

Range extension for White-throated Earthcreeper *Upucerthia albigula* in Lima, Peru

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Presentamos la evidencia de una extensión en el rango de distribución de *Upucerthia albigula* aproximadamente a 350 km al norte de la última información publicada. Se observó a *U. albigula* entre 2.300 y 2.600 m de altura en pendiente de la prolongación orientada hacia el sur de los Andes occidentales en el departamento de Lima, donde se encuentra el hábitat típico de esta especie, lo cual fue descrito por observadores anteriores. La evidencia se presenta con la observación de reproducción de la especie y de múltiples machos territoriales o de parejas.



Figure 1. Habitat where White-throated Earthcreeper *Upucerthia albigula* was observed in Lima, Peru (Dan Lane)



Figure 2. White-throated Earthcreeper *Upucerthia albigula*, Lurin Valley, Lima, Peru 1 February 2009 (Richard E. Gibbons)

Figure 3. Nest burrow of White-throated Earthcreeper *Upucerthia albigula*, Lurin Valley, Lima, Peru (Richard E. Gibbons)



White-throated Earthcreeper *Upucerthia albigula* is a member of the Furnariidae that inhabits a narrow-elevation band on the Pacific slope of the Andes in Peru and Chile⁵. Its preferred habitat is described as arid shrubland with scattered columnar cacti^{5,6}, arid-zone ravines with streams and bushes², or arid montane scrub with sparsely

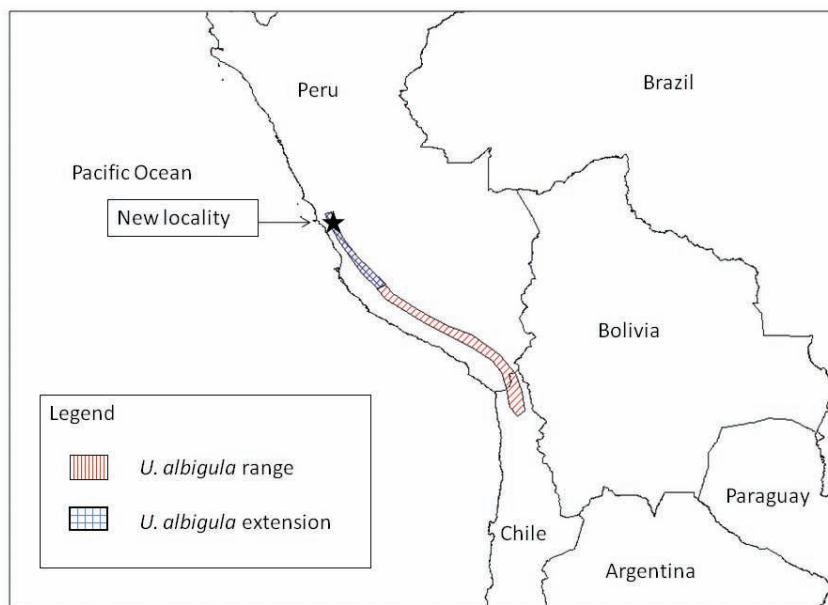


Figure 4. Map showing specimen localities of White-throated Earthcreeper *Upucerthia albigula* and the newly discovered population.

vegetated slopes, brushy ravines, desert scrub and adjacent hedgerows around pastures and agricultural land⁴. The species is assessed as Least Concern by BirdLife International¹. Fjeldsâ & Krabbe² noted *U. albigula* as far north as Ayacucho on the slope 'below' (*sic*, presumably 'above') Pampa de Nazca, at 2,675 m, and ranging south to northern Chile at Tarapacá near Putre, at elevations of 2,300–3,550 m. Koepcke³, in her seminal work on the avifauna of Lima, did not mention the species.

While exploring a canyon known as Tinajas⁷ near Lima, Peru (12°08'35.85"S 76°36'08.79"W) on 5 October 2008, SEG briefly observed an unidentified *Upucerthia* feeding quietly in a steep brushy ravine on a slope with scattered columnar cacti at c.2,330 m (Fig. 1). Realising the possible importance of the record, SEG returned on 18 January, 1 February and 14 March 2009. The visit on 18 January confirmed that the species involved was *U. albigula*. Field marks differentiating *U. albigula* from Plain-breasted Earthcreeper *U. jelskii* include the deeper-based bill, rufescent wing-coverts and secondaries, more pronounced supercilium and tawny flanks⁵. The first of two birds observed, in the same area as on 5 October 2008, was counter-calling with another distant individual. A third was encountered within the next 1 km. Both birds seen were vocalising from cacti close to the road.

SEG and REG returned on 1 February 2009, when 11 *U. albigula* were found, photographs taken (Fig. 2) and sound-recordings were made to document the range extension. Three to four

individuals were readily heard vocalising at several points in the steep slope cactus / shrub habitat.

During this visit one individual was seen leaving a cavity in the vertical roadside bank (Fig. 3). The burrow was c.2 m above the road and extended at a slight angle upwards at the entrance, then falling gently away within c.40 cm. SEG remained near the burrow and the bird soon returned, appearing to pretend to feed within 10 m of SEG; it gave quiet and repeated short calls as if either to communicate with the burrow's occupants or to distract SEG's attention. These call notes were tape-recorded (xeno-canto.org 33511). Comparable calls have been recorded by N. Krabbe and described by him as alarm-calls (xeno-canto.org 15983).

SEG visited the same area on 14 March 2009 with Noam Shany. The burrow was not in use, but an apparent juvenile with buffy, indistinct facial plumage was seen by NS downslope of the entrance. Further downslope, two adults were observed alternately taking turns excavating a hole in a ravine slope, occasionally taking prey. Soil was pried loose using the bill and then 'shoveled' downslope with a jumping movement using both feet. While one bird dug, the second perched quietly nearby.

Two additional occupied burrows were encountered within the next 2 km and one *U. albigula* was flushed from the first both on our ascent and again an hour later. A second *U. albigula* was flushed from the other burrow and, after a few minutes, an adult returned near the

entrance with a prey (apparently a worm), but stayed a few metres above the burrow on the ground and below the vegetation.

During the October visit birds were not heard vocalising, but they were readily audible in January and February. Only a short, weak series of calls was heard during the March visit from one distant bird. All visits were between 10h00 and 13h00. It was clear, hot and dry in October, misty and cloudy in January and February, and wet with much recent rainfall and very green conditions in March. Nest sites were all within road cuts in a substrate of friable, coarse-grained, weathered granodiorite. All observations at Tinajas have been on the south-facing slope above the first valley south of the Lurin Valley at elevations of 2,300–2,600 m. Our observations indicate territorial singing during the rainy season, with vocal activity possibly reduced outside this period. The nesting period appears to extend into the wet season.

Whether *U. albigula* also occurs in dptos. Ica and Huancavelica, which lie between the previously known range and Tinajas, is unknown. However, satellite imagery (accessed on Google Earth) suggests that similar habitat occurs in the intervening area. If occupied by *U. albigula* throughout, this would increase the known range significantly, perhaps by as much as c.30% (Fig. 4).

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