

# Red-billed Hornbill

*Tockus erythrorhynchus*

Bird

## Scientific Name

*Tockus erythrorhynchus*

## Other Names

None

## Range

Sub-Saharan Africa

## Habitat

Savanna, woodland and thorn scrub forests

## Description

A small black and white hornbill with spotted wing coverts, a white tail tip, a long black patch on the lower mandible, and a long, slender, red bill. Juveniles have a pale orange bill and females are smaller with a reduced black mandible patch.

## Average Size

Length: 19 – 24 in.

Weight: ½ - 1 lb.

## Lifespan

In the wild: Up to 15 years

In captivity: 25 years

## Diet

In the wild: Insects, fruit and larvae

In captivity: Insects, fruit, prepared beef diet, and parrot chow

## Clutch Size

2 – 7 eggs

## Incubation

23 – 25 days

## Fledging Period

39 – 50 days

## Sexual Maturity

2 years of age

## Predators

Birds of prey and carnivores

## Population Status

Not threatened



## Behavior

Red-billed Hornbills are non-migratory, social birds that gather in small groups or pairs to defend their large territories of up to 25 acres. During the dry season, these birds can be seen in large flocks of several hundred birds at watering holes. Although they are considered territorial and will fight with other members of their species, they often overlap the territory of other hornbill species without issue.

Red-billed Hornbills spend most of their time on the ground foraging for insects with their long, curved bill, but will fly up into the trees each night to roost. This species has been documented foraging alongside mongooses, a behavior that benefits both species as mongooses help with uncovering more bugs and insects. While there is some competition within the group because they are hunting for the same prey, predator avoidance is the net benefit. With more eyes and ears on the lookout for predators, the animals can forage in relative peace. The mongooses post fewer guards when the hornbills are around, allowing the group to disperse more in search of food. The hornbills will even give warning calls for animals that are predators of the mongooses but not the hornbills themselves.

## Reproduction and Breeding

In the wild, breeding occurs from October to January, with females laying their eggs one to two months after the first rains. The nest site is chosen by the male who uses a tree cavity, empty beehive log or an abandoned woodpecker hole. The pair is territorial and will defend their nest site vigilantly. Once the female lays her eggs, she seals herself into their nest cavity with a cement-like substance made of mud, fruit pulp, food and feces to prevent any predators from getting in. The male will bring food to the female and her offspring feeding them through a tiny hole in the opening. Once the chicks are about three weeks old, the female molts and leaves the nest, resealing the tree cavity behind her. Both parents feed the chicks at this point. Chicks fly well on emerging from the nest a few weeks later and never return to it, although they may remain with their parents for up to six months.

## Conservation

The Red-billed Hornbill is considered a species of Least Concern by IUCN (The International Union for the Conservation of Nature) due to the fact the species has an extremely large range and population trend appears to be stable. In fact, the Red-billed Hornbill is one of the most commonly seen hornbills in Kenya. As of the early 2000's the global population size has not been quantified, but the species is reported to be widespread and locally common.

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**Amazing Facts**

Zazu, a character in the animated film The Lion King is a Red-billed Hornbill.

Hornbills are unique because their first two neck vertebrae have been fused to support their large bill.

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