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

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