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Black-whiskered Vireo *Vireo altiloquus*

Even though migrants turn up all along the Gulf coast, the Black-whiskered Vireo is found as a breeding species in the United States only in Florida. Its breeding range extends from central Florida through the Bahamas and the western Caribbean, and it winters in South America and, rarely, in the western Caribbean. The Black-whiskered Vireo is very similar to the Red-eyed Vireo, but it has a dark stripe along the sides of its throat, thus giving it its common name. Its song is also different; it is shorter and more repetitive than the Red-eyed Vireo's. "Whip-tom-kelly" is one popular description of the song.

Habitat. The habitat of the Black-whiskered Vireo is usually red mangrove swamps and tropical hardwood forests in south Florida. In central Florida, coastal live oak hammocks are used, as at Fort DeSoto Park in Pinellas County. Almost 90% of the Black-whiskered Vireo's diet consists of insects and other invertebrates; fruit makes up the remainder.

Nests are placed in the fork of a tree 1.5 to 2.4 m (5 to 8 ft) above the ground or water. The nest is a deep cup typically built of grass, lichens, and spider webs. One nest, found 24 May 1987 in Brevard County by David Stock and Michael Brothers, was constructed of artificial materials. The nest was built of an "old carpet," lined with carpet fibers and Mottled Duck feathers, and suspended by nylon fishing line. Two or 3 white eggs, spotted with brown, purple, and black, comprise a clutch (Ehrlich et al. 1988). Few other details are known about Black-whiskered Vireo breeding biology, such as the incubation and fledging periods, and number of broods. The adults are highly aggressive to intruders into their nesting territory; the "DD" code was used in at least 1 instance to confirm breeding.

Seasonal Occurrence. Black-whiskered Vireos arrive in Florida as early as mid-March. Eggs are laid from May through July, possibly August (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The birds depart for their wintering grounds in September and October.

Status. This Caribbean species was first recorded in the state in June 1848 (Howell 1932). The Black-whiskered Vireo's breeding range has expanded, following the northward spread of mangroves into central Florida. The species is distributed throughout the Keys north along the Atlantic coast to Volusia County, and along the Gulf coast as a breeder to Pasco County, with suspected breeding occurring north along the coast to Pensacola. However, these records would need to be substantiated because this species is known to overshoot its normal breeding range during migration. Atlas fieldwork failed to find the bird north of Pinellas County, but they probably still occur on the Anclote Keys off Pasco County (B. Pranty, pers. commun.).

Most of this vireo's breeding range is within protected areas (e.g., Everglades National Park, Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuge, and Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge); therefore, human disturbance is not likely to be much of a problem. Occasional freezes that kill back mangrove habitats will continue to affect the breeding range in central Florida, but the only serious threat to this species' survival in the state is brood parasitism by cowbirds. Brown-headed Cowbirds have been suspected of causing the near extirpation of the Black-whiskered Vireo from the Tampa Bay area (L. Atherton in Langridge 1987, L. Atherton in Paul 1987, Paul 1988). Additionally, on 3 July 1989, a Black-whiskered Vireo was observed feeding a fledgling cowbird in Everglades



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National Park (Paul 1989). Shiny Cowbirds, recent invaders from the Caribbean, also pose a serious threat to the species. In Puerto Rico, from 1975 to 1982, of 15 Black-whiskered Vireo nests monitored by Cruz et al. (1985) 13 contained at least 1 cowbird egg or young. Even more shocking, the number of cowbirds that fledged from these nests was 6 times higher than the number of Black-whiskered Vireo that fledged: 18 to 3 (Cruz et al. 1985).

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Black-whiskered Vireo

