

= Black catbird =

The black catbird (*Melanoptila glabrirostris*) is a songbird species in the monotypic genus *Melanoptila* , part of the family Mimidae . At 19 ? 20 @.@ 5 cm (7 @.@ 5 ? 8 in) in length and 31 @.@ 6 ? 42 g (1 @.@ 1 ? 1 @.@ 5 oz) in mass , it is the smallest of the mimids . Sexes appear similar , with glossy black plumage , black legs and bill , and dark reddish eyes . The species is endemic to the Yucatán Peninsula , and is found as far south as Campeche , northern Guatemala and northern Belize . Although there are historical records from Honduras and the US state of Texas , the species is not now known to occur in either location . It is found at low elevations in semi @-@ arid to humid habitats ranging from shrubland and abandoned farmland to woodland with thick understory , and is primarily sedentary .

Although it is a mimid , the black catbird is not known to imitate any other species . Its song is a mix of harsh notes and clear flute @-@ like whistles , with the phrases repeated . It builds a cup nest in low bushes or trees , and lays two bluish eggs . It is threatened by habitat loss , and has been assessed as near threatened by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature .

= = Systematics = =

When Philip Sclater first described the black catbird in 1858 , from a specimen collected in Omoa Honduras , he assigned it to the monotypic genus *Melanoptila* , which he created at the same time . At least one subsequent ornithologist assigned the species to the genus *Turdus* , believing it to be a thrush , but most agreed with Sclater 's assessment . DNA studies have since shown that it is most closely related to various endemic Antillean mimids and the gray catbird , and it is sometimes included with the latter species in the genus *Dumetella* . Although some taxonomists place the birds from Mexico 's Cozumel Island in a separate subspecies (*M. g. cozumelana*) , most authorities do not feel that such distinction is warranted and the species is generally regarded as monotypic throughout its range .

The genus name *Melanoptila* is a compound word created from two Greek words : *melas* , meaning " black " and *ptilon* , meaning " plumage " . This and the " black " of the bird 's common name are a straightforward reference to its general appearance . The species name *glabrirostris* is a combination of two Latin words : *glaber* , meaning " smooth or hairless " and *rostris* , meaning " beak " (*rostrum*) . This is a reference to the very small rictal bristles which surround the black catbird 's beak , in marked comparison to the prominent bristles found on the gray catbird .

= = Description = =

At 19 ? 20 @.@ 5 cm (7 @.@ 5 ? 8 in) in length and 31 @.@ 6 ? 42 g (1 @.@ 1 ? 1 @.@ 5 oz) in mass , the black catbird is the smallest of the mimids . It has short , rounded wings and a relatively long tail . The sexes are similar in appearance , though the male tends to be heavier . The plumage is glossy black with a purplish sheen overall , though the rectrices and primary and secondary coverts have a greenish sheen and the remiges are a duller blackish @-@ brown color showing reduced sheen . The female is less glossy than the male , and juveniles are brownish @-@ gray with mottling below . The legs are black . The bill , which is black and shorter than the head , has a generally straight culmen , decurved toward the tip . The iris is a dark reddish color in adults and gray in juveniles .

= = = Similar species = = =

Although the black catbird is unlikely to be mistaken for any other mimid species , there are several other black birds ? including the melodious blackbird , the bronzed cowbird and the giant cowbird ? that occur within the same range and might conceivably cause confusion . All are birds of more open habitats . The melodious blackbird is larger and longer tailed ; it has dark eyes and a stocky bill with an evenly curved culmen . The bronzed cowbird is thicker necked than is the catbird and has a

bronzy , rather than purplish or greenish gloss to its plumage ; its eye is bright red rather than dark red . The giant cowbird is considerably larger , and is relatively longer tailed and thicker necked than is the catbird .

= = Range and habitat = =

The black catbird is endemic to the Yucatán Peninsula . It occurs as far south as the Mexican state of Campeche , northern Guatemala and northern Belize , and is found on the offshore islands of Cozumel , Isla Mujeres , Ambergris Caye , Caye Caulker , Lighthouse Reef and Glover 's Reef . Although the type specimen of the bird was apparently collected in northwestern Honduras in 1855 or 1856 , it has not been recorded in that country since , and must have been rare if it was ever there . Some authors feel that the specimen might have been mislabeled , and have come instead from northwestern " British Honduras " as Belize was then called . There is also a single specimen of a black catbird collected from Brownsville , Texas in 1892 . Although obtained by a reportedly reputable collector , and accepted by the Texas State Records Committee , the origin of this specimen is a source of some controversy , and it has not been accepted by the American Birding Association or the American Ornithologists ' Union .

The species is found at low elevations in semi @-@ arid to humid areas in habitats ranging from scrubland and abandoned farmland to wood edge . It prefers areas with dense thickets , scrub or understory , and is uncommon in taller forest where the vegetation beneath the canopy is more open . Although it is largely sedentary , there may be some localized seasonal movements away from the drier northern parts of the Yucatán Peninsula in late summer to early winter .

= = Behavior = =

= = = Voice = = =

Unlike many of its fellow mimids , the black catbird is not known to imitate any other species . Its song consists of repeated phrases of notes ranging from harsh and scratchy to warbled and flute @-@ like , often interspersed with metallic clicking buzzes . It often sings from exposed perches . It has a variety of calls , including some which are quite similar to those of the gray catbird ; these are variously described as a harsh rriah , a nasal chrrh and a grating tcheeu .

= = = Food and feeding = = =

Although no specific studies have been done on the black catbird 's feeding ecology , it is thought to be an omnivore , like its close relatives are . It is known to eat the fruits of *Bursera simaruba* and *Ficus cotinifolia* , two deciduous trees found in the Neotropics .

= = = Breeding = = =

Little is known about the breeding biology of the black catbird . Its breeding season appears to run from spring through summer ; nest building was observed in Belize in early May , and small young were found in a nest in Mexico in mid @-@ August . The nest , an open cup of twigs lined with rootlets and other fine material , is placed low in a dense bush or small tree . The female lays two greenish @-@ blue eggs . However , details of nest @-@ building , incubation times , parental care , fledging periods and number of broods are unknown .

= = Conservation and threats = =

The range of the black catbird is small and dwindling further due to habitat loss . In 2008 , the world population was estimated to be less than 50 @,@ 000 and decreasing . Due to the speed of its

decline , which is reported to have been " precipitous " on Caye Caulker between 2003 and 2008 , the International Union for the Conservation of Nature has assessed the species as near threatened . The late 20th century arrival of the shiny cowbird , a brood parasite , into the Yucatán may cause problems for the black catbird as (based on past host choices) the catbird may become a target of the cowbird .

= = Note = =