

Blue-billed Curassow

Crax alberti

Family: *Cracidae*, Genus: *Crax*
Recognized Subspecies: 0, Monotypic
Conservation status: Critically Endangered
Wild Pop. Trend: Decreasing
CITES Appendix III
USFWS: Listed Endangered

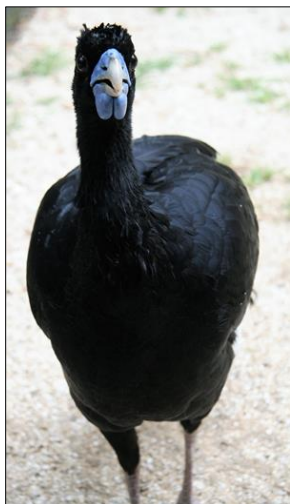
Range: Colombia, endemic

Conservation Concern: The Blue-billed Curassow is considered critically endangered by the IUCN. Historically little has been known of the status of this species in the wild. Since being described to science in 1852, it has been noted as being rare. This species, like other curassows, is sensitive to habitat fragmentation and habitat conversion for agriculture. A recent and rapid conservation concern for this species has been the increase in palm oil agriculture in South America which has resulted in a loss of habitat for this already imperiled species.



Blue-billed Curassow hen
Photo credit: White Oak Conservation Center

Species account: The Blue-billed Curassow is one of 8 species within the genus *Crax* and is one of the most endangered species within this genus. This species is only found in Colombia and in part because of its elusive nature there is not a lot known about how this species utilizes its environment or even if it is still present in some areas. The status of this species in the northern portion of its range is relatively unknown. There is more information about the southern population with most stemming from the El Paujil (Blue-billed) Reserve managed by ProAves.



Blue-billed Curassow male
Photo credit: White Oak
Conservation Center

In AZA, this species has been managed as a studbook since 1993 and was formally managed by Trey Todd of the Houston Zoo until he retired in 2007. This species struggled for a number of years to meet its demographic goals due to low fertility of eggs and lack of space/interest in AZA collections. Over the past ten years this species has rebounded drastically and now is at the highest demography ever. This is because of new founders from Europe and Mexico, increased interest in this species through-out AZA, and the willingness of holding institutions to hold birds for increased lengths of time. In fact, this population has improved so much it was one of the first recipients of the AZA SSP Sustainability Award in 2017.

The Blue-billed SSP has been a conservation focused program for the TAG and since the publication of the last RCP several projects have occurred to advance the partnership between AZA and

ACOPA ZOA (The Colombian Zoo Association). This partnership focuses on the recovery of this species and providing needed equipment and training to Colombian institutions.

An incubation workshop was held in March 2014 taught by Susie Kasielke and hosted at the Aviario Nacional de Colombia which trained the Colombian holders in egg incubation and supplied incubation equipment to 4 institutions that were in need. This workshop was sponsored by the Houston Zoo, Nashville Zoo, and Dallas World Aquarium.

The international collaboration for the conservation of this species, especially the training provided by Geer Scheeres EAZA Cracid TAG Chair at Zuttendal and Weltvogelpark Walsrode, led to the first captive hatch (January 2014) of this species in its native Colombia at the Aviario Nacional de Colombia by Guillermo Galviz and Rafael Vieira. This was a significant step for establishing a captive Colombian population of this species. The birds held in Colombian Zoos still present management challenges as most are imprinted ex-pets of unknown age. Multiple chicks have successfully hatched out since the first breeding.

To clarify what actions need to be concentrated on for the recovery of this species, a PHVA session was held in Cartagena, Colombia in 2016. This session was sponsored by the Houston Zoo and attended by the majority of the holders of this species both from Colombia and internationally, the wildlife authorities of Colombia, and some NGOs that were undertaking field work where this species has historically ranged. One of the major objectives that was identified during this meeting is the lack of confirmed sites where this species is still present within its historical range.

Due to the lack of current range knowledge, the Houston Zoo, Barranquilla Zoo, and Proyecto Titi have partnered to conduct a camera trap survey of the Proyecto Titi reserve near San Juan, Colombia and the surrounding area. The species was documented to have ranged in this region in the 1970s. This partnership aims to not only determine the presence or absence of the Blue-billed in the area but also document the other species that this habitat depends on. Christian Olaciregui of the Barranquilla Zoo is leading this project. The Phoenix Zoo has also started a camera trap project in the far northern portion of this species range in the Santa Marta Mountains in partnership with ProCAT Colombia and Birding Santa Marta. It is hoped these camera trap surveys will add to the scientific knowledge of where this species persists in the wild.

As with the Wattled and Helmeted Curassow, blood samples from this population have been collected and are going to be sent for the IUCN genetic testing project. This study will include almost the entire international population of this species and will determine relatedness of the population and guide imports/exports in the future.

AZA Role: The AZA population of this species is the most documented ex-situ population and offspring can be utilized for this species recovery. International transfers have occurred to Europe and Japan to diversify those populations and ensure that the AZA genetic lines are held in other Zoological regions as a safeguard.

Program Goal: The extreme rarity of this species in the wild and captive collections has made it a continued priority for the TAG both for captive management and in-situ conservation efforts. The overall goal of this program is to support the Colombian Zoo Association's breeding program to ensure that Colombian institutions have all that they need to breed and maintain a population

of this species. If you are interested in supporting the conservation effort, please contact Chris or Christian.

Education Emphasis

- Seed dispersal
- Dry forest biome

AZA Connections: The following table is not a guide of what the Blue-billed Curassow can be housed with (although many of these are a possibility), but it is instead meant to show the range connections between other AZA recommended bird species.

| Blue-billed Curassow <i>Crax alberti</i> recommended species by other TAGs within species range | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Common name | Scientific name | TAG | Program | Conservation status |
| Purple Honeycreeper | <i>Cyanerpes caeruleus</i> | PACCT TAG | TAG Monitored | Least Concern |
| Red-legged Honeycreeper | <i>Cyanerpes cyaneus</i> | PACCT TAG | TAG Monitored | Least Concern |
| Blue Dacnis | <i>Dacnis cayana</i> | PACCT TAG | TAG Monitored | Least Concern |
| Black-faced Dacnis | <i>Dacnis lineata</i> | PACCT TAG | TAG Monitored | Least Concern |
| Silver-beaked Tanager | <i>Ramphocelus carbo</i> | PACCT TAG | Yellow SSP | Least Concern |
| Blue-Grey Tanager | <i>Thraupis episcopus</i> | PACCT TAG | Yellow SSP | Least Concern |
| Saffron Finch | <i>Sicalis flaveola</i> | PACCT TAG | TAG Monitored | Least Concern |
| Yellow-rumped Cacique | <i>Cacicus cela</i> | PACCT TAG | Red SSP | Least Concern |
| Crested Oropendola | <i>Psarocolius decumanus</i> | PACCT TAG | Yellow SSP | Least Concern |
| Chestnut-mandibled Toucan | <i>Ramphastos ambiguus</i> | Piciformes TAG | Red SSP | Near Threatened |
| Keel-billed Toucan | <i>Ramphastos sulfuratus</i> | Piciformes TAG | Red SSP | Least Concern |
| Blue and yellow Macaw | <i>Ara ararauna</i> | Parrot TAG | TAG Monitored | Least Concern |
| Military Macaw | <i>Ara militaris</i> | Parrot TAG | TAG Monitored | Vulnerable |
| Scarlet Macaw | <i>Ara macao</i> | Parrot TAG | TAG Monitored | Least Concern |
| Red-and-green Macaw | <i>Ara chloroptera</i> | Parrot TAG | TAG Monitored | Least Concern |
| Blue-headed Pionus | <i>Pipnus menstruus</i> | Parrot TAG | TAG Monitored | Least Concern |
| Boat-billed Heron | <i>Cochlearius cochlearius</i> | Ciconiiformes TAG | Yellow SSP | Least Concern |
| Scarlet Ibis | <i>Eudocimus ruber</i> | Ciconiiformes TAG | Yellow SSP | Least Concern |
| Roseate Spoonbill | <i>Platalea ajaja</i> | Ciconiiformes TAG | Green SSP | Least Concern |
| Black-winged Stilt | <i>Himantopus mexicanus</i> | Charadriiformes TAG | Yellow SSP | Least Concern |
| Wattled Jacana | <i>Jacana jacana</i> | Charadriiformes TAG | Unmanaged | Least Concern |
| Double-striped Thick-knee | <i>Burhinus bistriatus</i> | Charadriiformes TAG | Unmanaged | Least Concern |
| Sunbittern | <i>Eurypyga helias</i> | Gruiformes TAG | Yellow SSP | Least Concern |
| White-faced Whistling-duck | <i>Dendrocygna viduata</i> | Anseriformes TAG | Raft | Least Concern |
| Black-bellied Whistling-duck | <i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i> | Anseriformes TAG | Raft | Least Concern |
| Fulvous Whistling-duck | <i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i> | Anseriformes TAG | Raft | Least Concern |
| American Wigeon | <i>Anas americana</i> | Anseriformes TAG | Raft | Least Concern |
| Cinnamon Teal | <i>Anas cyanoptera</i> | Anseriformes TAG | Raft | Least Concern |
| Blue-winged Teal | <i>Anas discors</i> | Anseriformes TAG | Raft | Least Concern |
| Northern Shoveler | <i>Anas clypeata</i> | Anseriformes TAG | Raft | Least Concern |
| Northern Pintail | <i>Anas acuta</i> | Anseriformes TAG | Raft | Least Concern |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------|------|---------------|
| White-cheeked Pintail | <i>Anas bahamensis</i> | Anseriformes TAG | Raft | Least Concern |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------|------|---------------|

**Disclaimer: this information was collected in 2017. If you have interest in any of these species, contact the perspective TAGs. All range overlap information was determined using the IUCN Red List range maps.

Conservation priority species that share the same range.

- Cotton-top Tamarin *Saguinus oedipus*
- Lowland Tapir *Tapirus terrestris*
- Jaguar *Panthera onca*

If your institution is supporting a field project in Colombia with one of these species, if your conservation partner is observing the Blue-billed Curassow in their study/field site. If your Zoo displays one of the following species, the addition of an aviary for Blue-billed Curassow further illustrates the diversity of Colombia at your institution and highlights a critically endangered bird.



Blue-billed Curassow chick

Photo credit Houston Zoo