

Contopus cinereus (Tropical Pewee)

Family: Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

Order: Passeriformes (Perching Birds)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Tropical pewee, *Contopus cinereus*.

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/image/image_gallery?uuid=5496b5f7-ca73-4c28-ae06-068e5856928b&groupId=11003, downloaded 10 March 2017]

TRAITS. The tropical pewee is a small passerine bird (Fig. 1) with dark grey tail and short beak whose approximate length is 14cm and weight 12g; both sexes are quite similar. This bird has a greyish coloration and whitish lores (skin on the face) with dark grey on the tail and wings. The bill is black with an orange-yellow outline. The iris of the eye is brown and legs and toes are black. The throat and middle chest are white and the flanks are grey-brown (Schulenberg, 2010). The vocalization of the bird is a sharp tweet (Kenefick et al., 2016).

DISTRIBUTION. The tropical pewee is found in several separate areas of South America (Fig. 2), from Mexico to Peru and northern Argentina, as well as in Trinidad (Ridgely and Greenfield, 2001). The bird is absent from Tobago (Kenefick et al., 2016).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. The tropical pewee occupies lowlands to lower elevations of mountain ranges. *Contopus cinereus* can be seen in forests and clearings, savanna, swampy areas

and local gardens. They are often seen during the daylight hours and considered to be diurnal. These birds are easily identified on tall trees during the early hours of the morning perching on trees to become aware of their surroundings. During the afternoon, time is also spent observing the area and quenching their thirst. The tropical pewee is usually solitary or seen in pairs.

FOOD AND FEEDING. When the birds perch on a tree, they forage on the branches consuming small insects (Kratter, 2017). The tropical pewee will be seen leaving the branches back and forth to the same spot catching insects with their long sallies to open air (Ridgely and Gwynne, 1989).

REPRODUCTION. *C. cinereus* is monogamous. The breeding season is during May-June in Trinidad. The nest can be located on the higher branches of a tree but not too high up. The nest is small and can be described as an open dish of fibres and herbs, placed on a fork branch. The exterior of the nest is grass decorated with lichens. The nest is built in this way by the female so that it is camouflaged and invisible to predators. Two creamy-white eggs with red spots are incubated for 15-16 days until hatching. The male keeps its distance. The chicks are fed by the female. The juvenile birds can be distinguished from the adults by their coloration; paler lemon-grey underparts and the wings are blacker (Kenefick et al., 2016).

BEHAVIOUR. Both male and female communicate by producing high pitched trill which has a “three” sound (Kenefick et al., 2016). The sound can vary according to the geographical location of the tropical pewee. The female tropical pewee nurtures her offspring by munching fruits and insects in her mouth (Fig. 3). Once the juveniles can fly they leave the nest and follow their parent to obtain food.

APPLIED ECOLOGY. The IUCN Red List has evaluated the tropical pewee to be of Least Concern when it comes to the conservation status, due to the large range and large estimated population size (IUCN, 2017). The only threats this neotropical bird experiences is deforestation caused by human beings.

REFERENCES

- IUCN. (2017). *Contopus cinereus*. Red List of Threatened Species. <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/103683886/0>
- Kenefick, M., Restall, R., and Hayes, F. (2016). Birds of Trinidad and Tobago. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Kratter, A. (2017). Bocas del toro: species database: *Contopus cinereus*. http://biogeodb.stri.si.edu/bocas_database/search/species/3254
- Ridgely, R.S. and Greenfield, P.J. (2001). The birds of Ecuador: status, distribution and taxonomy. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York.
- Ridgely, R.S. and Gwynne, J.A. (1989). A guide to the birds of Panama. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Schulenberg, T.S. (2010). Tropical Pewee (*Contopus cinereus*), Neotropical Birds Online Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology. http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p_p_spp=456076

Author: Allyson Bobcombe

Posted online: 2017



Fig 2. Tropical pewee geographic distribution; green indicating year-long residence.

[<http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/map/?cn=Tropical%20Pewee&sn=Contopus%20cinereus&sc=tropew1&species=456076>, downloaded 10 March 2017]



Fig. 3. The female (right) tropical pewee feeding juveniles.

[<http://www.hbw.com/ibc/photo/tropical-pewee-contopus-cinereus/feeding-juveniles>, downloaded 10 March 2017]

For educational use only - copyright of images remains with original source