

Tangara mexicana (Turquoise Tanager)

Family: Thraupidae (Tanagers and Honeycreepers)

Order: Passeriformes (Perching Birds)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Turquoise tanager, *Tangara mexicana*.

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/image/image_gallery.jpg?uuid=7445c458-4a04-4d78-9c4d-d84f4878ef5e&groupId=11003, downloaded 11 March 2017]

TRAITS. *Tangara mexicana* is one of almost 50 species of *Tangara* and has five subspecies (Mallet-Rodrigues and Gonzaga, 2015). The turquoise tanager has a bright blue chest and face (Fig. 1). Length ranges from 12-14cm and weight from 17-26g (Morochó, 2017). It has a dark pointed beak and long tail, the primary (wing) feathers are turquoise, with other feathers being blue and/or black, and yellow belly. The wing length is approximately 7cm and the bill depth is 5cm. The five subspecies have little variation. Although the name is *Tangara mexicana*, this species is not found in Mexico.

DISTRIBUTION. Widespread in lowland humid forests of South America, in Colombia, Venezuela, Trinidad and in the Amazon basin (Fig. 2). The subspecies *T. m. vieilloti* is indigenous to Trinidad, and *T. m. media* is found in Venezuela and far northern Brazil (Sproule, 2006).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. The turquoise tanager is commonly found in partially open habitats such as forest edges and river island forests. It mainly feeds on fruits and small arthropods. The mechanism utilized in feeding is perching. Small fruits are swallowed whole while larger fruits are picked apart (Fig. 3). As for arthropods, turquoise tanagers have been observed searching on bare branches of tall trees (Morocho, 2017). They feed in groups, commonly of 5 or 6 birds, keeping close to each other. They have not been found with other species in mixed flocks. The females are less active than the males, and their colour is not as bold. These birds are prey to mainly snakes, which eat their eggs and young offspring.

REPRODUCTION. Reproduction occurs year-round. The female builds the nest approximately 6m above ground. Eggs are white with brown spots (Fig. 4). Female turquoise tanagers incubate the eggs for a period of 12-14 days. Offspring are pink with patches of grey on the back and a yellow belly, and blue feathers are seen from around 10 days onwards (Fig. 5).

BEHAVIOUR. Mated pairs have been observed feeding each other. They sleep a short distance apart on high branches. It has also been observed that mating pairs break away from their groups to reproduce, then return to the group after the eggs have been hatched, to feed the offspring. Mating calls have been recorded where the male has a lower frequency than the female, 10 kHz and 15 kHz respectively. The mating calls have been observed to be given in a rapid duet manner, represented as 'tzing'.

APPLIED ECOLOGY. The turquoise tanager is listed as Least Concern. Deforestation may have little effect on the population size of the turquoise tanager, as although it occupies open forested areas it can also grow in garden and pastures.

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. Turquoise tanager year-round distribution.

[<http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/map/?cn=Turquoise%20Tanager&sn=Tangara%20mexicana&sc=turtan1&species=610636>, downloaded 11 March 2017]



Fig. 3. Turquoise tanager feeding on mango.

[https://farm8.static.flickr.com/7289/9540507936_a20e7182b3_b.jpg, downloaded 11 March 2017]



Fig. 4. Turquoise tanager eggs.

[<http://www.avisoc.co.uk/wp-content/gallery/birds/v112n4-the-turquoise-tanager-nest-with-eggs.jpg>, downloaded 11 March 2017]



Fig. 5. Turquoise tanager at 11 days after hatching.

[<http://www.avisoc.co.uk/wp-content/gallery/birds/v112n4-the-turquoise-tanager-chick-in-nest-11-days.jpg>, downloaded 11 March 2017]