

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Animal Abstract**

**Element Code:** ABPBJ08040

**Data Sensitivity:** No

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Polioptila nigriceps*

**COMMON NAME:** Black-Capped Gnatcatcher; Black-Headed Gnatcatcher

**SYNONYMS:** *Polioptila albiloris nigriceps*

**FAMILY:** Sylviidae

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** Baird, Review of American Birds 1: 67 (In Key), 69, July 1864.

**TYPE LOCALITY:** Mazatlan River, Sinaloa, Mexico.

**TYPE SPECIMEN:** USNM 023781, adult male collected by J. Xantus 264, July 1861.

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** Formerly in the family Muscicapidae. There are three species of gnatcatchers and eight subspecies in the genus *Polioptila*. *P. nigriceps* is one of two species that are found in Arizona; two subspecies are also found in Arizona.

**DESCRIPTION:** Length 11 cm (4 ¼-4 ½ in). In the winter the male does not have a black cap and its' head is the same color as its' back. He does not have a white eyebrow stripe. The back and rump is blue-gray and the wings are brown-slate and the wing tertials are edged whitish. A breeding male's black cap extends below his eye and he is without white lores, a white-eye stripe, or a white eye-ring.

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** The Black-capped Gnatcatcher is separated from Blue-gray (*P. caerulea*) and Black-tailed (*P. melanura*) gnatcatchers by having more graduated white outer tail feathers and a longer bill.

**ILLUSTRATIONS:** Color drawing (National Geographic 1999: 339).  
Color drawing (Peterson 1990: 269)

**TOTAL RANGE:** Found in northwestern Mexico from southern Sonora and southwestern Chihuahua south through Sinaloa, western Durango, Nayarit and Jalisco to Colima. Also, in southeastern Arizona ( Groschupf 1992).

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** Southeastern Arizona, more specifically Sonoita Creek (Santa Cruz County), Chino Canyon (Pima and Santa Cruz counties), Florida Wash, Sycamore Canyon, and Kino springs (Santa Cruz County).

**SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** The Black-Capped Gnatcatcher calls are like the California Gnatcatcher (*P. californica*) or Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*) (National Geographic 1999).

**REPRODUCTION:** An occasional breeder in dry canyons and riparian woodlands with mesquite, sycamore, and hackberry in southeast Arizona. They nest in a low bush or small tree, in a crotch of branches 5-14 ft. up. The nest is a neat cup-shaped structure (not as high or as deep as Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, but with the same diameter), of tightly woven spiders' web, hair, herbaceous twigs, and bits of leaves. The nest is built by both sexes. The breeding season begins mid-March to early April, and extends into August. The Black-Capped Gnatcatcher is double-brooded. There are 3-5 eggs, usually 4, similar to those of the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, though paler, 14 x 11 mm. Both sexes incubate the eggs and tend the young. Pairs may be seen in every month. Males acquire their distinctive partial black caps in February.

**FOOD HABITS:** Insectivore/Invertivore. *P. nigriceps* is probably similar to other gnatcatchers that feed on a wide variety of insects. In Arizona, young were fed small grasshoppers, caterpillars, and spiders (Groschupf 1992). (In NatureServe 2001).

**HABITAT:** Riparian woodland and associated brushy areas. Per NatureServe (2001), "Riparian thickets, thorn forest, wooded washes; mesquite/hackberry thickets especially favored in Arizona (Dunn and Garrett 1987). In Arizona, nests have been found in the upper branches of mesquite, Arizona sycamore, and hackberry trees (Groschupf 1992)."

**ELEVATION:** 2,625 - 4,595 (800-1400 m).

**PLANT COMMUNITY:** Chihuahuan Desertscrub

**POPULATION TRENDS:** Unknown

**SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION**

**ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:**

**STATE STATUS:**

WSC (AGFD, WSCA in prep)

[State Endangered AGFD, TNW 1988]

**OTHER STATUS:**

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** Some factors to consider when managing for this species are recreational development and grazing.

**PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:** Unknown

**SUGGESTED PROJECTS:** Information on the natural history of the Black-capped Gnatcatcher is needed.

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** USFS – Coronado National Forest; Private.

## **SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION**

### **REFERENCES:**

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- Groschupf, K. 1992. A Closer Look: Black-capped Gnatcatcher. Birding, June 1992. pp161-164.
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- Terres, J.K. 1980. The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds. Alfred a. Knopf, New York, New York. Pp. 1110.

### **MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:**

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

“Although considered conspecific with *P. albiloris* by some authors, *P. nigriceps* differs in plumage sequence as well as morphology, and shows no approach to *albiloris* in the region of geographic proximity in western Mexico (AOU 1983).” (NatureServe 2001).

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