

Wattled Jacana

Scientific Name: *Jacana jacana*

Class: Aves

Order: Ciconiiformes

Family: Jacanidae



The length of the wattled jacana is about 10 inches. The head, neck, upper mantle, breast, central belly and under tail coverts are black. Elsewhere the coloration is a rich chestnut. Flight feathers are a pale greenish-yellow, very conspicuous in flight. Immature birds are very different, being sooty brown above and more blackish on the crown, with a white stripe above the eye and a black stripe behind the eye. Otherwise they are grayish-brown above, with the sides of the head and under-parts whitish. The bill of the adult is yellow with a two-lobed yellow frontal shield. The bill of the immature is brownish with a pinkish or lilac frontal shield. The legs are long and grayish, with extremely long toes. Their tails are short.

Range

Panama to Bolivia, N. Argentina and Uruguay

Habitat

Tropical floating vegetation, grassy areas

Gestation

Incubation: 22 - 24 days

Litter

Clutch size: 3 to 6 eggs; generally 4

Behavior

Wattled jacanas are water birds characterized by their striking plumage and extremely long toes and claws, which enable them to walk with ease on floating vegetation and on the leaves of water lilies. (They are sometimes called "lily-trotters".) They forage while stalking from leaf to leaf, occasionally jumping over a patch of open water with the help of a flick of the wings. Jacanas are sedentary birds, without any well-defined migrations. Like other birds dependent upon water, however, they are obliged to wander if their pond or marsh dries up. They walk on lily leaves and floating vegetation with a high stepping gait and jerking tail.

Reproduction

Polyandry (females mating with more than one male) is common among wattled jacanas, with a reversal of the role of sexes. Males establish small territories which are defended against other males by strident calls, chases with upraised wings, and even aerial attack. Males build the nest unaided by females. The nest is made of water weeds, a low raft usually on floating vegetation, but sometimes a pad in a tussock at the water's edge. The female visits the nest to lay her eggs, then departs to consort with a neighboring male and lay a clutch for him. Generally the male incubates by himself. Newly-hatched young are carried under the wings of the adult. The young are helpless when hatched. By two days the chicks are fairly agile and can follow the adult. At three days they can run swiftly over lily pads, and then forage with the parent.

Wild Diet

Aquatic insects, mollusks, small fish, seeds of aquatic plants