



*Championing UK's most special species:
the wildlife of UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and
Crown Dependencies (CDs)*

FACT-SHEET ON:

TCI endemic land-bird subspecies
UK Overseas Territory: Turks & Caicos Islands

Thick-billed Vireo

Vireo crassirostris stalagmium

Importance: Thick-billed Vireos endemic race in the Turks & Caicos Islands generate the terrestrial soundtrack of the islands -- their iconic call, in which they say their own name, is ubiquitous throughout native upland ecosystems from sunrise each day. ("Upland" is the local term for normally dry land on rock, rather than normally wet land on mud; it is, at most, only a few metres above sea-level, and often just centimetres.) Their insect-rich diets makes them excellent pest control for the Territory.

Ecosystem: These birds live in the "upland" dry tropical forests of the islands, and often on the fringes of wetlands. They require the diverse species makeup of these forests to find their food. They do tolerate some level of disturbance in their habitat but only when patches of native trees are left intact.

Threats: Large-scale land clearance is their number one threat, followed by the introduction of invasive non-native predators including cats and rats.

Needs: More bird-friendly land-planning and -use, including strict enforcement of land-clearance policies and protection of larger tracts of upland forest habitat.

Greater Antillean Bullfinch

Loxigilla violacea ofella

Importance: This small, attractive bird is vital for the distribution of a number of tree seeds in its ecosystem. Its restricted range and willingness to approach humans make it attractive to birdwatchers and it is always a desired sighting to birders on the Caicos Islands.

Ecosystem: Restricted to only the tropical dry forests of Middle and East Caicos, particularly around karst habitats, and fringes of pine forests on Middle Caicos.

Threats: The most significant threat to this species is land clearance for human development. It does not survive in altered, developed habitats at all, and requires a diverse abundance of native tree species for its survival. Another significant threat is introduced invasive non-native predators such as cats and rats.

Needs: An assessment of population is needed, as well as protection of tracts of land where it has significant populations. One of the species best habitats, the tropical dry forest west of Lorimers, Middle Caicos, surrounding Haulover Plantation, Nanny Pond, and the Garden Ponds, has been called "prime development land" by the Turks and Caicos Islands Government. Development of this land, even with the current restrictions on land-clearance (which are rarely enforced), would result in the loss of the species' most significant population.



Thick-billed vireo

Thick-billed Vireo, a remarkably varied songster; this subspecies is restricted to TCI. © Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF



Greater Antillean bullfinch

Male (female is brown) Greater Antillean Bullfinch, a subspecies restricted to Middle & East Caicos, with occasional sightings on North Caicos. © Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF