

Procnias albus (White Bellbird)

Family: Cotingidae (Bellbirds and Cotingas)

Order: Passeriformes (Perching Birds)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. White bellbird, *Procnias albus*.

[<http://www.hbw.com/ibc/species/white-bellbird-procnias-albus>, downloaded 1 March 2017]

TRAITS. The name white bellbird refers to the adult male, as the females and the young males are olive (yellow-greenish) in colour (Schulenberg, 2010). Its wing span ranges from 153-159 mm, its bill culmen (upper ridge) is 18.2-19.9mm, nostril to tip 9-12mm, and its tail 93-97mm (Roth et al., 1984). The female has been reported to be slightly smaller than the male, while bill size across its geographic distribution depends on adaptation to food and other factors. The wattle, a horn-like structure on its head, is long, inflatable and covered in small white feathers and falls vertically downwards from its beak (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2001; Animalia Life, 2016). Only the males have wattles (Fig. 1).

DISTRIBUTION. The white bellbird is a bird of South America (Fig. 2). It ranges from Brazil (Para) to French Guiana and Venezuela (Birdlife International, 2017). It is a rare visitor to Trinidad and Tobago. There have been reports of two sightings at the Asa Wright Nature Centre in recent years according to the tour guide.

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. These birds are usually found high in the canopy, in forested hills approximately 500-750m above sea level (Roth et al., 1984). Dry branches protruding out above the canopy are used by the males to be noticed by females. This species is entirely frugivorous, even the hatchlings (Planet of Birds, 2017). The type of fruit is dependent upon the birds' geographical location but because these birds reside high in the canopy, they have a wide variety of fruit available. Fruits are swallowed whole, while the seeds are later regurgitated (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2001). Food is gathered mostly while they make flight sallies, rather than when perched. The wide gapes of their short bills are seen as an adaptation to ingesting whole fruit.

POPULATION ECOLOGY. The males of this species only associates with the female for mating purposes. When eggs hatch, the male is absent while the female is left to look after her nestlings. In a study carried out by Barbara K. Snow in the Kanaku Mountains of southern Guyana (1973), it was observed that the white bellbirds migrated during the dry season, as a drought decreased the abundance of fruits.

REPRODUCTION. Adult male *Procnias albus* are usually very sedentary and use their striking bell-like vocalization to attract females. The same perches and mating territories are used throughout the year, except for the moult period which is when the males renew their plumage (Snow, 1973). Females tend to visit males who display their striking white feathers and fleshy ornamentation on their heads. Their calls can be heard especially after rainfall, mainly around mid-August to October. Adult males have been observed to accompany their 'bell calls' with swinging movements from left to right, serving to attract females that approach. They usually perch above the canopy on temporarily leafless tree branches to be most visible (Fig. 3). Calling males are usually silent after a female approaches, provided it is not an immature bird in which case it starts vocalization once more. Male and female white bellbirds associate solely for mating purposes. Females use open branches to make nests to house their one or two hatchlings per clutch. Mothers care for their young by themselves and regurgitate fruits into the young's mouth (Animalia Life, 2016).

BEHAVIOUR. The white bellbird is known for its distinct bell-like call 'ding-ding', which is sharper and carries further than the second call, which is termed the musical call 'dor-ong'. The latter call is carried out while the bird is usually still. However, the bell call is normally carried out with a swaying motion as the bird sings its first 'ding', then turns approximately 100 degrees to make its second 'ding', all in one beak-opening (Snow, 1973).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. *Procnias albus* is listed as of Least Concern by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species in 2016. As this animal is mostly found in the canopy areas of montane forests, human contact is avoided. However, degradation and habitat loss through land use change in the Amazon and parts of Guyana, may result in 25% decline in the next three generations (BirdLife International, 2016).

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. White bellbird geographic distribution.

[<http://www.hbw.com/species/white-bellbird-procnias-albus> downloaded 9 March 2017]



Fig. 3. Immature male white bellbird above the canopy.

[<http://www.oiseaux.net/photos/maxime.dechelle/white.bellbird.1.html> downloaded 10 March 2017]

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