

## *Circus buffoni* (Long-winged Harrier)

Family: Accipitridae (Hawks, Kites and Eagles)

Order: Falconiformes (Diurnal Birds of Prey)

Class: Aves (Birds)



**Fig. 1.** Longed-winged harrier, *Circus buffoni*.

[[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p\\_p\\_spp=122076](http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p_p_spp=122076), downloaded 9 March 2017]

**TRAITS.** The long-winged harrier is a medium-sized bird of prey, and the female is often larger than the male. Adults are 46-61cm long, and can have a wingspan of 119-155cm (Bierregaard, 2017). They are characterized by long tails, which are narrow and rounded at the end, and have small beaks and long legs (Fig. 1). This species is also noted for its facial feathers resembling that of an owl, which covers their ear openings, and used to help locate prey in tall grass. The upperparts of the male are mostly black, with grey and black banded wings and tails. The females have a similar pattern, with brown replacing much of the black. There are two types of birds found within this species; the light morph which has a white belly, and the dark morph which had a black belly. Their heads are almost entirely black, with white throats and eye stripes.

**DISTRIBUTION.** Native to northern and central South America (Fig. 2), and also in Trinidad and Tobago. Sightings further north of Trinidad are not widely documented (Neotropical Birds Online, 2010).

**HABITAT AND ACTIVITY.** Typically found in lowland tropical areas, including wet fields, marshes, grasslands, savannas and anywhere with low vegetation where it can catch prey (Neotropical Birds Online, 2010). They prefer open country with little tree cover, but will settle for sparsely forested areas if given no choice. Nesting is on the ground, like other harriers. It is a

migratory bird in the southern parts of its range (Fig. 2). Compared to other raptors, *C. buffoni* is considered more active, and spends quite some time flying and looking for prey (Jimenez and Jaksic, 1988).

**FOOD AND FEEDING.** Its diet mainly consists of small mammals, but it also preys on small reptiles, amphibians, and smaller birds. It preys on both terrestrial and aquatic animals. Hunting is usually done anytime of the day between sunrise and sunset. The hunting patterns of the long-winged harrier are affected by weather conditions (Simmons, 2000).

**POPULATION ECOLOGY.** *C. buffoni* is generally a solitary bird (Global Raptor Information Network, 2017). It is a migratory bird in some countries like upper Uruguay and some parts of Brazil, but in most parts of Brazil and in Trinidad and Tobago it is a year round resident. Breeding takes place in the summer months, and eggs are laid in June, usually ranging from 2-4 eggs. The eggs are about 45mm in length and can weigh 25.4-27.7g.

**BEHAVIOUR.** The name *Circus* means the hawk that circles (Simmons, 2000). Another behavioural trait which is not only characteristic of the long-winged harrier, but to other harriers as well, is the aerial transfer of prey, usually done by a male to his mate. This is in the latter part of the mating season, where the female would leave the nest as the male approaches, and position herself so that she is slightly lower and behind him, and he would drop the captured prey where her claws are expected to receive it.

**APPLIED BIOLOGY.** The number of individuals of this species is currently decreasing, but it is listed on the IUCN Red List as Least Concern, mainly due to its large range, and as it does not fit the criteria to be listed as Vulnerable. Its numbers are declining at a slow rate (BirdLife International, 2017).

## REFERENCES

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- Jimenez, J.E. and Jaksic, F.M. (1988). Ecology and behavior of southern South American Cinereous Harriers, *Circus cinereus*. [http://rchn.biologiachile.cl/pdfs/1988/2/Jimenez\\_%26\\_Jaksic\\_1988.pdf](http://rchn.biologiachile.cl/pdfs/1988/2/Jimenez_%26_Jaksic_1988.pdf).
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- Simmons, R., (2000). Harriers of the World: Their Behaviour and Ecology. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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**Fig. 2.** Geographic distribution of the long-winged harrier.

[<http://www.hbw.com/node/53026>, downloaded 8 March 2017]

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