

Aramides cajaneus (Grey-necked Wood-rail)

Family: Rallidae (Rails, Crakes and Gallinules)

Order: Gruiformes (Cranes and Rails)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Grey-necked wood-rail, *Aramides cajaneus*.

[<http://www.ecoregistros.org/site/imagen.php?id=6831>, downloaded 3 February 2017]

TRAITS. *Aramides cajaneus*, commonly known as the grey-necked wood-rail or grey-cowled wood-rail, is approximately 38cm in length and has a weight of approximately 460g (Inaturalist, 2017). Their common name indicates that it has a definite grey neck and head (Fig. 1), from which it can be differentiated from other rails (EoL, 2017). The back of its head and neck forms a smooth blend with the brown overlying feathers. The grey-necked wood rail has red eyes and a long, yellowish beak. The belly, tail and rump are black and the legs are red.

DISTRIBUTION. Widespread throughout the Neotropical region from northern Argentina to north-east Mexico (Lourenco, 2014). It is also found on the Caribbean southern islands like Trinidad and Tobago.

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Found in habitats like mangroves, swamps, moist tropical forest, lakes and freshwater marshes. *Aramides cajaneus* is occasionally found on mountains as high as 2,300 m. Their habitat suggests that they have a liking for water. In addition, *Aramides cajaneus* are normally shy and are always cautious of being watched (Lourenco, 2014). If the *Aramides*

cajaneus realizes that it is under observation, then it tends to hide amongst the dense regions in its habitat. Its thin body helps facilitate quicker movement through these dense regions. When it is confident that no one is watching the *Aramides cajaneus* tends to advance out in the open. Furthermore, at dawn and dusk it tends to be vocal by producing squealing sounds which can be loud and repetitious. The grey-necked wood rail can be diurnal and nocturnal (Neotropical birds, 2017) because it is active during the day mostly hiding and feeds mainly at night.

FOOD AND FEEDING. *Aramides cajaneus* are omnivores so this means that it has a wide variety of food sources. These food sources include crabs, water snakes, snails (Lourenco, 2014) and even insects. On the other hand, seeds and grains also form part of its diet along with fruits (Lourenco, 2014). The mechanism by which these fruits are eaten involves pecking using their whole body with their legs moving upwards and downwards similar to a see-saw motion (Animal diversity, 2017). They were also observed to be feeding on leaves (Fig. 2).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. The grey-necked wood rail is a solitary species but sometimes moves in groups or pairs (Neotropical birds, 2017). It has an average life span of approximately 3.7 years in its natural habitat (Animal diversity, 2017). There is limited information with respect to its home range but it has a geographic range of 13,600,000 km² (Animal diversity, 2017).

REPRODUCTION. *Aramides cajaneus* is monogamous, that is, having only one mate at once (Animal diversity, 2017). The mating season depends on the location, but it typically breeds from January to September (Lourenco, 2014). The nest is usually well hidden between the dense vegetation, vines and twigs, on the ground or at heights of 2-3m above the ground. Females usually lay 2-7 eggs which have to be incubated for around 20 days, with the males incubating in the day and the females incubating during the night (Animal diversity, 2017). The parents often provide food via a beak to beak mechanism and they also provide protection for around 6 weeks after the young hatch.

BEHAVIOUR. After the young hatch, the parents place them within a nursery nest where they are well taken care of (Animal diversity, 2017). The young ones tend to be brown in colour and very active. After 7 weeks a young *Aramides cajaneus* tends to be just as tall as the adults, and beginning to resemble the adult's physical characteristics. It was observed that as the parents walked about searching for food and pecking at whatever they found, the young ones behaved in a similar fashion. Antipredator behaviour involves hiding within dense vegetation in their habitat when they feel a sense of threat. At times they can also alert other grey-necked wood rails by producing a special crackle (Animal diversity, 2017). Since the eggs need to be incubated, the crackling sound is not heard during that time of incubation because they are well hidden. After the chicks hatch, they resume their sounds and use it as a means to communicate with the young (Animal diversity, 2017). *Aramides cajaneus* can orient its back towards the sun while standing and spreading its wings so that it can sun itself (Fig. 3).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), this species is listed as Least Concern. It is widely distributed over a large geographic area and its food source varies so there is no competition for food (IUCN, 2017). Predation does not seem to affect them much so their population is very stable. Humans may use them as a source of food, as well as rear them as pets.

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Fig. 2. *Aramides cajaneus* feeding on a leaf.

[http://www.mindenpictures.com/search/preview/grey-necked-wood-rail-aramides-cajanea-feeding-on-leaf-limon-costa-rica/0_00559969.html, downloaded 4 February 2017]



Fig. 3. *Aramides cajaneus* sunning itself.

[<http://www.hbw.com/ibc/species/grey-necked-wood-rail-aramides-cajanea>, downloaded 4 March 2017]

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