

Colombia – Blue-billed Curassow (*Crax alberti*)

Introduction

Wandering through the website last year of the World Land Trust (WLT), the international organisation and charity that exists to “*protect the world’s most biologically significant and threatened habitats acre by acre*”¹ I came across a section that deals with threatened wildlife, including birds at risk; and the work that the WLT is doing to help support that particular species.

The one bird that caught my interest was the Blue-billed Curassow, native of northern Colombia. This is a Critically Endangered bird, native solely to Colombia and which is threatened by human activity, notably:

- Loss of forest habitat at a rate of between 2-7 per cent a year, through conversion to farm land (cocoa, coffee and marijuana);
- Poaching of birds for meat and eggs as well as hunting for the pet trade;
- Loss of habitat through gold mining activities to the East of the range.

In short, the greatest threat to the continued existence of this bird is human economic activity. Its habitat is now limited to five small pockets of northern Colombia, where tropical lowland forests still remain.

Since the Blue-billed Curassow is largely a ground-based bird, I did wonder if it was also subject to threats from forest predators, such as rodents or snakes, which might also have contributed to its decline. However, I then learned that the Curassow does nest in trees with dense foliage essentially as protection against predators.²

In size, the blue-billed Curassow is a large bird, with the male measuring some 32-36 inches tall (83-93cm). The female birds are slightly smaller. The Blue-billed Curassow feeds largely on a selection of fruits, shoots, seeds, worms, insects, snails, crayfish and sometimes carrion. It does feed primarily on the forest floor.³

The Blue-billed Curassow usually breeds once a year, in the dry season (mid-December through to March). The bird lays two to three eggs, which are incubated for 32 days or so. The newly born chicks hatch full-feathered and leave the nest very quickly, though they remain close to their parents for some time. They reach sexual maturity at 3 years old⁴. The WLT reports that in at least one location, there is a second breeding season, which runs from July to September.⁵

¹ Source: <https://www.worldlandtrust.org/who-we-are-2/>

² Source: <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/blue-billed-curassow>

³ Source: <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/blue-billed-curassow> and <https://www.worldlandtrust.org/species/birds/blue-billed-curassow/>

⁴ Source: <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/blue-billed-curassow>

⁵ Source: <https://www.worldlandtrust.org/species/birds/blue-billed-curassow/>

The Red List⁶ estimates the population of Blue-billed Curassow is at between 1,000-2,500 mature birds.



Source: <https://www.worldlandtrust.org/species/birds/blue-billed-curassow/>

The Stamps

Since this bird is wholly native to Colombia, it is to be expected that the stamp issues would primarily from the Colombia national postal authority. Of course, the United Nations Postal Administration might also be interested in featuring the Blue-billed Curassow as part of its “Endangered Wildlife” series.

The first issue (below), which is an airmail stamp, comes from a “Nature Conservation” themed series, possibly of definitives, all of similar design, which started in 1987 and continued through to 1990. There were five other stamps in this set issued at different times through 1988.

Nature Conservation (29 November 1988)



Source: www.birdtheme.org

⁶ Source: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/22678525/127590617>

The second stamp comes from a colourful stamp sheet of nine birds dedicated to the theme of “Endangered Colombian Birds”. The Blue-billed Curassow is located in the top-left corner of the sheet. Milena Maria Monguí y Fernán Pérez Amaya designed the stamps.⁷ I like the design of all nine stamps, which resemble water-coloured paintings or ink drawings and look very effective.

Endangered Colombian Birds (6 April 2010)



Source: www.birdtheme.org

The third and final stamp comes from another sheet, this time devoted to the theme of “Departments of Colombia – Bolivar”. The sheet has 12 stamps, arranged in four rows of three stamps, but with the central stamp being in landscape format and the two outer stamps of each row in portrait. The Blue-billed Curassow stamp is from the bottom left-hand corner of the sheet.

Departments of Colombia – Bolivar (29 October 2020)



Source: www.birdtheme.org

Conservation Efforts

The Fundación Biodiversa is WLT’s partner in Colombia which is collaborating on projects to help the regional conservation of the Blue-billed Curassow. Central to these efforts is the El Silencio Natural Reserve and Research Station, which the Fundación Biodiversa was able to establish in 2012 with the

⁷ Source: www.stampworld.com

financial support of the IUCN Netherlands. Since then, WLT has provided its own funds to allow the Fundación Biodiversa Colombia to purchase further land parcels, expanding the El Silencio reserve.

El Silencio protects an important area of lowland forest and wetlands in the middle-Magdalena valley of Colombia known as Barbacoas, home to a wealth of highly threatened animals, including critically endangered species, one of which is the Blue-billed Curassow.

The Fundación Biodiversa has support from several partners in the El Silencio and other related projects, including: Rainforest Trust, Saving Nature and the American Bird Conservancy, amongst others⁸.

Biodiversa ran a specific project in 2014-17 to help support the Blue-billed Curassow, with the following aims:

- *To establish management agreements with local land owners to increase the forested area and the connectivity among forest remnants in order to favour the mobility and persistence of the Blue-billed Curassow populations in the area;*
- *To advocate for changes in the regional management plans to promote environmentally friendlier production practices in the region;*
- *To increase coordination and participation among local organizations, institutions, and general public to oversight management practices in the region.*⁹

From this project, is some interesting film-footage of the Blue-billed Curassow, which can be viewed here on You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qk6aqZYbpTs>

⁸ Source: <https://www.fundacionbiodiversa.org/wordpress/conservation-of-blue-billed-curassow-2014-2016/>

⁹ Source: <https://www.fundacionbiodiversa.org/wordpress/conservation-of-blue-billed-curassow-2014-2016/>