

Red-billed Hornbill

Tockus erythrorhynchus

Kingdom Animalia
Phylum Chordata
Class Aves
Order Bucerotiformes
Family Bucerotidae



Native to: Africa.

Status: Least Concern

The red-billed hornbill's population is strong throughout its range. However, as with any species, their future status is highly dependent on habitat integrity as concerns of human interaction arise. While tropical rainforests are being felled at 95 square miles per day to supply the first world with pretty doors, furniture, scaffolding and disposable chopsticks, the future is not terribly secure for any Hornbill, or other large forest residents. Because hornbills consume a large number of insects and small animals that are seen as pests, its future is important for a healthy ecosystem.

Appearance & Lifespan

The Red-billed hornbill is distinguished by its thin red bill. It does not have the casque on the bill that many other hornbills have. It is brownish black above with white markings and white under parts. Hornbills are known for their long eyelashes and stubby legs and toes. The length of this bird is usually around 20 inches, males are generally larger than females.

The lifespan of the Red-billed Hornbill can be up to 40 years in captivity. The life span of the Hornbill in the wild is still unknown due to insufficient data.



Behavior & Reproduction

Red-billed hornbills usually occur in pairs or small groups. They are very territorial and defend a permanent territory that may range up to 25 acres.

Hornbills reach reproductive maturity between one and six years of age depending on their size. The rainy season stimulates breeding behavior. Most hornbills are monogamous and only have one mate their whole life. They nest in natural cavities, usually in trees but also in rock faces and earth banks. The female seals the nest entrance using mud and her own droppings mixed with food remains. She makes a narrow vertical slit so the male can still feed her. The female lays up to five eggs. She incubates for three weeks, remaining sealed in with her offspring for another three weeks. It takes about five hours for her to chip away the hard, brick-like wall so that she can leave the nest. She then joins the male in finding food and returning to feed the young. When the mother leaves the nest the young are already able to seal themselves in with wooden chips. They remain in the nest for an additional month and a half while both parents continue to supply them with food.

Ecology & Conservation

Red-billed Hornbills live in most parts of Africa except for forested west and central regions. They like tree and bush savanna ecosystems. Red-billed Hornbills are found over an enormous region, but they are not evenly distributed and may be locally abundant in some areas. Hornbills are popular zoo and aviary birds, but do not breed readily in captivity, so most are still caught in the wild.

The Hornbill Nest Adoption Project is a conservation and research project run by the Hornbill Research Foundation. Funding sent to this project helps the foundation collect data on the biological and ecological aspects of these birds, including their important ecological role in dispersing seeds throughout the forest.

These birds are omnivorous, eating plants, insects and small animals for food. They eat mostly beetles, grasshoppers, termites and ants but will also eat geckos, birds' eggs, nestlings and dead rodents.

At the zoo our Hornbills are fed a variety of fruits and vegetables, hard boiled eggs, mealworms, crickets, as well as nuts and seeds.

Did You Know?

1. There are 54 different species of Hornbills in the world.
2. They are expert diggers for which their bills are well-adapted.
3. The female Hornbill molts her flight feathers while she is "locked" in the nest but grows them back before she leaves.

