



Violaceous Touraco

Kingdom: Animalia
 Phylum: Chordata
 Subphylum: Vertebrata
 Class: Aves
 Order: Musophagiformes
 Family: Musophagidae
 Genus: *Musophaga*
 Species: *violacea*



Photo courtesy of Kelley Peck Dettor

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The violaceous touraco is found in West Africa ranging from Gambia and Senegal east to Cameroon in over 20 countries. These birds prefer open woodlands, riverine forests and humid forest edges. The touracos' range is from sea level to about 3000 ft.
- **Exhibit Location:** Diversity of Birds

Characteristics

- Length: about 30 inches; Weight: less than 1 pound
- The body of this bird is a magnificent shimmering bluish-violet. The head has crimson on the crown and nape, yellow on the forehead. This is the only touraco without a crest. The bill is curved, strong and is cinnamon red. Eyes are dark brown with crimson orbital rings. Legs are short and black or greenish-black along with the feet. Forest dwelling touracos have crimson wing coloring; bush land species do not.
- Touracos' outside claws are reversible which allows the bird to move out onto the ends of branches to pick up fruit. It also has wing claws that allow it to move in the trees.
- Sexes are similar.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 5-10 years; **In Captivity** up to 30 years

Behaviors

- Touracos often travel in flocks of 10 or 12 birds. Violaceous touracos are more social than some other touracos, although they like to hide in the treetops.
- These birds freeze if they are disturbed which helps camouflage them.
- Touracos drop more of the food than they consume, making food for other animals and helping with seed dispersal.
- The touraco perches in the dense canopy of tall trees where they are camouflaged.
- The birds have a gargling cou-cou-vhou sound that runs together. This makes a pulsing roar when more than one bird is calling at the same time.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** leaves, large or whole pieces of fruit

Reproduction

- The touraco is sexually mature at 1 year.
- The touraco usually breeds during the rainy season but may breed sporadically.
- Nests are shallow, fragile, and made of twigs in a platform style in densely foliated trees, usually fairly low.
- The clutch usually consists of 2-3 spherically shaped white or greenish eggs.
- Incubation is approximately 21-24 days. Both sexes incubate.
- Nesting period is about 4 weeks, but it takes about 1 year for full coloration to develop. The young are covered with a black, sooty gray down. Both sexes feed the hatchlings regurgitated pulpy fruit.

- Nestlings use a vestigial functional claw on each wing joint to scramble around the nest before they fledge.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** fruits, berries, insects, grubs
- **At the Zoo:** pelleted grain based food, exotic fruit such as plantains, papaya and mango and melon, apples, blueberries, etc.

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** Least concern; **CITES Appendix:** III Ghana
- Trapping of the birds for export trade may impact some populations.
- Destruction of habitat for agricultural practices is being monitored by community and national governments in various countries.
- Predators: man, animals that are larger than they are

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Touracos' 4th toe rotates forward.
- Plumage color comes from a pigment called turacoverdin (or tracin). The violaceous touraco plumage also is covered by dark melanins.
- The birds prefer to run along branches flying with a weak and dipping flight only when hopping is out of the question.
- There are many different touracos. We have violaceous touraco at the zoo.
- Even though these birds live near plantains, it is unclear if they eat the plantains.
- These birds have the ability to release feathers when threatened by predators.

Sources:

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