

Great Great Tinamou Tinamou

Tinamú Oliváceo (Spanish)

Tinamus major

Class: Aves
Order: Tinamiformes
Family: Tinamidae
Genus: Tinamus

Distribution

The great tinamou is widely distributed throughout the neotropics.

Habitat

They live in subtropical/tropical forest such as rainforest, swamp forest and cloud forest.

Food

They are omnivorous

Reproduction

These birds practise a form of polygamy known as polygynandry. A group of males has an exclusive relationship with a group of females. Any male in the group may mate with any female, and vice versa. A female will mate with a male and lay an average of four eggs which the male incubates. She moves on to mate with other males leaving clutches to be hatched by them. She may start nests with five or six males during each 8-month-long breeding season.



Twelve subspecies are distributed in various areas of the following countries; Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela. More than one subspecies may occur in these countries. Costa Rica has at least two subspecies.

The species occupies dense rainforest of both "terra firme" (no flooding) and "várzea" (seasonally-flooded) types. They occur in altitudes of up to 1,500 m.

They feed on the forest floor, predominantly on berries, fruits and seeds. They also eat opening buds, tender leaves, blossoms of plants they can reach from the ground... As well they consume nuts and small animals, such as insects and other invertebrates.

The eggs are large, shiny, and bright blue or violet in colour. Other species of tinamou have green, turquoise blue, purple, chocolate, or wine red eggs. They are always uniformly coloured, without blotches and are shiny like porcelain... They are oval or elliptical in shape. Nests are usually rudimentary scrapings in the buttress roots of trees with some plant material. This species is known for its exclusive male parental care. After she has been fertilized and the eggs have been laid she moves on. The male assumes responsibility remaining with the eggs, being reluctant to leave them. He incubates the eggs by sitting on them for many hours leaving the clutch only in the morning to look for food. He is very attentive and remains almost motionless for lengthy periods of time. Incubation time lasts for 20 or 21 days. Species that nest on the ground usually produce eggs that blend in with the background, these tinamous are an exception producing brightly coloured eggs.



Development

The male cares for the chicks for approximately 20 days before moving on to find another female. The young are precocial, and can run almost as soon as they hatch.

Characteristics

Feather colour varies somewhat between sub-species as well as with environment. It can be spotted or barred patterns of brown, grey, rufous, or tan. It has a compact form, slender neck, small head, short wings, and a short, slender bill that curves slightly downward. Its legs are blue-grey in colour.

Adaptations

The cryptic colouration of these birds provides very good camouflage in the rainforest understory. They are very difficult to see. This is especially so with almost motionless males incubating eggs. Great Tinamou (*Tinamus major*) will sprint for distances of five to ten metres, but only if threatened.

Status/Threats

IUCN: Near Threatened. Populations have declined appreciably due to hunting and habitat destruction. Eggs are heavily predated by a variety of animals.

Sightings at Cano Palma

Our station manager describes their calls as hauntingly beautiful. They are heard almost daily.



The chicks are densely covered with soft down in muted, varied colours and patterns. This cryptic colouration helps to conceal them as they move around the forest floor in search of food.



Sexes are alike, females can be slightly heavier and have brighter colours. The rounded, short wings are inconspicuous when the bird is on the ground. Primary flight feathers are hidden by the full plumage of the flanks. Tinamous (*tinamidae*) are a primitive bird family that are considered closely related to the ancestral group of ratites (flightless birds). Modern birds have a ridge down the center of the sternum (breastbone) where the flight muscles are anchored. Tinamous do not have a ridge on the sternum. The bare legs are sturdy with three short front toes, with the hind toe either elevated or absent. They are approx. 44 mm long and weigh 1 to 2 kg.

The voices of tinamous are among the strongest and most pleasant of any in the American tropics. They consist of loud but melodious whistles.

With short wings, a flat sternum and less strong or efficient muscles, their capacity for flight is limited. However they are capable of taking off fast when approached by predators but cannot fly far. They spend most of their time on the ground, particularly when roosting. Being highly adapted for ground dwelling, tinamous normally walk rapidly (especially the savanna species) and can run with amazing swiftness. If forced into extended running, however, they tire quickly... They are best able to escape notice by standing motionless with the neck extended or by quietly slipping away, making use of available cover. Some species may crouch or even feign death. They rise in flight only when almost stepped upon. Those that live in open terrain sometimes hide in the burrows of other animals (such as armadillos).

The species' main threat comes from habitat loss across its large range, in particular accelerating deforestation in Amazonia: despite its large range it is predicted to lose over 15% of its available habitat in the next three generations

Their principal predators, other than man, are skunks, foxes, wild cats and raptors, such as the red-backed hawk.

Studies indicate a 70% egg loss to predators.

The Great Tinamou has a distinctive call, three short but powerful piping notes which can be heard in its rainforest habitat in the early evenings. Calls of males and females are similar but with discernible (to the human ear) differences.