

THE COCKS-OF-THE-ROCK

JEWELS OF THE FOREST

ANDEAN COCK-OF-THE-ROCK



Photo: Jerry Thompson

The Andean Cock-of-the-rock, *Rupicola peruvianus*, is a medium-sized passerine bird of the Cotinga family inhabiting the Andean cloud forests in South America. This bird is widely regarded as the national bird of Peru.

The species exhibits marked sexual dimorphism; with the male having a large disk-like crest and scarlet or brilliant orange plumage with a black tail and wings, and pale grey scapulars. The female is

duller, darker, browner and has a much smaller crest. The beak is yellowish in the male, and dark with a small yellow tip in the female. Depending on the gender and subspecies there are significant variations in the colour of the iris, which ranges from red over orange and yellow to bluish-white in the male, and whitish over reddish to brown in the female. Both sexes are approximately 32cm (12½") in length. In addition to the display calls described in the breeding section below, foraging birds give a loud querulous "uankk?" when disturbed or in flight.



Photo: "chdwckvnstrsslhm"

Groups of males compete for breeding females, each displaying its colourful plumage, while bobbing, hopping, and uttering a variety of calls. After mating, the female makes a nest under a rocky overhang, incubates the eggs, and rears the young, all by herself.

One of two species in the genus *Rupicola*, the Andean Cock-of-the-rock was first described by the English ornithologist John Latham in 1790. The generic name is derived from the Latin stems *rupes* "rock" or "cliff", and *cola* "inhabiting", and is indicative of its habit of nesting in rock walls. Its specific epithet *peruvianus* means "of Peru".

There are four known subspecies:

- *R. p. peruvianus*, (Latham 1790) - the nominate subspecies



Andean Male, head detail
Photo: "chdwckvnrstrsslhm"

- *R. p. sanguinolentus*, Gould 1859
- *R. p. saturatus*, Cabanis and Heine 1859
- *R. p. aequitorialis*, Taczanowski 1889.

The Andean Cock-of-the-rock inhabits the cloud forests of the Andes with a range of about 260,000 square kilometres across Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. They are mostly found in ravines and by forested streams in montane areas at an elevation of 500-

2400 meters. They typically stay at lower and middle forest levels, but will range higher if feeding in fruiting trees. They are generally shy and inconspicuous, usually only being briefly seen when flushed or are swiftly flying down a valley.

The diet mainly consists of insects and fruit. However, they have been recorded taking small vertebrates such as frogs or lizards. They are one of the many species recorded following army ants to gather disturbed invertebrate prey.

The male is polygamous, and has nothing to do with nesting once mating has been achieved. Instead his energy is devoted to very elaborate display rituals to show off his magnificent plumage. These displays take place in communal leks, where males gather to challenge rivals and entice the females. As the displaying males are easily disturbed, their courtship rituals are not often seen. One study found that display activity is dependent on light intensity, with the morning display period occurring at the same light intensity level as the afternoon period.



Two wild Andean males photographed in Peru
Photo: Ricardo Sánchez

Males gathered at a lek have been observed to break up into pairs and perform "confrontation displays". These consists of facing each other while bowing, jumping, and flapping their wings. They sometimes snap their beaks and make a variety of squawking and grunting calls. When a female approaches, this behaviour becomes even more intense. The display then becomes a riot of dazzlingly bright colours, frenzied activity and a

cacophony of harsh and raucous sounds.

The nests, built entirely by the female, are mud plastered to cave entrances or rocky outcrops in forest ravines. The typical clutch consists of two white eggs.

The worldwide population size and trends in population numbers have not been determined, but it is believed that the Andean Cock-of-the-rock is not threatened and so the species is evaluated as “Least Concern” on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

GUIANAN COCK-OF-THE-ROCK



Photo: Almir Cândido de Almeida

The Guianan Cock-of-the-rock, *Rupicola rupicola*, is a South American passerine about 30cm (12”) in length. The bright orange male has a prominent half-moon crest, which is used in competitive displays in lek gatherings to attract a female.

The male is stout-bodied with an extraordinary half-moon crest, an orange-tipped black tail, black, orange and white wings, and silky-orange filaments of the inner remiges¹. The beak, legs and skin are orange. The less conspicuous female is a dark brownish-grey with a yellow-tipped black beak and a small crest. The species weighs 200-220 grams (7-7½ oz).

As the name implies, the Guianan Cock-of-the-rock is found in French Guiana, Suriname, Guyana, southern Venezuela, eastern Colombia and northern Amazonian Brazil, an area known as the Guianan Shield. The preferred habitat is humid forest near rocky outcrops.

Their diet mainly consists of the fruits of a variety of local plants and trees.

Like the Andean Cock-of-the-rock, the larger of the two species, the male is polygamous, and has nothing to do with nesting once mating has been achieved. Instead his energy is devoted to very elaborate display rituals to show off his magnificent plumage. These displays take place in communal leks, where forty or more males may gather to challenge rivals and entice females.

A displaying male erects his crest and plumage to such an extent that the beak and tail become obscured, resulting in a most unbird-like appearance. Within a lek, each bird has its own individual perch on a low branch, with a “court” on the ground below that is cleared of dead leaves and other debris by the draughts caused by taking off and landing.

¹ see next page.

Displaying males have a variety of calls, and movements that show off their crest and the elongated filaments on the rump and secondaries. Beak-snapping is also part of the display ritual. Males display on branches about 2.5m (10') above the ground until a female approaches, they then display and call from their individual plots on the ground. The female chooses a male by landing on the ground behind him and pecking him on the rump, the male turns round, and mating takes place almost immediately.

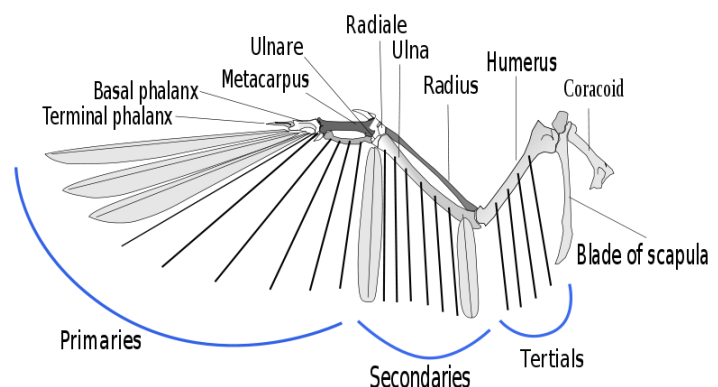
The female lays 1-2 eggs in a nest consisting of mud and plant material, attached with saliva to a vertical rock. The male does not participate in the building of the nest or the incubation of the eggs. The incubation period is 27-28 days.

Fairly common locally in its large range, the Guianan Cock-of-the-rock is evaluated as "Least Concern" on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia

WHAT ARE REMIGES?

Remiges (from the Latin for "oarsman") are located on the posterior side of the wing. Ligaments attach the long calami, or quills, firmly to the wing bones, and a thick, strong band of tendinous tissue—known as the postpatagium—helps to hold and support the remiges in place. Corresponding remiges on individual birds are symmetrical between the two wings, matching to a large extent in size and shape (except in the case of mutation or damage), though not necessarily in pattern. They are given different names depending on their position along the wing.



Bird wing bone structure, indicating attachment points of remiges
Illustration: L. Shyamal

Source: Wikipedia