

Musophaga rossae

Lady Ross's Turaco

Class: Aves. **Order:** Cuculiformes. **Family:** Musophagidae.

Other names: Plantain eater, Ross's turaco, Ross's Lourie.

Ross's plantain eater



Physical Description: Known as the Go-Away bird due to a "g'way" sounding call, the Lady Ross's Turaco is a medium-sized bird with a long tail for balance and broad, rounded wings. This bird is a glossy blue-black and violet except for crimson primaries and a crimson crest which stands about two inches high when the bird is excited. The feathers are actually "real colors" composed of 2 copper pigments, rather than a reflection of colors like most other bird feather coloration (only bird with true pigment for these colors). They have bright yellow skin under the eyes, black legs and feet, and orange-yellow beak with a casqued and red tip. Their yellow beak stretches to form a forehead shield. Males and females look alike. Adult size ranges from 15-18", weighing less than 1 lb.

Diet in the Wild: Mainly frugivores, dining on all kinds of fruit and occasionally eat foliage, flowers, and buds. They also are known to occasionally eat insects, snails, and termites (especially during breeding season).

Diet at the Zoo: oranges, apples, mangos, pears, papayas, bananas, soft bill diet

Habitat & Range: Canopy of evergreen and riparian forests and wooded valleys, avoiding deep forests in Central and South Africa. Is fairly common in Kenya.

Life Span: Sources differ widely. From 5-9 years to 15-20 years.

Perils in the wild: Habitat loss, killed for their red feathers, snakes, wild cats, birds of prey. Nests have been raided by diademed monkeys and snakes

Physical Adaptations:

- They are capable of making piercing sounds, that warn others of approaching predators
- The outermost toe of each foot can face either forwards or backwards (semi-zygodactylous). This creates support while perching and running backwards on branches, increasing grip.
- Living in the canopy, coloration that lets them hide in the foliage
- Turacos red crest can be used to communicate with other turacos

Behavioral Adaptations:

- Diurnal
- Live in pairs and family groups
- Can eat berries that are poisonous to humans
- Their flying ability is limited; instead they run/hop along the branches of the canopy
- When threatened, they freeze.

- They are extremely territorial and aggressive to other birds, including raptors. They occur in pairs or small groups but flock in feeding trees where groups will feed on wild or cultivated fruits.
- When faced with danger, they sit very still and fly away at the last minute with powerful flaps, revealing the crimson color under their wings.

Reproduction and Development:

- The pairs are monogamous.
- Courtship includes fluttering displays to reveal bright patches of coloration, along with raising of the conspicuous crest on the head, and energetic bobbing of the tail. These displays are accompanied by loud calls, and feeding of the female with fruit offered by the male.
- After mating, a pair will build their nest together. The nest is built haphazardly with a few branches laced over a platform. They are flat and flimsy.
- 2-3 eggs are laid and incubation lasts 21-26 days.
- Both parents help incubate the eggs.
- The young, covered with a silky down, are fed regurgitated fruit pulp by both parents who keep the nest clean by eating the eggshells and the chicks' droppings. Other flock members help the mother care for the babies after they hatch.
- The young fledge at about 4 weeks, but often leave the nest earlier, before they are even attempting to fly. They will stay near the parents even after becoming self sufficient.

Additional Information:

- These birds are non-migratory.
- They are messy eaters. For this reason, they contribute to seed dispersal. Fruit seeds also pass through their digestive system intact, further contributing to seed dispersal.
- The Masaai use the red feathers from the underside of the wings in their headdresses.
- Ross' Turaco is in the genus *Musophaga*, NOT in the genus *Turaco*. The genus *Turaco* contains the green-colored Turacos, while the *Musophagas* aren't green.
- All Turacos are in the family *Musophagidae*, which means "plantain eater" although they are NOT known to readily eat plantains (or bananas). In the wild, they actually prefer figs.
- There are two pigments associated with Turacos: Turacoverdin = GREEN, and Turacin = RED. Turacin is NOT water soluble, but it can be dissolved in alkaline solutions (buffered water). Turacoverdin is NOT unique to Turacos, but Turacin IS specific to the family. Turacoverdin is the only green pigment known to occur in birds. Both are copper-based. Our Cleo does NOT have Turacoverdin, being one of a small group of Turacos that only have Turacin (the red crest).
- In fact, if you stirred a glass of water with a red turaco feather, the water would turn pink!
- Lady Ross turacos are considered a pest in their native lands, as they eat cultivated fruit like guavas and loquats.

Conservation Status: Least Concern, although the habitat they inhabit is vulnerable to agricultural production. Habitat destruction remains their greatest threat.

Conservation Efforts:

Sources:

- Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Gardens

- http://lh3.ggpht.com/nw2txmShkY9C18P4xug10PqliYdxMRe_7S51UEIPpIINJ7wImmvEebgjR_yhUw4aImYLx3niNYZUR7JYujsm=s580
- Turacos.org
- <http://www.sfzoo.org/ladyrossturaco>
- <http://www.seaworld.org/animal-info/animal-bytes/animalia/eumetazoa/coelomates/deuterostomes/chordata/craniata/aves/cuculiformes/white-cheeked-turaco.htm>