

First record of Orinoco Goose *Neochen jubata* west of the Andes

Orinoco Goose *Neochen jubata* is widespread in Amazonia and was once common but is now generally rare^{1,2}, apparently due to hunting pressure especially along navigable rivers¹. Despite this, it was still a common breeder in part of Salta, north-west Argentina, as recently as the 1980s, and it is still considered common in parts of Bolivia, with groups of up to 250 at Laguna Beni and Laguna Pando². In Peru the species is apparently restricted to more remote portions of the Madre de Dios drainage of Amazonia, where it is usually found near riverbanks and sandbars⁶. Its rapid population decline has caused the species to be classified as Near Threatened globally¹ and Critically Endangered in Peru³.

Typical habitats for Orinoco Goose include rivers with forest and / or wetlands, wet savannas and large freshwater wetlands, generally below 500 m. One has been observed at 2,600 m on the Ubate savanna of the East Andes of Colombia⁴. We know of no other records from the Andes and none anywhere west of the Andes.

On 19 July 2009 at c.10h30 we visited Santuario Nacional Lagunas de Mejía, dpto. Arequipa, on the south coast of Peru (17°08'43.12"S 71°52'02.30"W; c.10 m). On approaching one of the larger *Typha*- and *Scirpus*-fringed lagoons (Iberia Centro), various waterbirds flushed, amongst which JB spotted an unfamiliar goose-like bird flying towards a salt grass formation (*Distichlis spicata*), where it remained a few minutes. It settled in the short grass behind the beach, but was very wary and impossible to approach closely, walking away whenever we attempted to approach the bird. However, NAHA did obtain digiscoped images, despite the fog and poor light, through a telescope (Fig. 1). In addition to the characters visible in the photograph, the wings and tail were dark green and a small white wing speculum was visible in flight. We observed



Figure 1. Orinoco Goose *Neochen jubata*, Santuario Nacional Lagunas de Mejía, dpto. Arequipa, Peru (Nataly A. Hidalgo Aranzamendi)

the bird for over 20 minutes. Shortly after, the bird flushed and flew off north.

This is not only the first published record of the Orinoco Goose for coastal Peru but also the first anywhere west of the Andes. Contrary to some discussion of this record on the internet, a single vagrant does not constitute evidence for migratory habits in the species, because many non-migratory bird species produce occasional vagrants. Dispersal by a juvenile, albeit of very unusual magnitude, is a much more likely explanation. The vast majority of lone vagrant geese in North America are juveniles (SFB pers. obs.). Because the juvenile plumage of Orinoco Goose is very similar to adult plumage⁵, we were unable to age our bird. Although crossing the Andes to the Pacific coast is not a 'small-scale movement', like most geese *Neochen jubata* is a strong flyer and doubtless capable of crossing the Andes. In this respect, it is important to realise that the species' current stronghold is north-west Bolivia, which is almost the closest possible source population to the south coast of Peru, with the Beni lowlands lying c.550 km from Mejía. Moreover, any vagrant freshwater bird arriving on the coast would find little habitat except at the Mejía or

Ite (dpto. Tacna) wetlands, making these oases natural 'vagrant traps' including species from across the Andes⁷. Amongst such vagrants, the species with a distribution most similar to Orinoco Goose is Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria*. The Mejía wetlands are a popular birdwatching destination, but to the best of our knowledge previous visitors to the area had not seen this Orinoco Goose.

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