

Galbula ruficauda (Rufous-tailed Jacamar)

Family: Galbulidae (Jacamars)

Order: Piciformes (Woodpeckers, Toucans, and Jacamars)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Rufous-tailed jacamar, *Galbula ruficauda*.

[<http://asawright.org/2013/02/rufous-tailed-jacamar-galbula-ruficauda/>, downloaded 23 February 2017]

TRAITS. *Galbula ruficauda* (rufous-tailed jacamar) is a beautiful honey-brown chested, copper-green bird that very much looks like a hummingbird (Fig. 1), hence it is also known as the “king hummingbird” (Restall et.al., 2007). The length of this majestic bird is 26-27cm and it has a long blackish pointed bill, about 5cm long in both sexes (Gwynne and Tudor, 2002). The female can be differentiated from the male by a thinner, straight bill and puffy throat (Restall et al., 2007). The weight and wing length of the males ranged between 25-28g and 8.1-8.7cm whereas the females ranged between 24-33g and 8.1-8.6cm respectively. The rufous-tailed jacamar also has a long rufous (reddish-brown) tail of about 12.5cm (Ffrench, 1991).

DISTRIBUTION. *Galbula ruficauda* is well-known in the regions of Central and South America and some Caribbean islands (Fig. 2). These birds are located in Guatemala, Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and southern Mexico, Paraguay, Guyana, Brazil, Venezuela, French Guiana, Colombia, Bolivia, Argentina, and Ecuador, as well as both islands of Trinidad and Tobago (IUCN, 2017).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. A variety of habitats such as scrublands, forests, streamside or river banks, flooded grasslands, areas that comprise thickets and bushes, and also savannas (Ridgely, 1976). *Galbula ruficauda* forages in pairs mostly during the day, but is considered to be both diurnal and nocturnal. Jacamars are generally cavity nesters as nests are built by tunnelling into river banks to create holes that are as long as 45cm. At times these creatures also utilize termites' nests which are located a few metres above the ground to avoid any invasion of unwanted predators. In the tropical climate, an abundance of insects is available for consumption and as such food is available throughout the day. However, the main insects on which these birds prey are butterflies and flies. Due to its diurnal and nocturnal nature, *Galbula ruficauda* acquires its food during both the day and night (Restall et al., 2007).

FOOD AND FEEDING. The rufous-tailed jacamar feeds on insects (Fig. 3), including flies, beetles, bees, dragonflies, and butterflies (Jones, 2004). These birds capture butterflies and other insects in the air (Pinheiro et al. 2003). Occasionally, aposematic butterflies (i.e. with bright warning colours) are captured. In some instances, these birds return to the perch a few metres above the ground, where the insect is played with prior to being liberated; the butterfly is thrown into the air a few times before it is recaptured with the long thin bill (Pinheiro, 2004). Mostly, the jacamar batters the prey on the perch while it is trapped within its bill, ensuring that the food is dead before it is consumed (Restall et al., 2007).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. This species exists in pairs mostly for feeding or hunting for prey (Ffrench, 1991). The population of this species is large in numbers and; according to sources, has an estimated population number that ranges between 500,000-5 million individuals. Although numbers are fluctuating, this does not directly affect the population since the numbers has not approached the threshold for vulnerability (IUCN, 2017). No information has yet been brought to light of the longevity or survival of the rufous-tailed jacamar (Chaine, 2010).

REPRODUCTION. In Trinidad, the breeding periods recorded ranged from February to June and March to April whereas in the twin island of Tobago, this period ranged from February to July and also in August (Restall et al., 2007). Breeding takes place in burrows which are tunnelled by these birds in river banks, steep slopes, dead trees (Fig. 4) and termitaries. Both of the pair of rufous-tailed jacamars work together to complete their nests. The number of offspring (clutch) comprises 2-4 eggs which are white with minute spots present on the surface. In Costa Rica, it was noted that throughout the breeding period, both sexes work together as they alternately incubate the eggs i.e. in the day, the male incubates the eggs while the female hunts for food and in the night the female is left to keep the eggs warm while the male hunts. The incubation period lasted 19-23 days (Restall et al., 2007).

BEHAVIOUR. Throughout the year, jacamars are observed to be existing in pairs and therefore stay with their significant other for their entire lives. While courting, the young male tends to acquire insects to feed the female after their wings have been removed. *Galbula ruficauda* are known to defend their nests from fierce competitors such as the rough-winged swallows. When encountered with any unfamiliar predators or humans, these birds tend to whistle and graciously glide onto a new perch to distract unwanted visitors from entering their domain (Jones, 2004).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. This species is listed as Least Concern by the IUCN, since it is present throughout South and Central America, as well as Trinidad and Tobago in vast numbers. Even though the population of this species is fairly large, the numbers are gradually decreasing due to the loss of habitat as a result of human interference. *Galbula ruficauda* is a thriving species and as such no threats are present (IUCN, 2017).

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Fig. 2. Geographic distribution of *Galbula ruficauda* (rufous-tailed jacamar).

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/distribution?p_p_spp=294936, downloaded 23 February 2017]



Fig. 3. *Galbula ruficauda* (rufous-tailed jacamar) feeding behaviour.

[http://eol.org/data_objects/27097596, downloaded 23 February 2017]



Fig. 4. *Galbula ruficauda* (rufous-tailed jacamar) in nesting hole.

[https://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g951347-d10241565-i186304394-Thebirdingexperience-Monteverde_Province_of_Puntarenas.html, downloaded 23 February 2017]