

Chapter 7

Birds of the Konashen COCA, Southern Guyana

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SUMMARY

Avifaunal surveys were conducted around two sites in the Konashen Community Owned Conservation Area (COCA) between 6 and 28 October 2006. The purpose of the surveys was to obtain a baseline estimate of the avian species richness of the area, and to provide information on the population status of several bird species important to the indigenous people inhabiting the region. Birds were surveyed on foot and by boat during all daylight hours of the study period. Cassette recorders and directional microphones were used to document the avifauna; several species were also documented with a video camera. Species richness was high at both sites; a combined total of 319 species was tallied over the study period. Documentation was obtained for the majority of species encountered. The avifauna was largely composed of species that would be expected to occur in a Guianan lowland forest, and included 27 species that are endemic to the Guayana Shield. There was a high degree of habitat heterogeneity within each site. Six distinct habitats were identified, only two of which were shared between the two study sites. As a result, the avian diversity was higher than expected for the size of the area surveyed. It is probable that at least 400 bird species, or more than half of the number known to occur in Guyana, may be found in the Konashen COCA.

The survey recorded Large-headed Flatbill (*Ramphotrigon megacephalum*), a new record for Guyana and a range extension of approximately 900 km. Populations of parrots, guans, and curassows, all of which are important to the Wai-Wai inhabitants of the region and are of global conservation concern, seemed healthy. Fourteen species of parrots were observed, including Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao*), a CITES Appendix 1 species, and Blue-cheeked Parrot (*Amazona dufresniana*), listed as Near Threatened (IUCN 2006). Some of the larger parrot species are hunted by local people, but the effects of this hunting appear to be negligible. There was no evidence that parrots in the area are subjected to the intense trapping pressure that exists in more accessible regions of the Guayana Shield. This impression was corroborated through interviews with the Wai-Wai. Spix's Guan (*Penelope jacquacu*) and Black Curassow (*Crax alector*) were common at both survey sites, suggesting that their regional populations are not threatened by current levels of hunting pressure from the local community.

The remarkable avian diversity of the Konashen COCA does not seem to be faced with any immediate threats. The vast majority of bird species in the area are also found in the surrounding region and beyond, and their global populations are not threatened. Parrots and large game birds, though not currently threatened at a regional level, are of global conservation concern. Care should be taken to forestall local declines in their populations. Monitoring is not recommended at the present time, since these species are not amenable to standardized survey methods. Instead, the Wai-Wai community should continue to avoid trapping parrots for the pet trade, and should deny trappers entry to the Konashen COCA. Rather than monitor populations of large game birds, the community should establish a rotation system to distribute the effects of subsistence hunting over as large an area as possible. This should involve the closing of most of the Konashen COCA to hunting at any given time. Finally, the Wai-Wai should aggressively exclude illegal Brazilian miners from their territory, and (if necessary) seek assistance from the government of Guyana to maintain sovereignty over their land.