

Thraupis episcopus (Blue-grey Tanager)

Family: Thraupidae (Tanagers and Honeycreepers)

Order: Passeriformes (Perching Birds)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Blue-grey tanager, *Thraupis episcopus*.

[<https://www.beautyofbirds.com/bluegraytanagers.html>, downloaded 26 February 2017]

TRAITS. Adult male blue-grey tanagers adults are light bluish-grey, with a bright blue on the tail and wings, light blue iridescence on the head, and a dark blue on the back (Fig. 1) (Rainforest Alliance, 2012). Females and juveniles are a dull blue overall. Length of the species ranges between 16-18cm, including a 5cm tail, and they weigh 30-40g. The bill is thick and short in both sexes (Wikipedia, 2017). They are kept as song birds for their squeaky twittering, recognized by the ‘tsuup’ and ‘tsee’ notes (Johnson, 2009). In Trinidad and Tobago this species is also known as the blue jean.

DISTRIBUTION. *Thraupis episcopus* is native to South America from the south of Mexico to the north of Brazil and northeast to Bolivia (Fig. 2). It is non-migratory, but has been introduced to southern Florida and Peru (Wikipedia, 2017). The species’ range globally is approximately 7,900,000 km² (PlanetofBirds.com, 2011).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. The blue-grey tanager occupies mostly semi-open spaces such as forested areas or woodlands but is not specific to these areas as it tends to colonize open areas,

even those that are developed. It is a very social creature that is quickly adaptable to human presence (PlanetofBirds.com, 2011). The blue-grey tanager divides its time between the ground and trees. They travel in pairs or small groups, and may join large flocks of birds of different species while foraging for food. Although it is a non-migratory species, *Thraupis episcopus* do travel with single-species flocks for short distances, and are primarily diurnal (Schulenberg, 2010). The male songs tend to be longer and of higher pitch while the female's song is shorter and not as excited (Hilty, 2017).

FOOD AND FEEDING. Feeds mainly on fruits (Fig. 3), including cultivated fruits such as papaya, nectar from flowers, and insects. They eat pieces of fruit on the branch or take small fruits to the nest. *Thraupis episcopus* stalk their insect prey by hopping from branch to branch, inspecting the undersides of leaves on branches above and upper sides of leaves on the same branch (PlanetofBirds.com, 2011).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. It has a stable population of 5,000,000-50,000,000 worldwide. *Thraupis episcopus* is referred to as 'common' due to this large population (PlanetofBirds.com, 2011). In Trinidad and Tobago, it is bred in captivity and sold for use in bird singing competitions held by the locals.

REPRODUCTION. March to July is the breeding season, and most nests are well-hidden in vegetation (Rainforest Alliance, 2012). The female produces a clutch of about 1-3 greyish-blue eggs in a cup-shaped nest made of leaf strips, lined with moss and spider webs, resting on a fork-shaped branch. The eggs are incubated for 12-14 days. Once the eggs have hatched, the nestlings (Fig. 4) are fed by both parents (Rainforest Alliance, 2012). They remain in the nest for 14-20 days after which they become fledglings (Johnson, 2009), learn to fly and leave the nest, but are still fed by the parents (Fig. 5). The maximum lifespan is 9.5 years in the wild (Budovsky, 2013).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. *Thraupis episcopus* is listed as Least Concern since 2004 because there was not a decline greater than 30% in the last 3 generations (up to 2012), but populations are threatened by deforestation (IUCN, 2017). The blue-grey tanager is bred in captivity in large numbers.

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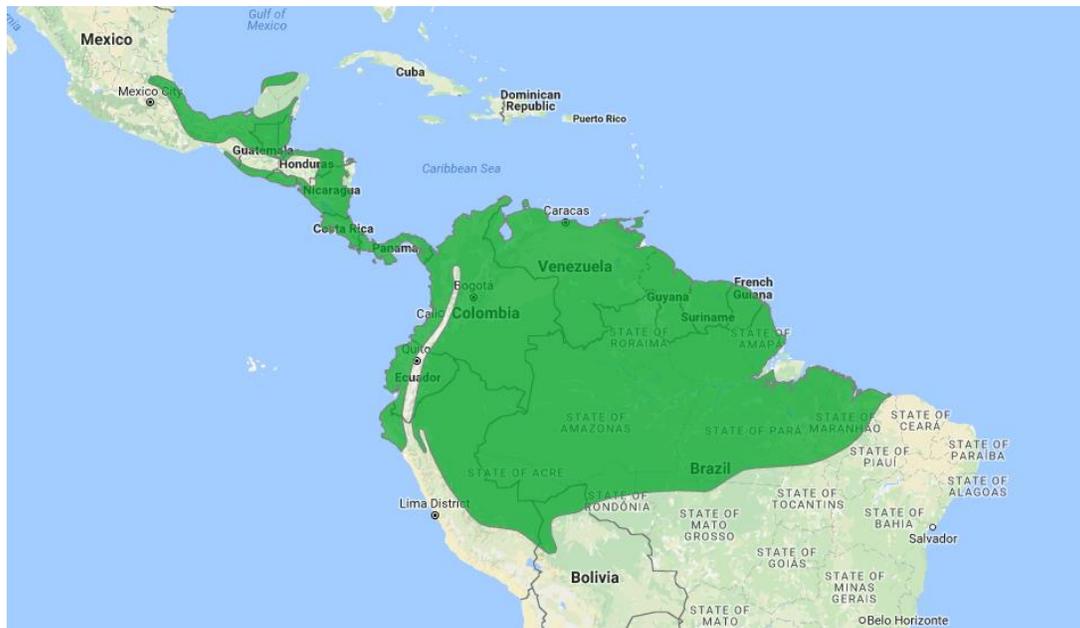


Fig. 2. Blue-grey tanager geographic distribution.

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p_p_spp=599756, downloaded 26 February 2017]



Fig. 3. Blue-grey tanager feeding on fruit.

[<https://www.aviary.org/animals/blue-grey-tanager>, downloaded 26 February 2017]



Fig. 4. Nestling blue-grey tanager.

[<https://www.aviary.org/animals/blue-grey-tanager>, downloaded 26 February 2017]



Fig. 5. Adult blue-grey tanager feeding its young.

[<http://www.hbw.com/node/61634> on 8 March 2017, downloaded 26 February 2017]

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