

## *Turdus fumigatus* (Cocoa Thrush)

Family: Turdidae (Thrushes)

Order: Passeriformes (Perching Birds)

Class: Aves (Birds)



**Fig. 1.** Cocoa thrush, *Turdus fumigatus*.

[[www.wildlifeontheweb.co.uk/passerinesStoZ/index12.html](http://www.wildlifeontheweb.co.uk/passerinesStoZ/index12.html), downloaded 5 March 2017]

**TRAITS.** The cocoa thrush is also called merle cacao in French (Le Dantec, 2012). Both male and female have similar appearances. The cocoa thrush is 22-24cm in length and has a dark rufous brown colour above and a lighter rufous brown on its underside (Johnson, 2017). The rufous (reddish) colour is particularly on the bird's back and rump, shoulders, as well as wings and it has a plain brown colour on its head and neck (Fig. 1). The wing's undersurface is covered in shades of orange and its tail is brown with a white undersurface that has orange brown edges and tips. It has a brown bill and varying amounts of white colour on its buff belly as well as its throat, which has in addition streaks of brown. The immature thrushes differ in having small orange spots on the head and at the back of the neck (Clement and Hathway, 2010).

**DISTRIBUTION.** Common in Trinidad and Venezuela, Colombia, the lesser Antilles specifically St Vincent and Grenada, Guyana, Surinam and east to northern Brazil (Fig. 2) (Clement and Hathway, 2010).

**HABITAT AND ACTIVITY.** Found in forests and plantations, especially cocoa plantations. Forested areas include lowland forest below 1000m. In Venezuela, they can be found in mountainous forests of both tropical and subtropical zones to about 1800m as well as open woodlands, forest by rivers and streams, forest edges and clearings, and near streams or swamps (Clement and Hathway, 2010).

**FOOD AND FEEDING.** Feeds on or near the ground (Hotspot Birding, 2017), mainly on invertebrates such as ants and their larvae and on earthworms, fruits (Fig. 3) and berries. They also acquire their food by climbing on branches of fruit trees, and wiggle the tail sideways when they land (Le Dantec, 2012).

**POPULATION ECOLOGY.** They usually live individually or paired with another in lower vegetation or on the ground (Clement and Hathway, 2010). There are many of them in Trinidad, St Vincent and the Lesser Antilles and are locally common in Venezuela north of the Orinoco. It has a low reproductive rate (Le Dantec, 2012).

**REPRODUCTION.** The breeding season occurs every month of the year except September. Their nests are mostly occupied between the months of February to July in Trinidad. The nest is built 5m above ground in a tree or stump and sometimes at the top of tree ferns, and in rare instances on a slight slope on land. It is made with plant material and mud that keeps the structure together, and the inner wall has a lining of thin roots. They lay 2 or 3 eggs, and in rare instances 4 eggs, that are a greenish blue colour and speckled with brown-red spots. The female incubates the eggs over a period of 13-14 days. After the eggs hatch and the young are covered in feathers, they can leave the nest 13-15 days after hatching (Le Dantec, 2012).

**BEHAVIOUR.** They are shy birds that hide when they are disturbed. In Trinidad, however they are not shy but instead are submissive and interact with people who feed them (Choco Story, 2017). Cocoa thrushes can be frequently seen in ditches along the roadside in Trinidad. They climb in fruiting trees and forage on forest floors (Fig. 4) (Clement and Hathway, 2010). To contact each other they emit a rough “bak” sound and during flight a “chuck” or “cluck” sound. Their singing consists of several musical phrases such as “teeew-to”, “mi yes,mi yes” and ending with “sree” with “deww eh dew eh” and “wee-a-wee-a-wee-a” in the middle of their song. Their cry of alarm is a fast and squeaky “shattering catshat” or a “kik-ik-ik-ik” (Le Dantec, 2012).

**APPLIED ECOLOGY.** This species is listed as Least Concern because even though the population appears to be declining, it does not decline at a rapid rate to be considered vulnerable (IUCN, 2017). It is not a species that is under threat (Le-Dantec, 2012).

## REFERENCES

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Posted online: 2017



**Fig. 2.** Geographic distribution of the cocoa thrush, by country.

[[www.oiseaux.net/maps/cocoa.thrush.html](http://www.oiseaux.net/maps/cocoa.thrush.html), downloaded 9 March 2017]



**Fig. 3.** Cocoa thrush feeding on a shrub.

[[www.oiseaux.net/photos/steve.garvie/merle.cacao.2.html#espece](http://www.oiseaux.net/photos/steve.garvie/merle.cacao.2.html#espece), downloaded 9 March 2017]



**Fig. 4.** Cocoa thrush foraging on the ground.

[[www.hbw.com/ibc/species/cocoa-thrush-turdus-fumigatus#photos](http://www.hbw.com/ibc/species/cocoa-thrush-turdus-fumigatus#photos), downloaded 9 March 2017]

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