

NEST DESCRIPTIONS FOR *CONOTHRAUPIS SPECULIGERA* AND *THLYPOPSIS ORNATA* IN ECUADOR

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Abstract

We describe, for the first time, the nests and eggs of two tanagers (Thraupidae), the Black-and-white Tanager (*Conothraupis speculigera*) and the Rufous-chested Tanager (*Thlypopsis ornata*). Nests of both species were found near Yungilla, in the Azuay province of Ecuador.

Key words: nest, egg, natural history, Thraupidae

Resumen

Describimos, por primera vez, los nidos y huevos de dos tangaras (Thraupidae), la Tangara Negriblanca (*Conothraupis speculigera*) y la Tangara Pechicanela (*Thlypopsis ornata*). Los nidos de ambas especies fueron encontrados cerca de Yungilla, en la provincia de Azuay, Ecuador.

Palabras clave: nido, huevo, historia natural, Thraupidae.

Despite a recent increase in the number of papers describing, for the first time, the nesting of Neotropical birds, especially from Ecuador (e.g., Athanas & Davis 2004, Freile &

Renjifo 2003, Greeney & Wetherwax 2005, Oppel *et al.* 2003), the nests of a surprising number of species have yet to be described (K.Zyskowski pers. com.). We made all observations

while conducting studies on the breeding biology of Pale-headed Brush-Finches (*Atlapetes pallidiceps*) from 2004-2005 in the Yungilla Valley, ca. 50 km southwest of Cuenca, in the upper Rio Jubones drainage, Azuay Province, Ecuador. Here we provide the first descriptions for nests of Black-and-white Tanager (*Conothraupis speculigera*) and Rufous-chested Tanager (*Thlypopsis ornata*). We made observations on both species at the Jocotoco Foundation reserve near Yungilla (03°13' S, 79°16' W), at elevations ranging from 1600-2000 m. For more complete site descriptions see Agreda *et al.* (1999) and Oppel *et al.* (2003).

The nest and eggs of Black-and-white Tanager (*Conothraupis speculigera*). The Black-and-white Tanager is found west of the Andes in southwestern Ecuador and east of the Andes in southeastern Peru at elevations from 100-1800 m. At least some populations are thought to be nomadic, but its exact movements and breeding status are uncertain throughout most of its range (Isler & Isler 1999). Almost nothing is known of its breeding habits, except for the observations of Carriker (1934), who

flushed a laying (based on reproductive condition of specimen) female from a thicket in northwestern Peru, but was unable to locate the nest. To date the nest and eggs remain undescribed.

On 12 March 2005, we discovered a nest of Black-and-white Tanager containing two eggs with developing embryos. The nest was situated in an area of scrubby, thorny, second growth, in a three-way fork of a small *Lantana* sp. (Verbenaceae) shrub, 0.6 m above the ground. The nest was an untidy, loosely woven cup of pale sticks and leaf petioles, with an untidy lining of black fungal rhizomorphs (Fig. 1). The nest measured 6.5 cm tall and 10.5 cm wide outside, with a few stray sticks poking out an additional 4-5 cm. inside, the cup was 6 cm wide and 4 cm deep. The two eggs were pale blue with heavy brown blotching, distributed fairly evenly, but slightly more concentrated at the larger end. They measured 20.9 by 15.6 and 20.8 by 15.6 mm. Previously, on 10 March 2004, we observed a nest which contained three eggs, and was situated 1.4 m above the ground in a 1.8 m tall Urticaceae shrub. No further observations were made.



Figure 1. The nest and eggs of Black-and-white Tanager (*Conothraupis speculigera*) in the Yungilla Reserve, Azuay, Ecuador, 12 March 2005. Photo by H. F. Greeney.

The nest and eggs of Rufous-chested Tanager (*Thlypopsis ornata*). The Rufous-chested Tanager is distributed from western Colombia, south through western Ecuador to west and east-central Peru, at elevations ranging from 1800-3400 m (Isler & Isler 1999, Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). Despite this relatively broad distribution, there is nothing published concerning its breeding biology. Here we provide observations made at four nests found in the Yungilla Valley. The following nest description is based on a nest found 17 March 2005, containing two partially feathered nestlings (Fig. 2). The nest was in an area of second growth, loosely

supported 0.85 m above the ground by a single small (3-4 mm) diameter herbaceous stem at a 45° angle, and 10-15 leaves and stems of “yaragua” grass (*Melinis minutiflora*). The nest was an open cup built mostly of loosely interwoven sticks, grass blades, and leaf petioles. It measured roughly 8.5 cm wide outside, with a few loose sticks extending outwards an additional 4-5 cm. The nest was 7.5 cm tall overall, with an inner egg cup measuring 4.5 cm wide by 5 cm deep. The lining of the nest consisted of tightly woven, pale grass fibers and petioles. At the time of discovery (08:00 h), we observed both adults provisioning the nestlings with small,

singly-carried arthropods. The fate of the nest is unknown.



Figure 2. The nest and nestlings of Rufous-chested Tanager (*Thlypopsis ornata*) in the Yungilla Reserve, Azuay, Ecuador, 12 March 2005. Photo by H. F. Greeney.

Prior to this, on 16 April 2004 we discovered a nest situated in dense second growth vegetation, at 0.4 m above the ground, and supported by multiple forks of a small shrub. At the time of discovery, two nestlings were flushed from the nest. Both adults were present in the area, and emitted continuous alarm and contact calls. Presumably drawn by this noise, a pair of Pale-headed Brush-Finches (*Atlapetes pallidiceps*) arrived, also chipping excitedly, and flew repeatedly and aggressively towards the adult Rufous-chested

Tanagers. After ca. 15 min., the brush-finches left and the fledglings moved 7-10 m from the nest, where we observed them being provisioned by two adults. We made additional observations at a nest found under construction on 28 April 2004. Two eggs were laid in the nest prior to 1 May. Both eggs were white with thick red-brown blotching and streaking, heaviest at the larger end, but covering most of the egg. Using a straight ruler, the egg dimensions were determined as 1.8 by 1.6 and 1.9 by 1.6 mm, respectively. This nest was

situated in an area of second growth, supported in a multiple fork of a small Asteraceae shrub, at 1.2 m above the ground. It was similar to the nest described above, but the lining consisted predominantly of darker materials, including black fungal rhizomorphs and leaf petioles. No further observations were made. We observed an additional nest, in which two eggs were laid roughly 24 h apart, on 1 March 2004. This nest was 0.8 m up in a small, spiny, *Mimosa* sp. (Leguminaceae) shrub.

We discovered a fourth nest on 15 March 2005, situated in an area of second growth in the fork of a small *Lantana* shrub (Verbenaceae). The nest appeared mostly complete and was similar to that described above, containing a predominance of dried *Chusquea* bamboo (Poaceae) leaves in the body of the nest. The first egg was laid on 21 March, prior to 16:00 h; a second egg was laid the following day. On 4 April, 13 days after the second egg was laid, one egg hatched and the other disappeared from the nest. The nest was last observed on 13 April, at which time it still contained a single nestling, heavily infested with subcutaneous botflies. The nest of only one of the *Thlypopsis* tanagers, Orange-headed Tanager (*T. sordida*), has been described. Dinelli (1918), in Argentina, describes the nest as an open cup 2 m above the ground and contained two bluish-white eggs

spotted with red-brown and cinnamon.

Both of these species are common and fairly widespread in southwestern Ecuador, and inhabit scrubby, often second growth habitat. Despite this, their nesting habits and natural history, as well as those of many other common Ecuadorian species, have received little attention. We hope this brief contribution encourages others to bring forth data which has perhaps been collected, but remains unpublished.

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