

## *Parula pitiayumi* (Tropical Parula)

Family: Parulidae (New World Warblers)

Order: Passeriformes (Perching Birds)

Class: Aves (Birds)



**Fig. 1.** Tropical parula, *Parula pitiayumi*.

[<http://neo-tropical.birds.cornell.eduportal/species/overview>, downloaded 15 February 2017]

**TRAITS.** *Parula pitiayumi*, formerly known as *Setophaga pitiayumi*, is a small New World warbler which measures 11cm in length and weighs about 5-8g, with a wing span of 15-16cm (Wikipedia, 2014). It is commonly known as the tropical parula, Sennett's warbler, or olive-backed warbler (Regelski and Moldenhauer, 2012). The upper parts of the adult male are bright blue-grey and there is a bronze-olive patch on its back. It also possesses two white wing bars on the upper wing. The bright yellow underparts fade to orange at the breast and throat. The tail has small white patches and the coverts under the tail are white as well (Fig. 1). The females are distinguishable from the males, in that, they are duller and they do not possess the characteristic black patch of the male, which spreads from the bill to behind the eyes. The bill of both sexes consists of a back upper mandible and a yellow lower mandible and the feet are dark yellowish orange (Bouglouan, 2013).

**DISTRIBUTION.** The tropical parula ranges from northern Mexico to southern Brazil, including Venezuela, Columbia, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname and French Guiana (Fig. 2). It also occurs in south Texas, specifically in Rio Grande, Peru and northern Argentina (Soberanes-Gonzales et al., 2010). This species does not occur in the Amazon Basin. It is partially migratory, that is, it is not usually migratory except in cases where it occasionally inhabits an area but does

not breed there, for example in El Salvador, where it is referred to as a ‘vagrant’ (Mitch Waite Group, 2013).

**HABITAT AND ACTIVITY.** Habitat ranges from various types of forests such as deciduous forests, humid to semiarid forests, submontane and premontane forests and gallery forests, to forest clearings and edges. They can also be found in secondary forests and mangroves, occurring from lowlands to elevation of up to 2500m (Curson, 2017). The tropical parula usually nests in large trees in clumps of epiphytes such as Spanish moss. It is a diurnal bird, foraging and mating by day and nesting by night.

**FOOD AND FEEDING.** This bird forages by gleaning and hovering momentarily over the forest canopy to collect small invertebrates, such as insects and spiders, for food. They also perch upside down on trees to search the crevices and vegetation of the bark in order to retrieve their prey (Fig. 3). Sometimes, the tropical parula would dart out from its perch to catch flying insects in mid-air. Along with the insects and spiders, this species also occasionally makes a meal of fleshy fruits, such as berries, found in the forest (Curson, 2017).

**POPULATION ECOLOGY.** The extent of occurrence of the population is less than 20,000 km<sup>2</sup>, but the general population seems to be increasing in size. In local populations, the tropical parula is usually found in small groups or pairs that may consist of approximately 20 birds. When foraging they may join flocks of mixed species. Throughout the year, they tend to remain in pairs and may be found within or around their territory (Birdlife International, 2016).

**REPRODUCTION.** The breeding season of the tropical parula depends on its location but it most likely occurs in the summer months. They are solitary and monogamous nesters that find their home in wooded areas, near a water source. They build a dome-shaped nest, consisting of Spanish moss, grasses and pieces of bark, 3-13m above ground level. Some nests may also contain hair, feathers and roots (Bouglouan, 2013). Usually, 2-3 creamy white eggs, brown speckled at the large end, are laid by the female, who incubates them for approximately 12-14 days. After hatching, the young birds still depend on their parents for up to three weeks (Wikipedia, 2014).

**BEHAVIOUR.** When trying to attract females, the male parula fans out its tail to display the white spots and shows off its bright colours (Fig. 4). These birds also used their voice to attract a possible mate. The tropical parula is a fairly active species and they sing at the middle and upper levels of the forest. Their call is a thin, sharp “tsit” that echoes throughout the forest and, if the bird is alarmed, this note would be rapidly repeated. They sing with a buzzy trill that accelerates at various pitches, consisting of mostly thin, high notes. Most of the time, when it is not foraging, the tropical parula would be perched on a branch in the treetops, persistently singing its insect like buzzing song, either seeking a companion or defending its territory (Fig. 5) (Bouglouan, 2013). This flight of this bird can be described as fluttering and weak, composing of shallow wing beats.

**APPLIED ECOLOGY.** This species is listed as Least Concern because it is common to fairly common through much of its wide range (IUCN, 2017). In some areas, such as Texas, some populations have recently declined, making the tropical parula rare in this region. However, there is little reason to believe that it is currently threatened (Bouglouan, 2013).

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**Fig. 2.** Geographic distribution of the tropical parula.

[[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tropical\\_parula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tropical_parula), downloaded 15 February 2017]



**Fig. 3.** Tropical parula perching upside down on a tree.

[<http://www.oiseaux-birds.com/card-tropical-parula.html>, downloaded 3 March 2017]



**Fig. 4.** Male tropical parula fanning its tail.

[<http://www.oiseaux-birds.com/card-tropical-parula.html>, downloaded 3 March 2017]



**Fig. 5.** The tropical parula singing its song.

[<http://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/tropical-parula>, downloaded 6 March 2017]

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