

## *Anhima cornuta* (Horned Screamer)

Family: Anhimidae (Screamers)

Order: Anseriformes (Waterfowl)

Class: Aves (Birds)



**Fig. 1.** Horned screamer, *Anhima cornuta*.

[<http://carnivoraforum.com/topic/10432366/1/>, downloaded 1 March 2017]

**TRAITS.** The horned screamer *Anhima cornuta* is a large bird (Fig. 1) which grows to 84-95cm in length and weighs approximately 3.5kg. The bill looks similar to that of a chicken, and the top half of the body is black, with small white spots around the neck area. They possess a lengthy appendage which projects forward from the crown (Fig. 2). This feature is very rare among birds and is not the growth of a feather but a horny layer of skin continuous with the skull. This feature gives them the title “unicorn of the avian world”. The horned screamer supports itself with relatively long grey legs with three partially webbed toes.

**DISTRIBUTION.** The horned screamer occurs in lowlands from Colombia and Ecuador to southern Brazil (Fig. 3). There used to be sightings in Trinidad, however they were on the verge

of extinction there in the 1930s, and there were no reports of sightings since 1964. Although they became extinct in Trinidad and Tobago, they remain common in other countries and there are reports that this species has been expanding in Brazil in recent years (Hilty, 2003).

**HABITAT AND ACTIVITY.** The horned screamer inhabits well-vegetated wet tropical savannas, marshes, lakes in large open areas, forested areas and river banks (Fig. 4). They prefer warm weather, however they can adapt well to rainy seasons as well. Horned screamers are active during both day and night, but especially during the day (Freedman, 2002). Horned screamers usually feed on water plants. They eat roots and leaves in two ways, which can be described as digging and grazing. The juvenile diet of a horned screamer consists of insects. Horned screamers tend to move in pairs; in some cases a pair may interact with larger groups, but groups of horned screamers usually do not exceed six members. They are also commonly solitary. (Gill et al., 1974; Naranjo, 1986).

**REPRODUCTION.** Male horned screamers assist the females in constructing a nest, which can be described as a floating platform made of plant vegetation. The time of breeding is usually between April and May, but this can vary based on their geographical location. During this season, the females would lay 2-7 eggs, referred to as a clutch. These eggs vary in colour between white and olive-brown. The females would incubate the eggs during the day, and the males would incubate them at night. The juveniles usually stay with their parents for at least a year, before going on their own. Anseriforme birds can run as soon as they are hatched (Naranjo, 1986).

**BEHAVIOUR.** Horned screamers usually spend most of their time preening, foraging, standing and sleeping; flying is very rare. However, they do manage to carry out very short flights to get from one foraging area to another. Their most common behaviour in their natural habitat would be standing. Horned screamers demonstrate territoriality, making territorial calls after sunrise.

**APPLIED ECOLOGY.** *Anhima cornuta* is not listed as an endangered species, neither are they listed as at risk. In fact, according to the IUCN, they are considered to be of Least Concern. Horned screamers have large populations throughout their distribution, which makes them far from vulnerable (The IUCN list of threatened species, 2016).

## REFERENCES

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Posted online: 2017



**Fig. 2.** The horn of the horned screamer.

[<http://carnivoraforum.com/topic/10432366/1/>, downloaded 1 March 2017]



**Fig. 3.** Geographical distribution of the horned screamer.

[[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p\\_p\\_spp=63796](http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p_p_spp=63796), downloaded 1 March 2017]



**Fig. 4.** Typical habitat of the horned screamer, *Anhima cornuta*.

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