

Slaty-tailed Slaty-tailed Trogon Trogon

Trogón Cola Oscura
(Spanish)

Trogon massena

Class: Aves
Order: Trogoniformes
Family: Trogonidae
Genus: Trogon

Distribution

Southeastern Mexico,
Central America to
Columbia and Ecuador.

Habitat

Tropical lowland evergreen
forests. Secondary forests in
tropical and lower
subtropical zones.

Food

Trogons feed principally on
insects, other arthropods
and fruit. To a lesser extent
some small vertebrates such
as lizards or frogs are taken.

Reproduction

Males are territorial and
monogamous. He finds a
suitable nesting spot, begins
excavation, and then
advertises for a mate by
singing. Breeding occurs
during the dry season.



The family *Trogonidae* includes trogons and quetzals. They are residents of tropical forests worldwide. The family is thought to have an old world origin. Several species are found in Africa and Asia. The greatest diversity however occurs in Central and South America. *Trogon massena* inhabits areas of Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama.

It is a resident of the forest. It occupies shady middle strata and higher levels of damp tropical forests, but comes lower in adjacent semi-open areas. It can be found in heavily degraded former forests.

Prey is almost always obtained on the wing. The trogon flies from an observation perch to a target animal. Once there it hovers or stalls, snatches the item then returns to its perch to eat it. It also uses this technique to pick fruit. They will also pursue flying insects. More rarely they will shuffle along branches to obtain insects and insect eggs. They are one of the few bird groups to eat “hairy/spiny” caterpillars.

They are cavity nesters. Both continue the construction of the nest. Nests are dug into rotting wood, epiphyte root masses or termite nests. They may be 3 to 15 m above the forest floor. Eggs are laid in the nest cavity. A typical clutch is three white or bluish-white eggs. Incubation is 16 to 21 days and is shared by both parents. The female usually does the night shift.

Development

Young chicks are altricial. Chicks are fed and brooded by both parents. They are fed mostly insects, either whole or regurgitated.

Characteristics

Trogon have distinctive male and female plumage. They are compact birds with short, round wings, broad squared tails and small legs and feet. Bills are short and stout. *Trogon massena* is about 30 cm long and weighs 145 g.

Adaptations

Trogon have heterodactyl toe arrangements. This is quite unique amongst birds. They have very thick tarsi (feet bones). Wing muscle ratio is 22% of the body weight. It can hover while in flight. The ratio of leg muscle is much lower, only 3% the lowest known of any bird.

Status/Threats

IUCN Red List; of Least Concern for this species. Ten species of trogon are considered as Lower Risk: Near Threatened by the IUCN. They are preyed upon by hawks and predatory mammals.

Sightings at Cano Palma

These are seen frequently around the general compound.

References

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, *Trogon massena*. Retrieved May 2nd, 2008 from <http://www.iucnredlist.org/search/details.php/47644/all>
Slaty-tailed Trogon – BirdLife Species Factsheet. Retrieved May 2nd, 2008 from http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/search/species_search.html?action=SpHTMLDetails.asp

At birth they are naked and helpless, totally dependant on parental care. They fledge at three to four weeks. Chicks have to cope with a lack of nest sanitation, refuse does accumulate. Ingestion of noxious insects may account for the unpleasant smell of trogon excrement and flesh. This may help to discourage some predators.

The male has a green back, head and breast, red belly, and orange bill. The female has a dark grey back, head and breast, red belly and only partially orange bill. Most of the upper mandible is black. The tail is uniformly dark grey, and wing coverts also appear grey, although actually finely vermiculated in black and white. The bill is strong and the gape wide, with a slight hook at the end. The wings are short but strong. In spite of their strength they do not fly often, or for great distances. Short flights tend to be direct and swift. Longer flights are slightly undulating. The call is a nasal “uk uk uk”.

They typically perch upright and remain motionless. General lack of frequent activity may be a defense against predation. They shift about on branches keeping their less brightly covered backs towards observers. Their heads, like owls, can turn through 180 degrees. The toe arrangement is different to all other birds. On each foot, two toes point forward and two point back, but unlike other zygodactyls, trogons have their first and second toes, rather than first and fourth directed backward. This may help trogons to cling to the sides of trees. The deeply slotted wings allow them to stall momentarily, without losing flight control. Trogons have been observed landing on dead tree trunks and slapping the wood with their tails, presumably to test the consistency. The word “trogon” is Greek for “nibbling” and refers to the fact they gnaw holes in trees to make their nests.

Though this species is considered fairly common the family’s overall welfare is difficult to estimate. They are especially sensitive to habitat destruction, in part because of their choosiness when it comes to selecting nesting trees. As forests are cut around the globe it is inevitable species will decline, an unfortunate circumstance as trogons are important seed dispersers. In Panama, the slaty-tailed trogon was found to account for 11% of all the dispersed seeds of *Virola surinamensis*. This is known as baboon wood and is an endangered plant.

A pair of slaty-tails built a nest only 15 m from the compound area. They hollowed out a large termite ball situated about 3 m. off the ground.

