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FIRST NEST OF THE CHUSQUEA TAPACULO (*SCYTALOPUS PARKERI*) IN SOUTHERN ECUADOR

Harold F. Greeney[1] & Colin J. F. Rombough[2]

[1]Yanayacu Biological Station and Center for Creative Studies c/o Foch 721 y Amazonas, Quito, Ecuador & Research Associate, Museo Ecuatoriano de Ciencias Naturales, Rumipamba 341 y Av. Shyris, Quito, Ecuador *E-mail:* revmmoss@yahoo.com

[2]358 16th St., Brandon, Manitoba, Canada R7A 4X8.

El primer nido del Churrín de Chusquea (*Scytalopus parkeri*) en el sur del Ecuador.

Key words: Nest, natural history, nestlings, Andes, cloud forest, Chusquea Tapaculo, *Scytalopus parkeri.*

Extremely little is known about the natural history of *Scytalopus* tapaculos despite their broad Neotropical distribution (Krabbe 2003). The Chusquea Tapaculo (*S. parkeri*) was only recently described, having formerly been considered part of the Brown-rumped Tapaculo (*S. latebricola*) complex (Krabbe & Schulenberg 1997). It ranges from southern Ecuador to extreme northern Peru at elevations of 2250 to 3350 m (Krabbe 2003). Here we describe a nest of the Chusquea Tapaculo found at the Tapichalaca Biological Reserve (04°30'S, 79°10'W), located north of Valladolid in the southeastern Zamora-Chinchipe Province of Ecuador.

At 16:30 h (EST) on 7 October 2004, we found the well-hidden nest situated under a narrow crevice-like opening created by a large root protruding from a low bank (50 cm) next to the trail. The nest was a mossy ball wedged into the back of the crevice, 25–30 cm from the opening. It measured 15 cm in diameter outside, by roughly 15 cm tall and 13 cm from front to back. The opening was situated near the middle, 6 cm above the ground, and measured 5 cm wide by 3 cm high. Inside chamber dimensions were roughly 7 cm tall by 8 cm wide with a 4.5 cm deep egg cup. The nest consisted predominantly of moss and rootlets, with a thick cup of pale fibers and a few rootlets.

The nest contained two nestlings with long grey down. We observed both adults bringing small, single food items to the nestlings. Prey included adult and larval Lepidoptera, walking sticks (Phasmida), adult beetles, and orthopterans. Adult lepidopterans seemed especially common, and both adult birds were seen gleaning these from around an ultraviolet light located nearby. Nestling begging usually began while the adult was still a meter away from the entrance and not visible to the nestlings. It often continued loudly for up to 30 s after the adults left and, especially closer to fledgling, nestlings occasionally made muted noises in the absence of adults. Nestlings did not produce fecal sacs in the presence of adults, but

instead dropped them out of the nest between feeding visits. Adults collected these and carried them away upon their next visit.

The subterranean, mossy-ball nest was similar to previously described nests for the genus (Sclater & Salvin 1879, Johnson 1967, Skutch 1972, Stiles 1979, Hilty & Brown 1986, Rosenberg 1986, Sick 1993, Krabbe & Schulenberg 1997, Christian 2001, Young & Zuchowski 2003). The insect-like begging calls of the nestlings were similarly described for the Blackish Tapaculo (*S. latrans*) as "sizzling" by Skutch (1972). This unique description by Skutch, and the experience of HFG at other passerine nests, including two other species of *Scytalopus*, suggest that such loud and incessant begging calls may be unique among Neotropical passerines. Young & Zuchowski (2003), for the Silvery-fronted Tapaculo (*S. argentifrons*), also noted that nestlings were vocal in the absence of adults, and remarked on the insect-like quality of the begging.

Based on available evidence of breeding condition adults and dependent juveniles, Krabbe (2003) suggested year-round breeding of the Chusquea Tapaculo, yet this remains the first direct evidence of breeding. It is our sincere hope that other biologists working in the Neotropics will continue to publish all findings on this and other poorly known species. Only with repeated, published observations, on even the smallest details of natural history, will we be able to piece together the details necessary for sound conservation practices.

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