

Our Arroyo Ecosystem



Least Bell's Vireo

Vireo belii pusillus

Shy and secretive, the Least Bell's Vireo has been on the verge of extinction and back again over the last few decades.

Once one of California's most abundant birds in the 19th and early 20th centuries, by 1986 it was down to just 300 pairs. In recent years, its populations have increased, but it continues to be threatened by loss of habitat to human development, overgrazing, power lines, and to a significant extent by the brood parasitism of the Brown-headed Cowbird.

Least Bell's Vireo nests in degraded habitats are vulnerable to the predations of the cowbird, which lays its eggs in vireos' nests. When cowbird eggs hatch they typically kill the other chicks.

The Least Bell's Vireo is a small bird, at only about 4 ½ to 5 inches long. Its feathers are mostly gray above and pale below, a common protective marking for birds. When seen from below, it blends into the clouds. From above, it is hard to discern against its ground level surroundings.

For more information, visit <http://birds.audubon.org/species/belvir>

