN. This is because it has a widely dispersed range and does not approach the threshold to be classified as Vulnerable using population size criteria. According to the IUCN, the population appears to be declining and

is expected to lose approximately 12% of the population over three generations. However, the decline is not occurring rapidly enough to move toward the threshold for Vulnerable under population trend criteria. Also, although the species has not been quantified, the large range of the species causes researchers to believe the population size is not approaching the threshold for Vulnerable (BirdLife International, 2016).

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. Geographic distribution of the brown violet-ear.

[<http://www.planetofbirds.com/apodiformes-trochilidae-brown-violetear-colibri-delphinae>, downloaded 8 March 2017]



Brown Violet-ear (Colibri delphinae) Used by permission
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Fig. 3. Brown violet-ear feeding.

[<https://www.beautyofbirds.com/brownvioletearhummingbirds.html>, downloaded 8 February 2017]

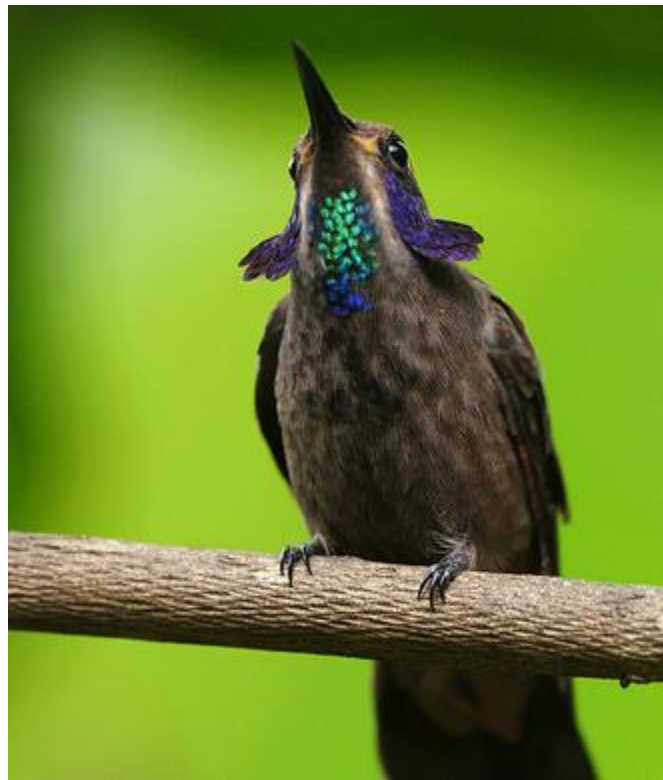


Fig. 4. Male brown violet-ear displaying ear patches.

[<https://featuredcreature.com/a-little-drab-but-still-fab-brown-violetear-hummingbird/>, downloaded 6 April 2017]