



Blue-crowned Motmot

Kingdom: Animalia
 Phylum: Chordata
 Subphylum: Vertebrata
 Class: Aves
 Order: Coraciiformes
 Family: Momotidae
 Genus: *Momotus*
 Species: *momota*



Photo courtesy of Karen Marzynski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The blue-crowned motmot lives in open woodlands and edges of tropical rainforests from northeastern Mexico to northern Argentina.
- **Exhibit Location:** Diversity of Birds, golden lion tamarin exhibit in the Rainforest area.

Characteristics

- Length: 17 inches; Weight: approximately 100 grams or 6 ounces
- Sexes look similar, although the females are slightly smaller than the males.
- The crown is black, bordered all around by a wide band of blue that covers most of the forehead.
- Its back and upper tail feathers vary in color from olive-green to parrot-green. The two central tail feathers are long, bright blue, and racquet-shaped. The wings are a brighter green with bluish-green primaries (the large, stiff feathers on the end joint of a bird's wing).
- *Momotus momota* has large, dull, red eyes. Its legs are short with gray feet.
- Its bill is black, broad, and heavy with coarse serrations along the middle half of the upper mandible (jaw).
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** unknown; **In Captivity** up to 20 years

Behaviors

- Little seems to be known about the general habits of motmots because of observation difficulties in their forested habitats.
- The blue-crowned motmot lives in pairs throughout the year.
- During the day these motmots forage separately. They associate closely together when roosting in the evening in thick foliage. They do not sleep in their nesting burrows.
- They are known to dust bathe, but bathing in water has not been observed in the wild.
- Flight is sudden, swift, and direct.
- Motmots are typically quiet and spend much of their time perched motionless until they suddenly dart to seize prey or to occasionally swing their tail side-to-side. It is possible, yet unproven, that the side-to-side tail movements are a form of communication, as they sometimes pause the tail movement in mid-swing.
- If a prey is too large to swallow, they may club it against a branch to kill it.
- The motmots' common call is a soft, deep, usually double hoot. They are mostly vocal at dawn and dusk. Their calls are far-carrying, but not loud.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** crickets, mealworms

Reproduction

- Motmots dig elaborate nests below the ground, consisting of a large tunnel extending 6 feet into an earthen bank. Both the male and the female assist in nest building, working in alternating shifts.
- Nest burrows are not reused; new ones are excavated after a successful breeding attempt. Motmots have never been observed removing waste products from the burrows.
- 3-4 eggs are laid. The incubation period is 21 days.
- The young hatch completely naked and blind. Each parent takes turns caring for the young, bringing insects and fruits until they are ready to leave the nest at about 1 month of age.
- Nestlings have no down; feathers that begin to grow a few days after hatching are adult-like, yet duller.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** insects, fruit, larvae, spiders, small lizards, frogs, mice, small birds
- **At the Zoo:** paradise pellets, pigeon pellets, dog chow, fruit mix, mealworms, fuzzy mice

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status** Least Concern; **CITES Appendix** not listed
- Although *Momotus momota* is common in the wild, habitat destruction could eventually impact on its numbers.
- Predators: birds of prey, snakes, humans

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- There are 8 species of Momotidae, but *Momotus momota* is the only species able to reproduce in captivity.
- The blue-crowned motmot is the best-known and most widely studied of all the species of motmots.
- The blue-crowned motmot is also known as the blue-diamond motmot.

Sources:

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