

Pseudastur albicollis (White Hawk)

Family: Accipitridae (Hawks, Kites and Eagles)

Order: Falconiformes (Diurnal Birds of Prey)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. White hawk, *Pseudastur albicollis*.

[http://www.avesderapinabrazil.com/leucopternis_albicollis.htm, downloaded 14 February 2017]

TRAITS. *Pseudastur albicollis* is approximately 46-56cm in length (Wikipedia, 2017). The sexes are similar however, the females tend to be larger than the males, where the males are approximately 600-650g as compared to females which are 710-855g. *P. albicollis* has characteristic features of white plumage on the majority of its body; however, the upper wing is stained black. The white hawk has a short tail which is black, tipped with a white band (Fig. 1). The hawk's bill is black and its legs are yellow (Menq, 2017). The white hawk was previously known as *Leucopternis albicollis*.

DISTRIBUTION. The white hawk is widespread over most of the Amazon Basin, Central America, and South America, including Mexico, Bolivia and Peru and Trinidad (Fig. 2). *P. albicollis* is a bird of lowland forested areas, and is non-migratory in all its range (Menq, 2017).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. *P. albicollis* is diurnal in activity and usually dwells in the lowlands and foothills of evergreen neotropical forested areas of hilly terrain, as well as sub-tropical well-watered regions. The white hawk can often be found perched for prolonged periods on a tree stub near the forest edge (Fig. 3). It frequently soars in circles at approximately 50-100 m above the canopy at mid-morning, however it avoids soaring over open spaces (Global Raptor Information Network, 2017).

FOOD AND FEEDING. The white hawk is a predator of both vertebrates and invertebrates. The *P. albicollis* diet consists mainly of reptiles, including lizards (Fig. 4) and snakes up to approximately 38cm long (Global Raptor Information Network, 2017). The white hawk has a marked preference for coral snakes (*Micrurus fulvius*), which it devours whole. However, at times the white hawk may feed on a young or weak bird, as well as large insects or amphibians. The white hawk watches from a perched position within the forest, and it also listens to acoustic cues when foraging and responds opportunistically to situations such as animals in distress (Whitacre, 2013). Additionally, the white hawk is known to have a foraging association with tufted capuchin monkeys (*Cebus apella*) as well as South American coatis (*Nasua nasua*). There may be indirect competition that exists between these species for food resources, however the association between these species have been believed to be that of a commensal relationship; whereby the monkey and/or coatis is least affected, however the white hawk greatly benefits as it can catch prey. *Cebus apella* and/or *Nasua nasua* moves through the forest in groups and are accompanied by *Pseudastur albicollis*, which soars and its able to make observations above and can easily swoop down to catch the prey which have been flushed out by the troops of primates (Zhang and Lixin, 1999).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. Very little information has been published about the species' population ecology. However, *P. albicollis* usually is a solitary bird and hunts at low levels. It soars high above the forested area, occasionally screeching as a territorial act. There is an estimated density of 0.25 pairs/100 ha. The longevity of a white hawk is approximately 20 years in captivity (Menq, 2017).

REPRODUCTION. *P. albicollis* displays courtship and nest-building in February, and by March the process of egg laying and incubation begins. The clutch size of a white hawk is one egg, approximately 54.4 mm x 43.2 mm. The egg is usually of a bluish-white colour with light brown marks distributed evenly over the entire surface of the egg (Global Raptor Information Network, 2017). The incubation period is 34-38 days, whereas the nestling period is on average 73 days, when the young bird is fed by both male and female hawks. The nest itself is cup-shaped, usually made from coarse sticks and dead or green leaves. These nests are built on average 22.2 m above ground in a tree, often being placed in a mass of epiphytes (Cisneros-Heredia, 2006).

BEHAVIOUR. Adult white hawks are wary but juveniles are more approachable (Whitacre, 2013). *P. albicollis* communicate acoustically, by a variation of screeching sounds which indicate particular situations. Such situations include flight, where a screech is made to announce/mark its territory, additionally, females screech to their male companions, signalling for the need of food at the nest (Spaans et al., 2015).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. This species is listed as Least Concern since it has an extremely large geographical distribution (IUCN, 2016). The estimated population size has been decreasing over the years because of human activities which results in habitat loss, thus rendering the white hawk vulnerable. The population of *P. albicollis* is dependent on neotropical evergreen forests for habitat. The primary threats to these forested areas are due to logging of mature forests, and deforestation as means of providing land space for agriculture and livestock production (Whitacre, 2013).

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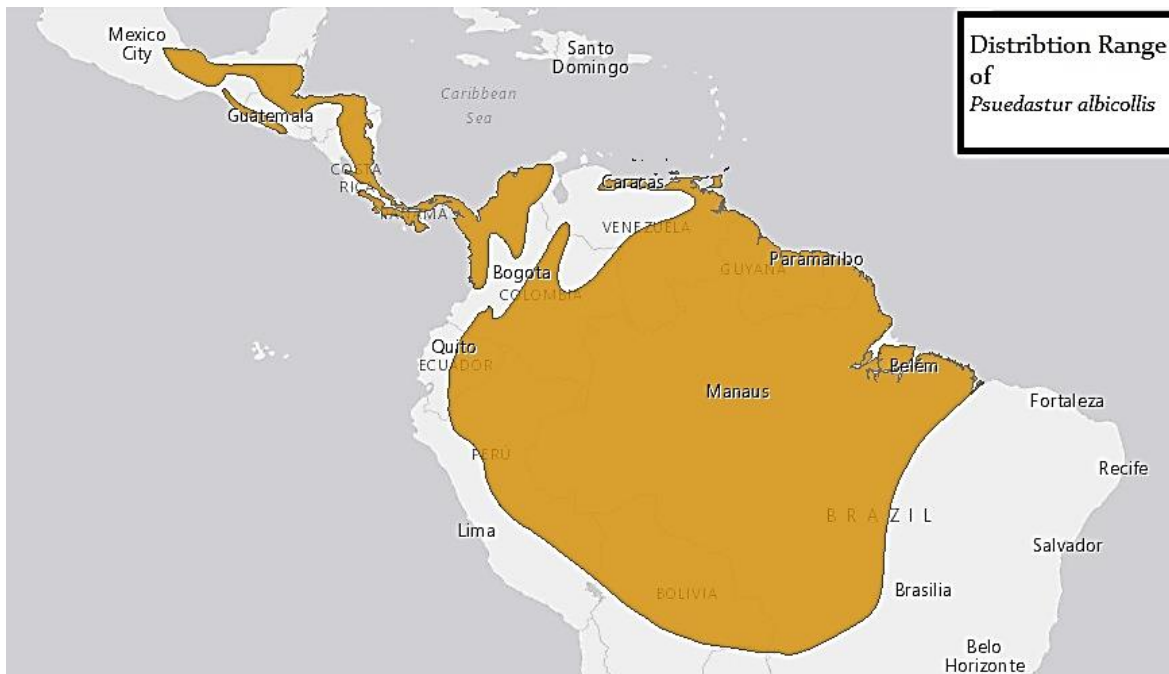


Fig. 2. Geographic distribution of white hawk.

[<http://maps.iucnredlist.org/map.html?id=22695786>, downloaded 21 February 2017]



Fig. 3. *P. albicollis* perched on dead tree stump.

[<http://www.arthurgrosset.com/sabirds/whitehawk.html>, downloaded 2 March 2017]



Fig. 4. *Pseudastur albicollis* feeding on a lizard.

[<http://mendobrew.com/blog/page/19/>, downloaded 2 March 2017]

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