

## *Pheugopedius rutilus* (Rufous-breasted Wren)

Family: Troglodytidae (Wrens)

Order: Passeriformes (Perching Birds)

Class: Aves (Birds)



**Fig. 1.** Rufous-breasted wren, *Pheugopedius rutilus*.

[<http://www.hbw.com/ibc/photo/rufous-breasted-wren-thryothorus-rutilus/adult-perched-branch>, downloaded 5 March 2017]

**TRAITS.** *Pheugopedius rutilus*, formerly known as *Thryothorus rutilus* (Avibase, 2003) is commonly referred to as the rufous-breasted wren and the Trinidad jungle wren. It is a relatively small bird of approximately 14cm in length and weight range from 13.5-18.5g. This species of wren has a distinct appearance (Fig. 1) with a grey-brown upper body with black lines on its short tail. Its breast is a characteristic rufous (reddish-brown) colour with a brownish-white abdomen (Fig. 2). The bird also has a thin bill and black and white lines through the eye (Fig.1) (Kroodsmas and Brewer, 2017).

**DISTRIBUTION.** Present in Costa Rica and Panama in Central America, Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean, and Venezuela and Colombia in South America. The rufous-breasted wren's distribution in South America spreads to the northern part of the Andes, and is bounded by the mountain range (Fig. 3) (Salaman et al., 2002).

**HABITAT AND ACTIVITY.** *Pheugopedius rutilus* spans a wide area but is not present in abundance. They are usually found in pairs or families. These birds often occupy the trees lining

forest borders. The rufous-breasted wren prefers foraging for food on the ground as well as occupying the lower branches of trees with tangles of wild vines. It is most distinguishable due to its tendency to maintain constant sound under the heavy foliage on the forest floor, using a tone resembling that of a finch or a wood warbler (Wetmore et al., 1985).

**FOOD AND FEEDING.** The rufous-breasted wren's diet is primarily invertebrates, including spiders and small insects, mainly beetles, bugs, flies, and sometimes small seeds, with the occasional small lizard and frog. *Pheugopedius rutilus* forages for food in groups, usually family members. They scour low areas between tangled vines and fallen leaves (Kroodsma and Brewer, 2017).

**REPRODUCTION.** Rufous-breasted wrens breed between April and July in Costa Rica. The breeding habitat is mainly the undergrowth and thickets in forested areas. They form a large dome-shaped nest composed of leaves and dried grass. The rounded structure has a side entrance hidden by tangled herbage. The approximate dimensions of the entrance is 10 x 15cm, just enough for the small rufous-breasted wren to fit through (Fig. 4). The females lay clutches of 2-3 eggs, producing several clutches per season. Incubation is performed by the female wrens. The males occasionally feed them at the nest for the 18 day incubation period. The eggs are white with brown spots, approximately 18 x 13mm (Kroodsma and Brewer, 2017).

**BEHAVIOUR.** *Pheugopedius rutilus* is characterised by almost constant song while foraging for food. Their song is described as a light-hearted and perky array of distinct whistles continuing for approximately 6-10 notes consecutively. This species makes contact with others of its kind using a sharp cheeping sound. While foraging for food, the birds maintain stealth and remain out of sight. As such, they require a sharp sound to travel from their hidden location to the others of the group it is hunting with. Most of their time is spent in lower branches and thickets. These birds are rarely found high up in trees, where they are more easily seen and therefore more vulnerable to predation (Kroodsma and Brewer, 2017).

**APPLIED ECOLOGY.** *Pheugopedius rutilus* is categorized as Least Concern since it is not threatened under the range size criterion. The population trend of this particular species has not yet been identified. However, it is postulated that the population size will not decrease in future years (IUCN, 2016). Additionally, the rufous-breasted wren is present in several protected areas, including the Alexander Skutch Private Reserve in Costa Rica.

## REFERENCES

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**Fig. 2.** Rufous-breasted wren showing characteristic rufous abdomen.

[<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/22711427>, downloaded 8 March 2017]



**Fig. 3.** Distribution map of *Pheugopedius rutilus*.

[<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/22711427>, downloaded 8 March 2017]



**Fig. 4.** *Pheugopedius rutilus* at the entrance to its nest.

[<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/22711427>, downloaded 8 March 2017]