

Turdus nudigenis (Spectacled Thrush or Big-eye Grieve)

Family: Turdidae (Thrushes)

Order: Passeriformes (Perching Birds)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Spectacled thrush, *Turdus nudigenis*.

[<http://www.hbw.com/species>, downloaded 5 September 2016]

TRAITS. This bird is known as big-eye grieve in Trinidad. It was also known as the bare-eyed thrush, however there is another African thrush species with the same common name, thus it is now known internationally as the spectacled thrush. *Turdus nudigenis* is about 23-24cm in length and weighs 60g. It is the only thrush in South America and the Lesser Antilles with a conspicuous bare yellow-orange eye ring (Hilty, 2003); the yellow part of the eye is skin that has no feathers. It also has a yellowish bill (Fig. 1). This thrush has a plain colour, it is greyish olive above, and the underparts are brownish grey with a throat that has dusky streaks (Bond, 1993). Males and females look alike, however the adult female has slightly paler underparts than the male (Clement and Hathway, 2000). *Turdus nudigenis* juveniles have flecks above and spots on their underparts (Hilty, 2003). They also have a thinner eye ring than their parents.

ECOLOGY. *Turdus nudigenis* can be found in the Lesser Antilles and South America mainly Colombia, Venezuela and Brazil. They are also very common in Trinidad and Tobago (Kenefick et al., 2011). The spectacled thrush resides in open habitats such as orchards, gardens, savannas and urban areas that are bushy and have trees (Hilty, 2003). This bird is widely distributed over Trinidad, from the sea level to altitudes of 600m (Snow and Snow, 1963). Spectacled thrushes have been observed to conduct foraging and nest building activities from early dawn until dusk. They are mostly arboreal and will come to the ground to forage on small invertebrates and earthworms. It has also been observed collecting twigs and other materials for nest building. There is considerable overlap in habitat and diet with other thrushes resident in Trinidad (Snow and Snow, 1963).

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. This bird is mostly solitary and hardly seen in groups (Hilty, 2003). Where food is abundant it has been observed foraging with different species of birds such as tanagers. *Turdus nudigenis* is a shy species but in Trinidad and Tobago it is tamer (Fig. 2). Once it does not feel threatened by humans etc. it has been observed to approach bird feeders (Fig. 3) and take food from tables located outside. This thrush relies more on visual contact rather than song with regards to intraspecific relations (Snow and Snow, 1963). Both males and females are involved in nest building and both parents care for their nestlings (Borgo, 2014).

ACTIVITY. *Turdus nudigenis* breeds in open habitats. Outside its breeding season it may forage in secondary forests (Snow and Snow, 1963). The colour of this thrush is related to its habitat and helps it to blend in with its surroundings as well as with other different species of birds that also inhabit semi-open areas (Snow and Snow, 1963). Most times this bird tends to be inconspicuous. It can be seen in flowering or fruiting trees or hopping about on lawns or in gardens as well as residential areas (Hilty, 2003). The spectacled thrush has been observed to sing in the cover of trees whereas North American thrushes sing from exposed perches (Snow and Snow, 1963).

FORAGING BEHAVIOUR. The spectacled thrush forages near or on the ground (Hilty, 2003). This bird enjoys many food sources such as a variety of fruits (Fig. 3), berries, insects and earthworms. As the diet of this thrush is catholic it does not have any problems gaining food sources which are numerous locally and in South America. These birds have been observed to use their bills to dig soft dirt to get small arthropods or worms. They will also perch in fruiting trees such as papaya and eat the ripe fruit (Hilty, 2003). It can also be seen perching on flowering trees and picking off small bugs from the leaves. They feed on soft dirt, hopping around and eating the various invertebrates found. If they are perching in a tree, they suddenly dive down and usually emerge with a worm (Clement and Hathway, 2000). The spectacled thrush will forage from bird feeders and once it does not feel threatened it has been observed to feed on pieces of fruit such as bananas placed by humans (Fig. 3).

COMMUNICATION. The spectacled thrush has a short period of regular sustained song which is related to the breeding period as it occurs from April to August (Snow and Snow, 1963). However a little sound was heard each year from February-March onwards or in November or early December (Snow and Snow, 1963). *Turdus nudigenis* makes a song that is halting and feeble, this may suggest that this bird does not rely on song but on visual contact for intraspecific relations (Snow and Snow, 1963). This bird produces melancholy notes that are repetitive like the cocoa thrush, but less melodious (Kenefick et al, 2011). It produces a whining “pe-ou-wa” and a variety of shorter calling notes (Bond, 1999). The songs of the spectacled thrush are mixed with many high notes and phrases (Hilty, 2003). They also have a cat-like call which is a distinctive

“meowing” call with a nasal sound that slides sharply upwards (Hilty, 2003). It also produces a clear “ture-too-too” song that is produced indefinitely and when uncomfortable the bird emits a “kereel” sound (Bond, 1999).

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR. Spectacled thrushes use twigs, mud, plant material as well as fine roots in order to build their cup-shaped nests (Fig. 4) (Borgo, 2014). These birds usually place their nests in a fork of the branches of a tree or large shrub (Snow and Snow, 1963). This species of thrush starts breeding during the wet season and it lasts from April to August (Snow and Snow, 1963). In the Orinoco region breeding occurs from the period May-June (Hilty, 2003). When the bright yellow or yellow-orange patch around the eye is larger and more developed, this suggests that the bird is mature enough to breed (Clement and Hathway, 2000). Females lay 2-4 eggs that are pale blue, green in colour with russet blotches (Hilty, 2003). Spectacled thrushes undergo a moult period from August to November. These thrushes make no more than two nesting attempts during the breeding season (Snow and Snow, 1963).

JUVENILE BEHAVIOUR. Both parents have been observed caring for the nestlings. *Turdus nudigenis* hatchlings are fed a diet of worms at 10 minute intervals (Borgo, 2014). This diet of worms are a good source of protein for them. Immature juveniles have a thinner yellow eye ring (Fig. 4), with pale white streaks to their forehead and crown (Clement and Hathway, 2000). They are distinguished from adults by their richly spotted breasts; adults have a spotless breast.

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. Tame *Turdus nudigenis*.

[Original photograph by Camellia Ramjohn]



Fig. 3. *Turdus nudigenis* feeding on fruit.

[<http://www.google.com/photos/flickr>, downloaded 5 November 2016]



Fig. 4. *Turdus nudigenis* juveniles in nest with parent looking on.

[<http://www.hbw.com/images>, downloaded 10 October 2016]

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