

Touit batavicus (Lilac-tailed Parrotlet)

Family: Psittacidae (Parrots and Macaws)

Order: Psittaciformes (Parrots, Macaws and Cockatoos)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Lilac-tailed parrotlet, *Touit batavicus*.

[https://c1.staticflickr.com/4/3678/12173678485_4519d22c3a_z.jpg, downloaded 24 January 2017]

TRAITS. Lilac-tailed parrotlets are small, brightly coloured parrots, also known as seven-coloured parrotlets, with a very distinctive short lilac tail with a black tip (Fig. 1). They are approximately 14-16.5cm long and weigh 58-72g. Their head is green with a yellow forehead and a dusky greyish nape, and a large, narrow, yellowish beak (Hilty et al., 2003). The tips across the wing coverts are blue and they have black upper parts with a yellowish green band (Fig. 2). At a distance the bird looks black and green (Ffrench, 1991). The chest is powdery light blue (Parr and Juniper, 2010) or blueish green (Ffrench, 1991). They are not sexually dimorphic as the male and female look the same (Vriends, 1999). The juveniles are similar to the adults, however, their cheeks are a lighter yellow and tips of the wing-coverts are a darker blue, the bill is greyer and the irises are darker (Beauty of birds, 2017).

DISTRIBUTION. Lilac-tailed parrotlets reside mainly in forested areas and are found in South America (Fig. 2). They are native to Colombia, French Guiana, Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad, and Venezuela (IUCN, 2017). They can also be found in the northernmost part of Brazil, and locally in Trinidad at the Asa Wright Nature Centre and Spring Hill Estate (Forshaw, 2010).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Lilac-tailed parrotlets are diurnal animals and forage mostly during the day high up in dense canopies (Hilty et al., 2003). Wet montane forest is their preferred habitat but they can also reside in rural gardens and tropical lowlands. They occur in the canopies of primary forests in tropical and subtropical zones (Parr and Juniper, 2010). They can also be found near the shore where the forest edge comes close to the coast. Elevations of 1700m can be reached by these birds and is said to be higher than other species of parrotlet. They are quiet whilst feeding and boisterous while flying and roosting (Parr and Juniper, 2010). They also exhibit stealthy movements when moving within trees (Hilty et al., 2003). Lilac-tailed parrotlets are sociable species and commonly fly overhead in flocks of 10-40, and up to 100 or more when commuting for long distances. Although usually in flocks, they separate into pairs during the breeding season (Hilty et al., 2003).

FOOD AND FEEDING. Lilac-tailed parrotlets feed in large flocks in dense tree canopies. Their diet mostly consists of buds, seeds, fruits such as mangos and berries, flowers and nectar (Planet of birds, 2015) (Fig. 4). A recent study shows that they consume Clusiaceae, and the *Clusia* trees provide additional feeding resources to these birds such as the sap, leaves and flowers (Buitrón-Jurado and Sanz, 2016). Whilst feeding the birds consume the sap by scratching the bark, while others break leaf petioles to eat the lamina (blade) of the leaf. They may respond aggressively when approached by other individuals during feeding but otherwise remain calm and silent (Buitrón-Jurado and Sanz, 2016).

REPRODUCTION. Lilac tailed parrotlets are paired during breeding (Hilty et al., 2003). The breeding season begins in January and ends in March but can be longer (Ffrench, 2012); another source gives a possibility of the season beginning in November (Planet of birds, 2015). They nest in tree cavities and woodpecker nests and in large termite mounds (Ffrench, 1991). The female lays 5-6 white eggs with an average size of 22.0 x 19.3mm (Ffrench, 2012) and incubates them for 19 days (Planet of birds, 2015). The hatchlings are fed by both parents until mature enough for fledging at 4-5 weeks. They continue to receive food up to 3-4 weeks after fledging (Planet of birds, 2015).

BEHAVIOUR. Lilac-tailed parrotlets are gregarious and loud during flight and at roost (ffrench, 2012). They have a high pitch call that rises towards the end. Calling is done continuously through flight, and they utter nasal squealing calls while in flocks (Parr and Juniper, 2010). When feeding, they are quiet and move stealthily while climbing around the trees often fanning their tails, and squeal softly before flight (Hilty et al., 2003). They are friendly but can demonstrate aggressive behaviour when approached by other birds during feeding (Buitrón-Jurado and Sanz, 2016). They are cautious and stay within thick canopies and do not perch or roost in open or isolated trees (Hilty et al., 2003). They prefer the canopies of tall trees and rarely go down to the ground and are nearly impossible to detect (Beauty of birds, 2017).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. Lilac parrotlets are among one of the least endangered parrot species in the world and have a status of Least Concern on the IUCN red list (IUCN, 2017). Despite increasing deforestation and loss of habitat resulting in a decline in the population, it has no effect

on its status as it is not sufficient for a cause for concern (IUCN, 2017). Parrotlets in the genus *Touit* have very poor survivorship in captivity (Pereira et al., 2014) and are not usually kept as pets (uncannymag, 2016). However, not much is known about these birds as they live cryptically and are difficult to study (Vriends, 1999).

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Fig. 2. Showing yellowish green band with blue tips across wing coverts.

[<https://www.flickr.com/photos/12007842@N05/1227337287>, downloaded 1 March 2017]



Fig. 3. Map showing distribution of lilac-tailed parrotlets.

[<http://maps.iucnredlist.org/map.html?id=22686006>, downloaded 24 January 2017]



Fig. 4. Lilac-tailed parrotlets feeding on berries in tree canopy.

[<https://www.parrots.org/photo-gallery/lilac-tailed-parrotlet>, downloaded 1 March 2017]

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