

Pipile pipile (Trinidad Piping-guan or Pawi)

Family: Cracidae (Guans, Chacalacas and Curassows)

Order: Galliformes (Pheasants, Grouse and Guans)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Trinidad piping-guan, *Pipile pipile*.

[<http://www.ahailey.f9.co.uk/pawi.htm>, downloaded 12 November 2012]

TRAITS. The Trinidad piping-guan, or pawi by which it is locally known, is a large turkey-like bird whose length is 610 mm and wing length is 350-363 mm. Most of its body and wings possess a black glossy colour with areas of white on its wings (www.scsb.org). Their bill is bluish in colour at the base with a black tip. They also have a large shaggy crest that has both black and white feathers mixed together. A pale blue colour that has a bright appearance can be seen on its face while their throat is bare with the fleshy wattle that is found on the throat is of dark blue colour (www.scsb.org). Their legs are a bright pinkish red (Pawi Study Group, 2012). There is no distinct difference between the male and female pawi in terms of coloration. Their only differentiation is that of the male being slightly larger than the female as well as the size of their dewlap but this is uncertain (Pawi Study Group, 2012). Now considered to be separate from the similar blue-throated piping-guan of Venezuela and northern South America, *Pipile cumanensis*; both were formerly known as *Aburria pipile*.

ECOLOGY. The Trinidad piping-guan can be found distributed mainly in the remote areas of the east side of the Northern Range in Trinidad and Tobago. In the Northern Range, the places in which it can be seen are in Madamas, Aripo, Cumaca/Platanai, Hollis Dam, Salybia, Grande Riviere. Some were also spotted in the Trinity Hills of the Southern Range (James & Hislop, 1997). This species is one that is endemic (belonging exclusively) to Trinidad (Hayes et al., 2009). They dwell in canopies of the forest greater than 5 m above the ground and were usually seen on trees which were growing at the perimeter of the forest (Hayes et al., 2009).

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. The Trinidad piping-guan is believed to be monogamous (having one partner) during the mating season. They are expected to lay 2 or 3 cream coloured eggs in a nest shaped like that of a platform. This nest is also a shallow one. One was observed in a coffee tree but there have been reports of such nests being found on the ground or in low vines that are tangled (Pawi Study Group, 2012). These eggs hatch between 28-32 days. Both parents tend to the young providing them with food and protection until they grow to their adult size (Pawi Study Group, 2012) (Fig. 2). Pawi were usually seen in small groups, mostly of 2 birds, or they were seen by themselves; later groups split up or joined together (Hayes et al., 2009).

ACTIVITY. These birds were mostly active during the early morning and late afternoon. Active birds that were easily observed in canopies and the crown of emergent trees, the ornamental nutmeg tree (*Myristica fragrans*) during the early hours of the morning disappeared amongst the trees by mid-morning. During the early hours of the morning, the birds spent most of their time perched on trees aware of their surroundings or preening while the least amount of time was spent drinking and flapping their wings while sitting on the tree (Hayes et al., 2009). In the late afternoon, most of their time was also spent aware of their surroundings while they were in the trees and the least amount of time they were drinking water (Hayes et al., 2009). They were also observed roosting in the night twice, once in a group and once alone.

FORAGING BEHAVIOUR. Foraging took place between the early hours of the morning and late afternoon, after sunrise and before sunset. They usually searched for food by themselves and in small groups, looking for fruits, mainly the ornamental nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*) and wild nutmeg (*Virola surinamensis*). The confirmation of small insects being a part of their diet has not been made yet (Hayes et al., 2009.) One bird feeding another was observed twice in which the larger bird walked picked a leaf and gave it to the smaller one that followed. Another such pattern was observed when a bird fed another several times while they were in a mango tree feeding. It was difficult to tell though whether the ones being fed were offspring or the partner of the bird doing the feeding. To quench their thirst, the pawi was observed drinking from epiphytic bromeliads that was located in the canopy of a tree (Fig. 4). They were not observed drinking from a stream which was located not too far away (Hayes et al., 2009).

COMMUNICATION. The Trinidad piping-guan communicated vocally via song at various moments during the early hours of the morning (5-200 minutes after sunrise) and late afternoon, approximately two minutes before sunset (Fig. 5). Their song comprised of a series of notes that had succeeding whistles that were slightly higher than those before (Hayes et al., 2009). These songs were sung by a single bird even though there were other birds in the surroundings. The song was continued even if the bird moved from one tree to another. These songs (an average of 2.7 songs) took up one minute. There was one time where the bird continued its song for

approximately 30 minutes which was interrupted by drumming displays. Drumming displays are another form of communication. These are produced mechanically when the wings beat while the bird glides between two trees (Hayes et al., 2009). In addition to the single song uttered by pawis, a variety of soft calls during social interactions also took place (Hayes et al., 2009).

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR. A courtship dance is displayed by the male towards the female in the canopy which is inclusive of vocalizations. It has been observed that mating occurs on the ground as well. This period of mating goes on for a lengthy period and throughout this time, the male remains with the female. It was observed that the piping-guan would occasionally raise their crest to one another. During this time, they vocalized and then “attacked” one another before separating (Hayes et al., 2009). This could be a behaviour in which males are competing against each other but the exact reason for this is unknown. The nest is built on the ground or in low tangles of vines.

JUVENILE BEHAVIOUR. Not much is known about the young pawi, except that consequent to being laid in a shallow nest, surrounded by one or two other cream coloured eggs, they hatch within 28-32 days (Fig. 3). They are born precocial, meaning that they are active and able to move freely hence they have feathers and are almost fully mobile (Pawi Study Group, 2012).

ANTIPREDATOR BEHAVIOUR. A bird on its own showed off its crest during a 19 minute period of singing without the presence of another bird after which a drumming display was given and it flew away. This may have been as a result of seeing a threat while singing and so it left. They almost never interacted with other species of birds except on one occasion where one piping-guan came into the presence of some orange winged parrots (*Amazona amazonica*). If threatened by other birds for example, the piping-guan would just move to another branch or tree (Hayes et al., 2009). Also, with threats such as humans, the birds would either accommodate them by staying where they are or fly away to another location. For example, these birds would still feed and forage in certain areas even though farmers were there tending to crops or tourists were present. If humans were underneath where they were, they would move in between the trees (Hayes et al., 2009). Hence they are not bothered essentially and become habituated and this may be a reason for their endangerment of being hunted. For areas that were cleared even though they could not forage, they would still fly over the area.

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. An adult with two juveniles.

[<http://pawistudygroup.yolasite.com/pawi-page.php>, downloaded 12 November 2012]



Fig. 3. A Trinidad piping-guan's egg and nest.

[<http://pawistudygroup.yolasite.com/pawi-page.php>, downloaded 12 November 2012]



Fig. 4. A pawi drinking from an epiphyte.

[<http://pawistudygroup.yolasite.com/pawi-page.php>, downloaded 12 November 2012]



Fig. 5. A Trinidad piping-guan vocalizing.

[<http://pawistudygroup.yolasite.com/pawi-page.php>, downloaded 12 November, 2012]