

## *Ardea cocoi* (Cocoi Heron or White-necked Heron)

Family: Ardeidae (Hérons and Egrets)

Order: Ciconiiformes (Storks, Herons and Ibises)

Class: Aves (Birds)



**Fig. 1.** Cocoi heron, *Ardea cocoi*.

[[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/gallery?p\\_p\\_spp=112476](http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/gallery?p_p_spp=112476) downloaded 24 February 2017]

**TRAITS.** Adult cocoi herons possess a completely black crown, a yellowish-orange bill, blue-grey skin around the eyes, yellow eyes, and a white S-shaped neck (Fig. 1). The back is grey, they have white thighs and grey to black feathers on the wings. The belly is usually black, with short black streaks on the neck and upper breast, which are white, and it has brownish-grey legs (Kenefick, 2011). The juvenile *Ardea cocoi* differs with an upper body that is grey-brown and greyish underparts (Ffrench, 2012). The average adult size of both male and female is 1.9-2.0kg weight and its height is around 100-130cm (Dunning, 2008).

**DISTRIBUTION.** It is widespread over most of South America (Fig. 2), being resident from Colombia to Brazil and Chile, and considered a regular non-breeding visitor to Trinidad and Tobago (IUCN, 2016). Within the last few years they have been seen frequently in Tobago, and the cocoi heron was last seen in Trinidad at the Nariva River and Caroni Swamp in February 2017.

**HABITAT AND ACTIVITY.** Found in mainly aquatic areas, ranging from rivers, marshes swamps, lagoons, streams and freshwater lakes. Feeding diet and activity varies with season. It is diurnal, with a peak in activity at noon and a reduction at dusk, but there is the possibility of feeding at night (de la Paz Ducommun and Beltzer, 2010). In a river or lake *Ardea cocoi*, would catch fish, but in a more vegetated area such as a swamp it may feed on other prey such as insects and amphibians. This bird can venture into open water and their long legs allow them to use deeper wetlands (de la Paz Ducommun and Beltzer, 2010). Even though they fly slowly, their wings are big which gives them a sturdy flight (Fig. 3). In the dry season they mix with other species to feed, and are known to steal prey from them.

**FOOD AND FEEDING.** Standing up is their main way of feeding, as they slowly move through shallow water looking for prey. They frequently catch their target by using their bill to stab downwards; their head and neck move rapidly, while the body remains immobile (Fig. 4) (Kushlan, 2011).

**POPULATION ECOLOGY.** It is usually solitary and territorial, but they may move in large groups of up to ten. The population trend has been increasing. Their estimated generation length is 10.5 years whereas their maximum longevity is 24.4 years.

**REPRODUCTION.** The breeding season may shift depends on the location of the birds, for example in Suriname it begins around July whereas in Brazil and Argentina the season is August to November (Wildscreen, 2017). A nest is usually large and deep, made of branches and sticks with grass, generally situated in trees. Their eggs are light blue and 1-4 eggs can be laid at a time (Fig. 5) which are incubated for 24-26 days. Juveniles may remain at the nest up to 12-13 weeks, but some may leave at 6-7 weeks (Bouglouan, 2017). Juveniles usually miss a lot of prey and they acquire less food per minute than the adults. The voice of a cocoi heron is a deep croak (Kushlan, 2011).

**APPLIED ECOLOGY.** This species is listed as Least Concern due to its wide range, increasing population and resourceful feeding, therefore is not considered vulnerable or threatened (IUCN, 2016). Although in a few territories, these birds are influenced by toxins, mainly pesticides, environmental modification and human interference with their nest and eggs, they are not at risk of extinction since these issues do not pose damaging threats (Wildscreen, 2017).

## REFERENCES

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**Fig. 2.** Cocoi heron geographic distribution.

[<http://maps.iucnredlist.org/map.html?id=22697001> downloaded 26 February 2017]



**Fig. 3.** Cocoi heron in flight.

[<http://www.arkive.org/cocoi-heron/ardea-cocoi/image-G90035.html> downloaded 27 February 2017]



**Fig. 4.** Cocoli heron stabbing down on prey.

[[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/gallery?p\\_p\\_spp=112476](http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/gallery?p_p_spp=112476) downloaded 2 March 2017]



**Fig. 5.** Cocoli heron's nest and eggs.

[<http://www.arkive.org/cocoli-heron/ardea-cocoi/image-G86412.html> downloaded 2 March 2017]