

**Black-banded Owl *Ciccaba huhula* near Podocarpus National Park, southern Ecuador**

The range of Black-banded Owl *Ciccaba huhula* extends from southern Colombia to south-east Brazil and northern Argentina<sup>4</sup>. It is mainly found below 500 m<sup>6</sup>, with rare records to c.1,400 m<sup>4,9</sup>. In Ecuador, the species is almost exclusively found in humid forests of the north-east Amazonian lowlands, mainly along the río Napo, to 900 m<sup>11</sup>, although a female has been collected at the confluence of the ríos Zamora and Bombuscaro<sup>2</sup> (prov. Zamora-Chinchipe). In addition, a *Ciccaba* with characters intermediate between Black-and-white Owl *C. nigrolineata* and *C. huhula* is regularly observed at Cabañas San Isidro (1,900–2,000 m) on the east slope of the Andes ([http://cabanasanisidro.com/pages/birds\\_and\\_forest.htm](http://cabanasanisidro.com/pages/birds_and_forest.htm)). This population is singular in being apparently isolated from all other Ecuadorian *Ciccaba* populations, as well being found at a higher elevation than any known Black-banded Owl population in the country.

On 15 January 2000 (at 06h32), calls attributed to a Black-banded Owl were heard by MG at c.980 m in Podocarpus National Park, near the río Bombuscaro, c.400 m from the park's administration centre. The area is characterised by open forest, both primary and secondary on rolling hills, and a U-shaped gorge. This record is just c.5 km south of Chapman's record<sup>2</sup> but at least 420 km south of Cabañas San Isidro and even further from the Napo population. Unfortunately, the call was not sound-recorded.

Subsequently, on 13 April 2011 (at 10h30), a Black-banded Owl was observed by TD and photographed (Fig. 1) at 1,510 m in 'Copalinga private reserve', near Zamora (04°04'S 78°58'W), which site is almost equidistant from the two previous records along the río Bombuscaro. The owl perched 1.5 m above ground for c.5 minutes, almost motionless but turning its head regularly. A group of White-fronted Capuchin Monkeys *Cebus albifrons* was foraging



Figure 1. Black-banded Owl *Ciccaba huhula*, Copalinga private reserve, near Zamora, prov. Zamora-Chinchipe, Ecuador, 13 April 2011 (Thibaut Delsinne)

nearby. Each time a monkey vocalised, the owl turned to face the sound. When the capuchins came closer, c.15 m distant, the owl flew off and disappeared. Although the reserve is sited at c.950–1,600 m, this sighting was well above the regular trail system, which perhaps explains why the species has not been recorded previously. The habitat is relatively well-preserved evergreen lower montane forest<sup>5</sup>. The bird's plumage clearly differed from the 'San Isidro' owl and corresponds to *C. h. huhula*<sup>4,6</sup>. This record is the highest elevation documented for Black-banded Owl, unless the San Isidro birds prove to be this species.

Despite considerable ornithological field work in Podocarpus National Park and its environs, Black-banded Owl has only been recorded with certainty once before<sup>2</sup>, perhaps because nocturnal bird surveys are rare and mid elevations under-worked compared to areas such as río Bombuscaro (1,000 m) and Cajanuma (2,500–3,100 m). Furthermore, Black-banded Owl is generally difficult to detect, which is well illustrated by the fact that several populations in Brazil were only recently discovered<sup>3,13,14</sup>. It is uncommon throughout its range<sup>4,6,10</sup>, and its population density is usually low<sup>1,8,12</sup>, though see Lloyd<sup>7</sup>, and playback is the most effective census method<sup>1,13</sup>.

More data are needed to determine if this bird was a wanderer from lower elevations or if there is a resident population in the area. Nevertheless, the observation suggests that Black-banded Owl is more widespread in Ecuador, and occurs at higher elevations, than previously suspected.

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