

Notes on the breeding of north-west Ecuadorian birds

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Whilst the work of Skutch, French, the Snows, Haverschmidt, Sick and others has greatly increased our understanding of the breeding biology and seasonality of the birds of Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Trinidad, Suriname, Brazil and Colombia, there remains relatively little published on the breeding of Ecuadorian birds. The work of Marchant (1959, 1960) then Best *et al.* (1993, 1996) and Rasmussen *et al.* (1996) in southern Ecuador provided a starting point, but recent papers have pointed to the dearth of information for the country as a whole (e.g. Kiff *et al.* 1989, Greeney *et al.* 2004). Though we have barely begun the monumental task of elucidating breeding patterns in Ecuador, recent studies have greatly improved our knowledge for the north-west (e.g. Marín & Carrión 1991, 1994, Freile & Renjifo 2003, Karubian *et al.* 2003, Athanas & Davis 2004, Greeney *et al.* 2004, Greeney 2005, Greeney & Wetherwax 2005).

Here we present *c.*150 observations on the breeding activity of 72 species of birds, collected over the last five years, from the Tandayapa–Mindó area of Ecuador's north-western Pichincha province. Observations were made opportunistically, and alone are not useful for assessing patterns of seasonality. In conjunction with past and future observations, however, the data presented here comprise a significant contribution to our knowledge of birds from this poorly studied area of Ecuador. We are aware that numerous breeding records are 'buried' in birdwatching trip reports, but we hope this paper encourages others to publish such valuable, and currently unavailable, information.

The majority of our observations were made between 1998 and 2004 in the Tandayapa Valley, Pichincha province, north-west of Quito. All locations are sequentially located along the road to Mindó above the small town of Tandayapa, beginning with Tandayapa Bird Lodge (00°00'N, 78°41'W), 1,300 m (TBL) just outside the town of Tandayapa; Pacha Quindi Nature Refuge and Botanical Gardens, 2,000 m (PQ); and Bellavista Lodge, 2,200 m (BV). Data collected at PQ in 1999–2004 show annual rainfall to range from 1.7 to just over 3 m (TN unpubl.). July and August are consistently the driest months, with a fairly well-defined dry season in June–November. We made additional observations in 2001–04 around the Mindó Biological Station (MBS). The station lies at 1,750 m in the Mindó Valley, and has similar weather patterns to Tandayapa. Nesting records are given in taxonomic order following Ridgely & Greenfield (2001). For many species, these data are the first presented for Ecuador, and for most others the first for the area. For brevity and simplicity, we have refrained from exhaustively reviewing the breeding literature for each species, mentioning only other Ecuadorian records or particularly

relevant works. We use the following abbreviations: (B) building, (I) incubating, (N) nestlings, (F) dependent fledglings, (AN) active nest at unknown stage, (J) juvenile-plumaged individual, and (CM) carrying nesting material but nest unseen.

Species accounts

WHITE-RUMPED HAWK *Buteo leucorrhous*

On 16 January 2000, at PQ, we observed an adult feeding a juvenile. Adults brought the young bird three small mouse-sized mammals over the course of two hours.

BARRED HAWK *Leucopternis princeps*

On 26 December 2002, at PQ, we observed an adult carrying food repeatedly to the same area of forest, where we suspect it had a nest. Three lizards were the only prey items identified. Almost nothing is known of the breeding habits of this elusive forest raptor.

DARK-BACKED WOOD-QUAIL *Odontophorus melanonotus*

At PQ, on 10 May 2000, we observed two adults with three dependent young and, on 26 May 2001, a group of four adults and three juveniles. Groups of adults and juveniles were reported at a nearby site (Freile & Chaves 2004), but no specific dates were presented and little else appears to have been published on the breeding of this poorly known species.

CLOUD-FOREST PYGMY-OWL *Glaucidium nubicola*

On 14 August 1999, at PQ, an adult was seen feeding a lizard to a recently fledged juvenile. There is apparently no published breeding account for this species, but Freile *et al.* (2003) published observations of this species from a nearby location.

PURPLE-THROATED WOODSTAR *Calliphlox mitchellii*

On 14 May 1999, at PQ, we discovered a nest saddled over an exposed bare branch, 3–4 m above ground. On 27 June, we observed the female feeding nestlings and soon afterwards fledglings. Subsequently, on 1–8 July, we observed a female adding material to the same nest. Two eggs were laid and eventually two young fledged on 23 August. The following year, the same nest was rebuilt and on 15 April 2000 we observed a female incubating two eggs. The nest failed and, on 20 April, what we believe to have been the same female began constructing a second nest 15 m above ground on an exposed branch. On 5 June 2000, only 5–6 m from the new nest, we located another nest containing a single nestling. On 6 April 2002, at PQ, a female was seen carrying nesting material repeatedly to the same area.

BROWN INCA *Coeligena wilsoni*

On 23 August 2002, at MBS, we discovered a female incubating two all-white eggs (15.1 × 9.8 mm and 14.8 × 9.8 mm). The nest was a slightly oblong mossy cup with a dense lining of balsa seed down, decorated on the outside with loose hanging

moss. It was 2 m up in the vertical fork of a small sapling within mature forest. The nest measured 7.0–7.5 cm wide × 6.5 cm tall, with a 10 cm ‘tail’ of hanging moss, and the cup was 3.0–3.5 cm wide and 2.5 cm deep.

SPOTTED BARBTAIL *Premnoplex brunnescens*

On 2 May 2002, at MBS, a nest with two all-white, partially incubated eggs (21.2 × 16.7 mm and 21.4 × 16.7 mm) was found along a small stream. The following day we found a second nest under construction, with two adults bringing soft pale lining material. On 25 August 2002, at MBS, we found a third nest with two all-white, well-incubated eggs (20.4 × 16.4 mm and 21.1 × 16.9 mm). On 28 January 2003, we revisited the first nest and discovered two nestlings. On this date, also at MBS, we discovered a fourth nest with two all-white eggs (21.7 × 16.0 mm and 21.1 × 15.8 mm) which showed no embryonic development. On 20 August 2003 we found the third nest to again contain two all-white eggs (20.8 × 15.8 mm and 20.7 × 15.9 mm). We discovered a fifth nest on 11 December 2003 at PQ. It contained two nestlings. These records, as well as an active nest in March–April and June at a nearby location (Marín & Carrión 1994), suggest breeding is year-round in north-west Ecuador.

GIANT ANTPITTA *Grallaria gigantea*

On 19 April 2001, at PQ, we observed an adult feeding a fledgling a large earthworm. The nest of this species remains undescribed, and this appears to be the first published breeding information for this Endangered and range-restricted species (Krabbe & Schulenberg 2003, BirdLife International 2004).

ANDEAN COCK-OF-THE-ROCK *Rupicola peruviana*

On 9 July 1999, at TBL, we observed an adult female sitting on a nest near the ‘Potoo’ trail. We could not observe the contents of the nest. At MBS, on 20 August 2003, we discovered an adult female feeding and brooding a single nestling below the lodge. Other nesting records from the area include a nest with older nestlings near TBL in September 1997 (Pérez & Lyons de Pérez 1998) and 15 active nests near Mindo in July 1991–February 1992 (Nicolalde 1993).

YELLOW-BELLIED CHAT-TYRANT *Ochthoeca diadema*

On 16 November 1999, at PQ, we discovered a nest with two white to cream-coloured, unmarked eggs. The nest was a mossy ball lined with feathers, 1.5 m up on the side of a moss-covered tree.

GREY-BREASTED WOOD-WREN

We found nests, each with two nestlings, on 2 June 2001 at PQ and 27 January 2003 at MBS. On 29 January 2003 at MBS we found a nest with two incubated, all-white eggs (20.0 × 14.3 mm and 20.4 × 14.3 mm). The nest was 1.4 m up, in a regrowing pasture. We found a second nest with eggs at TBL on 6 December 2003. The nest

was along the road, 3 m up, and contained two all-white, partially incubated eggs (19.3×14.0 mm and 18.9×14.1 mm). Additionally, on 8 September 2002, at PQ, we saw an adult with begging juveniles. These dates suggest breeding in the dry season, extending into the wet, and possibly year-round.

BLACK-CAPPED TANAGER *Tangara heinei*

On 7 December 2003, near TBL, we discovered a nest containing two eggs (20.9×15.7 mm and 20.5×15.2 mm). The nest was 1 m above ground and well supported in the vertical fork of an isolated *Tibouchina* sp. (Melastomataceae) sapling, surrounded by pasture. On the same day, at PQ, we found a second nest located 5 m above ground in the vertical fork of an isolated tree (Urticaceae). At 0900 h an adult female arrived and fed one nestling a small red berry, then settled onto the nest to brood. On 13 December 2003, at TBL, we discovered a third nest containing two eggs (21.5×15.1 mm and 19.7×15.4 mm). The nest was located 1.5 m up in a small shrub (Asteraceae), saddled over a thin horizontal branch. All of the eggs were pale blue to blue-green with sparse red-brown spotting. Nests were neat mossy cups lined with dark and pale fibres, and decorated on the outside with spider webs and lichens. We observed only females incubating. Hilty & Brown (1986) reported a clutch size of one in Colombia, nests 2–3 m above ground and breeding activity nearly year-round. Ewert (1975) reported a nest under construction in Venezuela in May, but ours appear to be the first breeding reports for Ecuador.

BLACK-WINGED SALTATOR *Saltator atripennis*

On 15 February 2001 and 17 February 2002 we observed adults carrying nesting material at PQ. On 11 December 2003 we discovered a nest, 80 cm above ground, supported by pasture grass and containing two nestlings. The nestlings' tarsi measured 23.0 mm and 22.7 mm respectively.

TANAGER FINCH *Oreothraupis arremenops*

On 4 June 2000, at BV, a single fledgling was seen following and begging from a pair of adults. The only breeding information available for this rare species is the description of a single nest in November, found at BV (Greeney *et al.* 1998).

RUFOUS-COLLARED SPARROW *Zonotrichia capensis*

At PQ, we found nests under construction in May 2000 and April 2003. We observed a nest with two incubated eggs on 11 December 2003. The eggs were pale blue with red-brown flecking and measured 19.5×15.2 mm and 20.4×15.3 mm respectively.

In addition, we recorded the following information: **Swallow-tailed Kite** *Elanoides forficatus*, 13 May 2001 PQ (CM); **Double-toothed Kite** *Harpagus bidentatus*, 29 March 1999 BV (CM, carrying moss); **Plumbeous Pigeon** *Columba plumbea*, 7 December 2003 PQ (B); **Green-fronted Lancebill** *Doryfera ludovicae*,

8 June 1999 PQ (I), 28 January 2003 MBS (N, near fledging); **Green Violetear** *Colibri thalassinus*, 7 June 1999 PQ (I, clutch two), 16 June 2000 PQ (I, nest 1 m up, saddled on *Chusquea* bamboo); **Western Emerald** *Chlorostilbon melanorhynchus*, 6 April 2000 PQ (CM, gathering seed down), 8 October 2000 PQ (N, nest 2 m up), 26 October 2000 PQ (B); **Fawn-breasted Brilliant** *Heliodoxa rubinoides*, 26 April 2000 PQ (CM, gathering tree fern scales); **Collared Inca** *Coeligena torquata*, 23 March 2000 PQ (AN, nest 3 m up on *Chusquea* bamboo tip); **Buff-tailed Coronet** *Boissonneaua flavescens*, 26 June 1998 BV (I); **Booted Racket-tail** *Ocreatus underwoodii*, 12 June 2000 PQ (B, just commencing construction); **Masked Trogon** *Trogon personatus*, 28 July 2000 PQ (F); **Plate-billed Mountain-toucan** *Andigena laminirostris*, 9 August 2001 PQ (AN), 3 September 2002 PQ (AN); **Crimson-mantled Woodpecker** *Picus rivolii*, 17 August 2002 PQ (F); **Yellow-vented Woodpecker** *Veniliornis dignus*, 4 September 2002 PQ (F); **Azara's Spinetail** *Synallaxis azarae*, 1 April 1999 BV (B), 12 May 2000 PQ (B), 30 November 2001 PQ (B), 10 May 2003 PQ (B), 7 December 2003 PQ (B); **Lineated Foliage-gleaner** *Syndactyla subalaris*, 12 August 1999 PQ (B), 6 December 2000 PQ (F); **Striped Treehunter** *Thripadectes holostictus*, 14 April 2000 PQ (B, excavating tunnel), 14 April 2002 PQ (AN); **Streak-capped Treehunter** *Thripadectes virgaticeps*, 14 October 2001 PQ (N); **Montane Woodcreeper** *Lepidocolaptes lacrymiger*, 7 October 1998 BV (N); **Spillmann's Tapaculo** *Scytalopus spillmanni*, 10 August 1999 PQ (F); **Smoke-coloured Pewee** *Contopus fumigatus*, 6 May 2001 PQ (CM); **Black Phoebe** *Sayornis nigricans*, 24 September 2003 Mindo (B); **Golden-crowned Flycatcher** *Myiodynastes chrysocephalus*, 5 March 1998 BV (CM), 25 April 1999 BV (CM), 12 May 1999 PQ (B), 2 June 1999 PQ (I, clutch three), 27 April 2000 PQ (B, 15 m up); **Barred Becard** *Pachyramphus versicolor*, 23 August 2003 MBS (B, both sexes building, 8 m up); **Green-and-black Fruiteater** *Pipreola riefferii*, 12 August 1999 PQ (F), early-October 2000 PQ (B), 8 September 2002 PQ (AN); **Turquoise Jay** *Cyanolyca turcosa*, May 1998 (B), June 1999 BV (N); **Beautiful Jay** *Cyanolyca pulchra*, 14 August 1999 PQ (AN); **Blue-and-white Swallow** *Notiochelidon cyanoleuca*, 17 April 2002 PQ (AN), 1 August 2003 PQ (AN), 7 December 2003 PQ (N); **Southern Rough-winged Swallow** *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*, 6 December 2003 TBL (B); **Mountain Wren** *Troglodytes solstitialis*, 3 April 1998 BV (F); **Tropical Parula** *Parula pitaiyumi*, June 1999 PQ (B); **Slate-throated Whitestart** *Myioborus miniatus*, 16 May 1998 BV (B), 1 September 1998 PQ (I, clutch two, in bank on ground), 27 February 2002 PQ (AN, in bank on ground), 24 September 2003 MBS (I, clutch two, in bank on ground), 6 December 2003 TBL (N, two older nestlings); **Spectacled Whitestart** *Myioborus melanocephalus*, 25 June 1998 BV (CM); **Three-striped Warbler** *Basileuterus tristriatus*, 5 September 1998 PQ (F); **Russet-crowned Warbler** *Basileuterus coronatus*, April 1998 BV (F), 18 April 2002 PQ (AN), 10 May 2003 PQ (F); **White-sided Flowerpiercer** *Diglossa albilatera*, 27 March 2000 PQ (B), 13 March 2001 PQ (F); **Thick-billed Euphonia** *Euphonia laniirostris*, 6 October 2003 PQ (B,

both sexes building, lining of *Chusquea* bamboo leaves), 7 December 2003 PQ (I); **Golden-rumped Euphonia** *Euphonia cyanocephala*, November 1998 PQ (AN), May 1999 PQ (B), June 1999 PQ (B, both sexes building), 10 December 2002 PQ (B, both sexes building, predated by Plate-billed Mountain-toucan), 24 December 2002 PQ (B, re-nesting of previous pair); **Golden Tanager** *Tangara arthus*, 18 August 1999 PQ (F), 28 February 2000 PQ (B); **Silver-throated Tanager** *Tangara icterocephala*, 8 April 2000 PQ (J); **Flame-faced Tanager** *Tangara parzudakii*, 18 October 2000 PQ (B), 1 August 2001 PQ (B), 13 December 2002 PQ (CM); **Metallic-green Tanager** *Tangara labradorides*, 17 April 1998 BV (F); **Beryl-spangled Tanager** *Tangara nigroviridis*, June 1999 PQ (B); **Scarlet-bellied Mountain-tanager** *Anisognathus igniventris*, 27 June 1998 BV (J); **Blue-winged Mountain-tanager** *Anisognathus somptuosus*, April 1998 BV (F), 23 April 1999 PQ (B, 5 m up); **Grass-green Tanager** *Chlorornis riefferii*, 27 June 1998 BV (J), 14 May 1999 PQ (CM); **Blue-capped Tanager** *Thraupis cyanocephala*, 18 August 1999 PQ (F), 22 August 1999 PQ (CM), 10 June 2000 PQ (CM), 22 August 2000 PQ (F, adult feeding flower petals to fledgling), 15 February 2001 PQ (CM), 18 January 2002 PQ (CM), 15 August 2002 PQ (CM, breaking dead twigs from *Baccharis* (Asteraceae) shrub), 1 April 2003 PQ (AN), 24 September 2003 PQ (B); **Lemon-rumped Tanager** *Ramphocelus icteronotus*, 24 August 2003 MBS (B); **Dusky Bush-tanager** *Chlorospingus semifuscus*, 22 November 2001 PQ (CM); **Plushcap** *Catamblyrhynchus diadema*, 21 August 1999 PQ (J); **Blue-black Grassquit** *Volatinia jacarina*, 18 August 1999 PQ (F); **Yellow-bellied Seedeater** *Sporophila nigricollis*, 3 April 1999 PQ (F), 19 August 1999 PQ (F), 16 May 2001 PQ (I, clutch two, 1.2 m up), 27 February 2002 PQ (CM), 26 May 2002 PQ (N, male feeding nestlings); **Tricoloured Brush-finch** *Atlapetes tricolor*, 22 February 2000 PQ (F); **White-winged Brush-finch** *Atlapetes leucopterus*, 1 November 1998 PQ (CM), 28 May 2001 PQ (F), 15 May 2003 PQ (F); **Chestnut-capped Brush-finch** *Buarremon brunneinucha*, 9 November 1998 PQ (F), 2 September 1999 PQ (F); **Russet-backed Oropendola** *Psarocolius angustifrons*, February 1999 BV (F, adult feeding Giant Cowbird *Molothrus oryzivorus* fledgling), December 2001 PQ (F, adult feeding Giant Cowbird fledgling).

Whilst these few data are insufficient alone to understand seasonality, for a few species at least (e.g. Spotted Barbtail, Grey-breasted Wood-wren, Azara's Spinetail, Blue-capped Tanager), it appears that nesting probably occurs year-round. Others appear to be more seasonal (e.g. Yellow-bellied Seedeater). Within larger taxonomic groups (e.g. hummingbirds), we also begin to see some patterns: in this case, a preference for the end of the wet season and extending well into the drier months. We hope this note encourages others to contribute their observations on the breeding of Ecuadorian birds.

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The occurrence of *Sporophila hypochroma* and *S. hypoxantha* in Uruguay

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Tawny-bellied Seedeater *Sporophila hypoxantha* and Rufous-rumped Seedeater *S. hypochroma* occur seasonally over much of south-central South America in marshes, flooded grasslands and savanna-like habitats (Ridgely & Tudor 1989, Silva 1999). Whereas *S. hypoxantha* is considered the commonest small seedeater in the region (Ridgely & Tudor 1989), *S. hypochroma* is poorly known and currently treated as globally Near Threatened (BirdLife International 2004). Females and juveniles of both species are indistinguishable, and males are very similar, differing only in the intensity of the rufous coloration on the underparts and rump (Short 1969, Ridgely & Tudor 1989). *S. hypochroma* has not previously been reported in Uruguay, where *S. hypoxantha* is an uncommon summer resident (Azpiroz 2001). Here we report the first records of *S. hypochroma* for Uruguay that form the basis for its inclusion in Rocha (2003) and Claramunt & Cuello (2004). We also evaluate the status of *S. hypoxantha* and conclude that it may be regarded as hypothetical in Uruguay.

SC examined specimens of *Sporophila* in the bird collections of the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural y Antropología (MNHN) and the Facultad de Ciencias, Universidad de la República (ZVC-A), both in Montevideo, Uruguay. Specimens were also compared with representative samples of *S. hypochroma* and *S. hypoxantha* in the Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales 'Bernardino Rivadavia', Buenos Aires. During the austral summer of 2002–03, SC and GR surveyed threatened grassland birds in central-west Uruguay during which period they photographed and tape-recorded many seedeaters (Rocha & Claramunt 2003). In January 2003, SC and JA collected birds for MNHN in the departments of Río Negro and Paysandú, during which seedeater specimens were prepared as study skins, and tissue samples, crops and stomachs were preserved in 95% ethanol.