

Toco Toucans: Seed Superheroes!

Ramphastos toco



Canopy Dwellers

Feeding up high in the forest canopies of **South America**, Toco Toucans fly from tree to tree in search of seasonal fruits. Easily identified by their **large orange beak** and **white face**, Toco Toucans are the **largest** and **most common** species of toucans. While **fruits** are preferred, they won't shy away from a potential meal and will also eat lizards, frogs, or other bird's eggs.

Big Beak Basics

Toco Toucans use their massive beak to **reach fruit** hanging from branches that are too small to hold their weight (1.5 lbs). The **sharp, crooked edge** of the beak helps them to **peel fleshy fruits** like figs and papayas. Their beak also acts like a **built-in air conditioner** for the body by using blood vessels inside it that take heat away from the body and release it out into the air.

Community Helpers

As the toucans fly to new locations, their **feces** disperse the seeds from the fruits they eat and help **plant new trees** in the forests. Many other species of **animals also benefit** from the toucan's activities, such as the vulnerable **Hyacinth Macaw** (pictured right) that only nests in Manduvi trees whose seeds are dispersed mainly by the Toco Toucan.



1. Target Audience: The main audience would be family members visiting a zoo Toco Toucan exhibit with relatively little knowledge about the animal aside from charismatic physical appearance. Ideally it would be adults interested in the subject matter but I have also tried to target an audience that may not be as keen to explore more about the animal.
2. Specific Purpose: My specific purpose is to outline the role of Toco Toucans as important seed dispersers and to demonstrate that along with being beautiful and common, they have a very important role within rainforest ecosystems. In order to do that, a basic understanding of the birds behavioral and morphological adaptations is relayed.
3. Bibliography:
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 2. BirdLife International. 2017. *Ramphastos toco* (amended version of 2016 assessment). *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2017*: e.T22682164A113557535; [Accessed 2021 April 10]. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2017->

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3. Pizo M, Donatti C, Guedes N, Galetti M. 2008. Conservation puzzle: Endangered hyacinth macaw depends on its nest predator for reproduction. *Biol Conserv.* 141: 792-796.