

Geranospiza caerulescens (Crane Hawk)

Family: Accipitridae (Hawks, Kites and Eagles)

Order: Falconiformes (Diurnal Birds of Prey)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Crane hawk, *Geranospiza caerulescens*.

[<http://www.hbw.com/ibc/photo/crane-hawk-geranospiza-caerulescens/perched-bird>, downloaded 7 March 2017]

TRAITS. The crane hawk is a bird of prey with an intertarsal joint that allows flexible forward and backward bending of the legs (Burton, 2008). Males and females are similar in length, ranging from 43-50cm. The crane hawk has small feet, with long outer toes and short inner toes. Its iris is deep red, the lores and cere (skin between the eye, nostril and beak) are dull grey, its legs are bright red, and the bill is black (Blake, 1977). An adult crane hawk has a small head and bill; a long body, tail and legs; and at rest, its wings are rounded. The crown, face, breast and belly are grey in colour, while its flight feathers are black (Fig. 1). Its underwing has a white crescent on the mid-primaries during flight. Its voice sounds like a sharp whistle. An immature crane hawk has pale buff underparts, a grey crown, thick white streaks on its face, and its upperparts are similar to the adult (Kenefick et al., 2011).

DISTRIBUTION. This species is widespread throughout the Amazon Basin (Fig. 2), from northern Mexico to eastern Bolivia and northern Argentina (Ouellet, 1991). It is accidental in the United States of America (IUCN, 2017) and Trinidad, but absent from Tobago (Kenefick et al., 2011).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. This diurnal species is found mostly in tropical lowlands like mangrove lagoons and open woodland. It also occurs in swamp forest, and areas with streams and ponds (Blake, 1977). Several sightings across different locations in Trinidad have been recorded. In 2001, a single crane hawk was recorded from Wallerfield, which was the first documented sighting in Trinidad (Kenefick, 2005). In December 2005 a single crane hawk was seen flying in Freeport, and in January 2006 one was also seen flying around the Arima bypass, possibly disturbed by nearby habitat destruction (Kenefick, 2008). In 2014, three single crane hawks were photographed in Sangre Chiquito (North Manzanilla) and Guapo (Point Fortin) (Kenefick, 2015). Although the crane hawk is mostly found near water in forested environments, its low-profile flight behaviour and dark-coloured plumage makes it a research subject on which data is difficult to gather (Sutter, 2000).

FOOD AND FEEDING. The crane hawk feeds on small vertebrates like rodents, lizards, birds, frogs, bats and snakes, and arthropods. It utilizes its flexible intertarsal joint to obtain prey from holes and cracks. Although there is limited data on the crane hawk's behaviour and diet, one study indicated that rodents were the most common prey. It was assumed that many of the prey items, which were nocturnal species, were extracted from daytime hiding areas. Various styles of hunting behaviour of the crane hawk were also recorded; some follow prey on foot on large tree branches, while others search in holes in tree trunks, explore bromeliads, palm leaf axils, leaf litter of the forest floor, and shallow puddles. Some also scaled trees and used their legs to reach in holes while balancing with their wings extended (Fig. 3). Most crane hawks rested quietly on low branches while scanning the forest floor for prey (Sutter et al., 2001).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. Very limited data is available on population in this species. The total population is estimated to be 500,000 to 4,999,999 individuals. However, due to continuous destruction of habitat, there is a suspected decline in the population, indicating that the current population trend would be decreasing. Research shows that there are no extreme fluctuations (IUCN, 2017).

REPRODUCTION. Observations of courtship behaviour indicated that the male would fly around a perched female and then perch close to her. This is followed by calling of both male and female, in response to each other (Ouellet, 1991). Crane hawks produce clutches containing one or two eggs. Egg-laying and hatching occurred mostly in the dry season, while fledging happened at the beginning of the rainy season. Nest sites, which were usually high in trees, were often reoccupied. In one study, 80% of eggs hatched, while 50% of those hatchlings grew into fledged young. Females performed most of the incubation and nest-care, while males mostly hunted for prey. At least one adult was almost always present on the nest during the incubation period, which would last a minimum of 39 days. For the juvenile crane hawk, the dependency period on parents post-fledging was estimated as 17 weeks (Sutter, 2000).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. The crane hawk is listed as Least Concern since it has a very large range. Although the population trend seems to be decreasing, it is not a sufficiently rapid decline to be deemed as approaching the thresholds for Vulnerable. There is currently no apparent major threat to crane hawks, and no conservation actions are urgently necessary (IUCN, 2017).

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Fig. 2. Crane hawk geographic distribution.

[<http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-3.RLTS.T22695729A93526020.en>, downloaded 7 March 2017]



Fig. 3. Crane hawk hunting for prey.

[<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/af/b0/06/afb006f69e533b77d92a9f8a993ece7e.jpg>, downloaded 8 March 2017]

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