

Xiphorhynchus susurrans (Cocoa Woodcreeper)

Family: Dendrocolaptidae (Woodcreepers)

Order: Passeriformes (Perching Birds)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Cocoa woodcreeper, *Xiphorhynchus susurrans*.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cocoa_woodcreeper#/media/File:Cocoa_Woodcreeper.jpg, downloaded 26 February 2017]

TRAITS. *Xiphorhynchus susurrans* is a medium-sized passerine bird whose length can range between 27-28cm and weighs approximately 64g (Planet of Birds, 2017). It was previously considered a subspecies of the buff-throated woodcreeper *Xiphorhynchus guttatus*, but based on genetic analyses has been deemed as specifically distinct (Rochaa et al., 2015). The cocoa woodcreeper is distinctively characterized by its black, long and slightly decurved bill which is hooked at its tip, which is used as a foraging probe on the trunks of trees (Clench, 1995). The plumage pattern of its head and neck are dark brown and buff-streaked, the back is streaked light brown, and the tail and wings are rufous. The plumage of the underparts has an olive-brown tone with a streaked breast (Fig. 1).

DISTRIBUTION. Their geographic range includes Central America and South America (Fig. 2), including northern Venezuela and northern Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago (IUCN, 2017). The cocoa woodcreeper is a resident species throughout its range without any significant migration (White et al., 2015).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Habitat preferences vary geographically for the cocoa woodcreeper however it mainly inhabits humid and lowland forested areas (Ridgely and Tudor, 2009). According to del Hoyo et al. (2003) it is common, although occurring in small numbers at higher altitudes in north western Costa Rica and northern Honduras. The cocoa woodcreeper is a rather conspicuous woodcreeper and is a regular and known associate of mixed-species flocks that frequent the mid-levels and sub canopy of humid forest and woodland (Ridgely and Tudor, 2009). It is relatively aggressive, especially when searching for swarms of army ants. They occasionally check inactive bivouacs of ants (Swartz, 2001) which is behaviour typical of an expert ant-follower. When searching for ants, they perch on the trunks of trees within 2m of the ground, but may forage higher in the presence of competing antbirds.

FORAGING BEHAVIOUR. The cocoa woodcreeper usually forages alone but groups ranging almost up to a dozen have been seen to follow columns of army ants (Swartz, 2001). The favoured food of the cocoa woodcreepers are arthropods; ants, other insects and spiders. They usually feed by pecking, rummaging or gleaning into dead leaves, bark crevices and moss clumps through the use of its hooked and slightly decurved bill (Fig. 3). Whilst foraging, the cocoa woodcreepers start near the bottom and moves up the trunk in a spiral motion. Unlike other species of *Xiphorhynchus* the cocoa woodcreeper forages at the upper sides of tree limbs rather than the undersides (Marantz, 2009).

COMMUNICATION. The cocoa woodcreeper is a very vocal woodcreeper that sings with great frequency during the early morning and late afternoon. The often heard call of the cocoa woodcreeper is a fast series of clear, loud, whistled notes of *kew-kew-kew-kew*. The notes start off fast at first, eventually slowing to a reduced pace until it fades away (Ridgely and Tudor, 2009).

REPRODUCTION. The cocoa woodcreeper constructs a nest that is lined with bark. The nest is a natural cavity located in a hollow stump or a low placed tree hole. The clutch size of the cocoa woodcreeper is two eggs with an incubation period of 18-19 days (Planet of Birds, 2017).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. According to The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (2017) the cocoa woodcreeper has been evaluated as Least Concern, and there are no major known threats to the species.

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Author: Marsha Ramkissoon

Posted online: 2017



Fig. 2. Geographic distribution of the cocoa woodcreeper.

[<http://maps.iucnredlist.org/map.html?id=22729055>, downloaded 26 February 2017]



Fig. 3. A cocoa woodcreeper foraging on a tree.

[<http://www.hbw.com/sites/default/files/styles/h200/public/ibc/p/CG0R22513.jpg?itok=OlkuWOXj>,
downloaded 26 February 2017]

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