

Ocellated Turkey

Meleagris ocellata

Family: Phasianidae, Genus: *Meleagris*
Recognized Subspecies: 0, Monotypic
Conservation status: Near Threatened
Wild Pop. Trend: Decreasing
CITES Appendix III
USFWS: Not Listed

Range: Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala

Conservation Concern: The Ocellated Turkey is listed as near threatened by the IUCN. This species is sensitive to habitat fragmentation and hunting for consumption and for sport. This species is still an important protein source within its native range and commercial hunting is still practiced.



Photo credit: Joel Satore

Species account: This large, brightly colored turkey inhabits humid woodland, broadleaf and savanna-scrub forests and open grasslands near forested areas. Flocks of up to ten or more birds can be found together from November through January before the females separate from the group to lay eggs. Breeding season begins in mid-February and lasts through April. The males display to the females by fluffing up their feathers and making a combination of clucking and booming sounds. The females begin nesting in April, laying a clutch of 8-15 eggs and after an incubation period of 28 days, the females may join others with chicks and stay together for around 8 months or until the start of the next breeding season.

The wild population was estimated to be less than 50,000 individuals in 2008. The population is expected to be declining due to habitat destruction and fragmentation and hunting pressure for food as well as for the animal trade. While typically a rare sighting, this species is more common in protected areas such as the Mayan Biosphere Reserve, Tikal National Park, Rio Bravo conservation area, Jug/Chan Chich lodge lands, and a protected reserve in Peten. In these protected areas, some of the individuals have become accustomed to human activity where hunting still takes place.

AZA Role: These birds draw the immediate attention of zoo guests with their iridescent colors and large size. The courtship display of the males during breeding season is always a crowd-pleaser. This species serves as an educational opportunity for patrons to learn about human-wildlife interaction and conflict in developing areas of the world and the success of conservation areas in protecting wildlife.

TAG Program Goals: At this time, this population is being monitored by the TAG. Institutions holding this species are encouraged to sex birds of unknown sex to facilitate pairings in the future.

Education Emphasis

- Habitat fragmentation
- Two species of turkey
- Hunting pressure

AZA Connections: The following table is not a guide of what the Ocellated Turkey can be housed with (although many of these are a possibility) but instead shows the range connections between other AZA recommended programs.

Ocellated Turkey <i>Meleagris ocellata</i> recommended species by other TAGs within species range				
Common name	Scientific name	TAG	Program	Conservation status
Red-legged Honeycreeper	<i>Cyanerpes cyaneus</i>	PACCT TAG	TAG Monitored	Least Concern
Blue-Grey Tanager	<i>Thraupis episcopus</i>	PACCT TAG	Yellow SSP	Least Concern
Keel-billed Toucan	<i>Ramphastos sulfuratus</i>	Piciformes TAG	Red SSP	Least Concern
Scarlet Macaw	<i>Ara macao</i>	Parrot TAG	TAG Monitored	Least Concern
Yellow-headed Amazon	<i>Amazona oratrix</i>	Parrot TAG	TAG Monitored	Endangered
Boat-billed Heron	<i>Cochlearius cochlearius</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
American Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	Charadriiformes TAG	Unmanaged	Least Concern
Black-bellied Whistling-duck	<i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</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
Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</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 this species range:

- Baird's Tapir *Tapirus bairdii*
- Mexican Red Brocket Deer *Mazama temama*
- Geoffroy's Spider Monkey *Ateles geoffroyi*

If your institution supports a field project with one of these species, check if your conservation partner is observing the Ocellated Turkey in their study site/field. If your Zoo displays one of the following species, the addition of an aviary for Ocellated Turkey can help illustrate the diversity of this biome at your institution and highlight a threatened bird.



Ocellated Turkey at Dallas World Aquarium

Photo credit: Joel Satore