

# Northern jacana

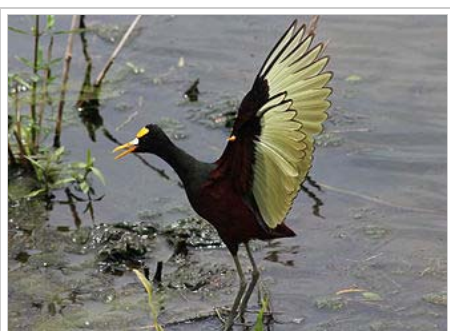
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The **northern jacana** or **northern jaçana** (*Jacana spinosa*) is a wader which is a resident breeder from coastal Mexico to western Panama, and on Cuba, Jamaica and Hispaniola. It sometimes breeds in Texas, USA, and has also been recorded on several occasions as a vagrant in Arizona [1] (<http://www.azfo.org/gallery/noja.html>). The jacanas are a group of wetland birds, which are identifiable by their huge feet and claws which enable them to walk on floating vegetation in the shallow lakes that are their preferred habitat. They are found worldwide within the tropical zone. In Jamaica this bird is also known as the 'Jesus bird', as it appears to walk on water.<sup>[2]</sup> Jacana is Linnæus' scientific Latin spelling of the Brazilian Portuguese *jaçanã*, pronounced [ʒasaˈnɐ̃], from the Tupi name of the bird. See jacana for pronunciations.

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## Description



Fortuna, Costa Rica

The northern jacana has a dark brown body with a black head and neck. In addition its bill has yellow patches and its forehead has a wattle.<sup>[3]</sup> Its bill has a white base. When a jacana is in flight, its yellow primary and secondary feathers are visible. Juveniles have a white supercilium and white lores. The female jacana is around twice as big as the

male, averaging (145.4g) compared to (86.9g).<sup>[4]</sup> Jacanas average 241 mm in length with a wingspan averaging 508 mm.

## Behavior and ecology

The northern jacana ranges Mexico to Panama, although they occasionally visit the southern United States.<sup>[5]</sup> It mainly lives in coastal areas. Jacanas live on floating vegetation in swamps, marshes, and ponds. They will

### Northern jacana



In Palo Verde National Park, Costa Rica

### Conservation status



Least Concern (IUCN 3.1)<sup>[1]</sup>

### Scientific classification

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Aves
Order:	Charadriiformes
Family:	Jacanidae
Genus:	<i>Jacana</i>
Species:	<i><b>J. spinosa</b></i>

### Binomial name

***Jacana spinosa***  
(Linnaeus, 1758)



Northern jacana foraging at Tortuguero, Costa Rica

feed on insects on the surface of vegetation and ovules of water lilies.<sup>[3]</sup> They will also consume snails, worms, small crabs, fish, mollusks, and seeds. The jacana competes with birds of a similar diet like the sora.<sup>[6]</sup> Predators of the jacana include snakes, caimans, snapping turtles and various large birds and mammals.<sup>[3]</sup> The American purple gallinule preys on jacana eggs and offspring. Jacanas commonly attack gallinules that enter their territory.<sup>[6]</sup>

### Social behavior and mating

The northern jacana is unusual among birds in having a polyandrous society. A female jacana lives in a territory that encompasses the territories of 1-4 males.<sup>[7]</sup> A male forms a pair bond with a female who will keep other females out of his territory. Pair bonds between the female and her males remain throughout the year, even outside of breeding. These relationships last until a male or female is replaced.<sup>[3]</sup> The female maintains bonds with her mates through copulations and producing clutches for them, as well as protecting their territories and defending the eggs from predators.<sup>[7]</sup> Monogamous pairs are sometimes observed among polyandrous groups.<sup>[8]</sup> The jacana has a simultaneous polyandrous mating system. That is the female will mate with several males a day or form pair bonds with more than one male at a time.<sup>[8]</sup> Because of the high energy costs of producing eggs, females are replaced more often than males.<sup>[9]</sup> If water levels remain constant, jacanas can breed year round.<sup>[3]</sup>

### Parenting

Both the creation of the nests and parenting are the responsibility of the males. A male constructs a nest on top of the water with whatever plant matter he can find.<sup>[3]</sup> A male jacana will grab vegetation and walk backwards to uproot it and continues to walk backward to drop the plant part in the nest. The male pushes against and steps on the plant parts to create a compact mound. The best nest are ones that are the most dense and stable.<sup>[10]</sup> A male may create several nests at different sites and the female may choose one or find a site of her own in the territory.<sup>[10]</sup> The male usually brings up the chicks without help from the female. He spends 28 days sitting on and incubating the eggs. A female may sometimes shade and squat over the eggs but rarely incubate them.<sup>[10]</sup> A female may reluctantly incubate the eggs if a male doesn't have sufficient time to forage throughout the day due to rain and cool temperatures.<sup>[7]</sup> Males spend most of their time within their territory during incubation but sometimes leave the nest unattended for long periods of time. A male performs when each egg hatches and stands next to the nest to peer into it.<sup>[11]</sup> The males continues to incubate to remaining eggs while brooding the hatched chicks. When all the eggs have hatched, the male will dispose of the remaining egg shells. It will also lead the chicks away from the nest within the next 24 hours.<sup>[11]</sup>



A juvenile northern jacana

Young jacana chicks are called downies and have patterns of orange, browns, black and some white on them.<sup>[12]</sup> Older chicks are gray and have brownish upper parts.<sup>[12]</sup> Chicks are able to swim, dive and feed shortly after they hatch. The male will not feed the chick but lead them to food.<sup>[11]</sup> The male will brood the chicks for many weeks. As the chicks get bigger, fewer can fit under the males wing. Females may brood chicks when the male is away.<sup>[11]</sup> Territorial defense for both males and males increase when the chick are born. Males are intolerant of intruders in their territory and make calls to the female for help for predator

defense.<sup>[11]</sup> Females respond to every call the male makes and invests much interest in the safety of the chicks, despite having little interaction with them. The females provide the males with a new clutch when the chicks are 12–16 weeks old.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Vocalizations

Vocalizations among jacanas usually occur between mating pairs or between fathers and their young. Jacanas will emit "clustered-note calls", which are made of individual notes clustered together, when jacanas attack intruders in their territories.<sup>[8]</sup> Jacanas also made calls when eggs or chicks are under threat by predators. The notes and their pattern depend on the urgency of the threat. Calls are also made on flight, when a female is away from then territory too long or if a male can't find a chick.<sup>[8]</sup>



Jacana pair and chick near a caiman

## Status

Northern jacanas appear to be common throughout most of their range, but could become vulnerable with loss of wetlands.<sup>[5]</sup>

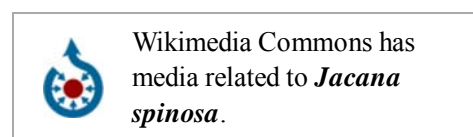
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Categories: IUCN Red List least concern species | Jacanidae | Birds of the Caribbean | Birds of Central America | Birds of Mexico | Birds of Panama | Birds of the United States | Animals described in 1758



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