

# JUNGLE JOURNAL

a most recognizable bird

by Cyril Brass



Without a doubt, the Rainbow-billed Toucan is the most recognizable of all Toucan species. It is also known as the “Keel-billed” Toucan, “Sulfur-breasted” Toucan, “Billed” bird and even the “Fruit Loop” bird. Named “Tucano” by the Tupi Indians of Brazil, it is the largest and most vocal of the forty Toucan species.

network of spongy hollow and narrow fibres covered with a strong protein called keratin, the same material that makes up human hair and fingernails. It is not known why this bird has developed such an exaggerated multi-colored beak. Theories range from a visual threat to scare off potential predators to an aid in courtship display. It is useful for reaching fruit on branches too small to support the bird’s weight or for plucking food from

sleeping, they turn their heads and place their beaks on their backs with the hook pushed down between wing and body. The tail is folded over the head and the bird transforms into a ball of feathers. The Rainbow-billed Toucan’s diet consists mostly of various fruits and berries and sometimes includes insects, small reptiles and eggs. They toss their head back to drop their food from the end of their long bill into their throat. When feeding in groups, meal time can be deafening with the constant chattering of the hungry flock. The best time to see them is at dawn or dusk when they are most active.

This close up of a



Its plumage is mostly black with a bright yellow chest and neck and red and white stripes on its short tail. The bill is one of the most brightly marked beaks of all bird species; a rainbow of color with shades of green on the top portion, an orange band across the sides, pale blues and greens on the bottom and dark red at the tip.

The extraordinarily large beak appears heavy and cumbersome but despite its size, it is deceptively lightweight as it is made up of a strong

awkward angles. The bill can also be used as a weapon when jousting and fighting among themselves or to throw berries at one another when in a playful mood.

Rainbow-billed Toucans are very social birds that live in a small community consisting of several families. Poor flyers, they have a very noticeable flight pattern using several rapid wing beats followed by long gliding. Their preference is to travel through the upper levels of the rainforest hopping from tree to tree with feet adapted for this purpose. Their toes face in opposite directions to help tightly grip branches and hop from one branch to another.

They nest in natural cavities or abandoned tree hollows. When

Rainbow-billed Toucan was taken at a small family run rehabilitation home for wild animals in Costa Rica. We stopped for a short break so we could see locals taking pride in helping the wildlife of their country. The Rainbow-billed Toucan lives in the jungles and rainforests of southern Mexico, throughout Central America and in the northern regions of South America. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing destruction of its habitat it is a threatened species. The Rainbow-billed Toucan, a social, family-oriented creature; a bird with a stunning multi-colored beak . . . a most recognizable tropical bird. **ca**

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