

Executive Summary - Curassows, Guans and Chachalacas: Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan

Cracids (curassows, guans and chachalacas) are the most threatened family of Neotropical birds, occurring in south Texas, Trinidad and Tobago, and all Latin American mainland countries except Chile. They are a primitive, ancestral family of gamebirds (Galliformes) that play an important role in the regeneration of tropical forest through seed dispersal and predation, yet half of all species are threatened by habitat destruction and hunting. The five most critically endangered species are the horned guan, Alagoas curassow, Trinidad and black-fronted piping-guans, and highland guan, while the four most critically endangered subspecies are three subspecies of the helmeted curassow and the northeastern bare-faced curassow.

Cracids are important not only for their role as seed dispersers, but also as biological indicators of the environment, as a major protein source for indigenous people, and as an important focus for ecotourism. The scarcity of information in many regions for many species makes it difficult to conserve them, so it is hoped that this Plan will encourage further studies of the cracid family. Concerted field work and the development of sound conservation measures are critical to secure a future for these birds.

This Action Plan is written for wildlife biologists, ecologists, administrators, educators, conservation officials and potential funding donors in countries inhabited by cracids. It is hoped its contents will further catalyze conservation and research of this fascinating group of birds.

The Plan describes the natural history of cracids, outlines the threats to the birds and the measures needed to alleviate these threats. The chapter "Conservation Strategy and Taxonomic Accounts" outlines the methods used by the Cracid Specialist Group to classify threatened species and subspecies, and provides species accounts. "Country and Regional Priorities" includes methods for identifying countries that are home to the rarest cracids and shows that the highest number of rarest taxa occur in Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Mexico (in descending order). This chapter also lays out the priority actions needed in each country for the conservation of cracids.

The chapter "General Conservation Recommendations" calls for extensive conservation research including status and distribution surveys in each country, studies of the effects of habitat disturbance and hunting pressure, assessments of cracids as biological indicators, conservation education and communication programs, the creation of new reserves, together with an assessment of their effectiveness, and an assessment of legislative issues such as trade legislation. In the field of taxonomic research, rigorous studies are needed to determine species limits; solving taxonomic irregularities is essential for assigning conservation priorities to species. Priority field projects are listed by country and avicultural priorities and symposia are outlined.