

The first breeding records of White-rimmed Brush-finch *Atlapetes leucopis* with ecological notes

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Son presentadas notas sobre la ecología, descripción del canto, la extensión altitudinal en la distribución y la descripción del nido y huevos de *Atlapetes leucopis*. Estas notas se basan en observaciones en el Departamento de Putumayo, sur de Colombia. Además se hace un resumen de los registros recientes de esta especie poco conocida.

Introduction

White-rimmed Brush-finch *Atlapetes leucopis* is a relatively little-known restricted-range species, endemic to the northern Central Andes and Napo Endemic Bird Areas (EBA)⁵, and currently considered near-threatened¹. It is reportedly rare to uncommon⁴, or local and hard-to-see³ within its disjunct range.

Distribution

The general distribution of the four populations known in Colombia and Ecuador^{2,3,4} are described, with details of all known recent records noted.

Colombia

The southern base of the Central Andes, across the head of the Magdalena valley (south-west Huila) to the eastern slope of the East Andes (east Caquetá), then south along the eastern slope of the Andes (through western Putumayo and south-east Nariño) to north-west Ecuador (in east Napo); 01°04'N 76°44'W Putumayo: Río Guinea watershed near "El Mirador" 2,000–2,100 m, March 1997 (sighting, PGWS) and October 1997 (sighting and nest found, PGWS, LD, GMK).

Ecuador

00°37'S 77°50'W Napo: Cordillera de Guacamayos 2,200–2,300 m, 1991 (sighting, R. S. R. Williams); 1992 (sighting, T. Davis); September 1995 (sighting and tape-recording of duet, D. M. Lysinger); November 1996 (sighting and tape of song, J. V. Moore); December 1996 (nest found, D. M. Lysinger).

The eastern slope of the Andes in central Ecuador (Azuay, north-west Morona-Santiago); c.03°02'S 78°36'W Azuay/Morona-Santiago: Gualaceo–Limón road 2,800 m, June 1984 (sightings, N. Krabbe *et al.*).

The western slope of Andes (in western Imbabura). The documented altitudinal range differs between 2,350–3,200 m² and 2,100–3,100 m⁴; 00°27'N 78°36'W Imbabura: Cordillera de Toisón

3,050 m, September 1991 (one mist-netted, N. Krabbe); 00°20'N 78°24'W Imbabura: Apuela road, 23 km from Laguna Cuicocha 3,100 m, September 1983 (specimens, Museo Ecuatoriano de Ciencias Naturales, Quito, Ecuador and Louisiana State University Museum of Zoology, Baton Rouge, USA); 00°17'N 78°28'W Imbabura: Loma Taminanga 2,900 m, August 1990 and September 1991 (sightings and tape-recording, N. Krabbe).

A fourth population has recently been reported in Loja (N. Krabbe *in litt.* 1998); 04°34'S 79°21'W Loja: Loma Angashcola (2,550–3,100 m) near Amaluza, August–September 1990 (sightings, R.S. R. Williams).

Authors' observations

In March 1997, PGWS found the species to be locally relatively common between 2,000 (a 100 m downslope elevational range extension) and 2,100 m near "El Mirador", km 115.5, on the Pasto–Mocoa road, Putumayo department, southern Colombia (coordinates at the café roof: 01°04'N 76°44'W at 2,095 m [± 10 m]). El Mirador is situated above "Bajo Putumayo", the near-vertical wall of the eastern slope of the Andes from 1,300–2,500 m, which the Pasto–Mocoa road transects through excellent forest in the Río Guineo watershed. One bird was seen in October 1997, when a female incubating one egg was also discovered at 2,200 m (LD, GMK, PGWS *et al.*).

Habitat, food and feeding

In March 1997, individuals, pairs and groups of up to three birds were seen foraging slowly through dense understorey vegetation, occasionally giving confiding views. The dense understorey of wet montane forest, particularly in steep terrain with multiple landslides and various stages of regenerating forest, combined with open ground and forest edge, was favoured. White-rimmed Brush-finch was not encountered in mixed-species flocks, although Hilty & Brown³ state that it is frequently seen with such flocks at 2,350–3,200 m. Birds foraged on the



Nest and egg of White-rimmed Brush-finch *Atlapetes leucopsis* (Jon Hornbuckle)

ground at the edge of landslides, streams and the road, from ground-level to 5 m (mostly between 0.3–3 m) in dense herbaceous and woody-stem vegetation. The diet in March appeared to consist of understory berries, with one pair seen feeding on brilliant blue *Melastomataceae* berries.

Voice

The discreet but distinctive contact call, a thin high-pitched single *zeeee*, is the most reliable indicator for detection of this species. The song, heard several times in March, is a series of 8–15 *zeee* notes, sharper and more penetrating than the call, briefly rising then descending. An excited, rambling duet recorded by D. M. Lysinger in September 1995 at Cordillera de Guacamayos ridge, Napo was compared with two of N. Krabbe's recordings of the rambling duet from Imbabura. The Imbabura duet is similar to the Napo duet, but faster (N. Krabbe and M. Lysinger *in litt.* 1998). This song is unlike that described from Puracé, Colombia; "a soft chipping warble, begins with *twoo-twoo*... and ends with 4 or 5 musical chips"³.

Breeding data

The only breeding data currently published is of a juvenile seen with an adult in December in eastern Nariño³. The first nest was found in December

1996 on the Cordillera de Guacamayos ridge at 2,200 m: D. M. Lysinger observed two birds carrying nesting material into a 10 cm diameter hole in a large clump of moss in a large treefork, c.8 m above the ground.

On 13 October 1997, a female was flushed from and later returned to a nest with one egg at km 113 (at 2,200 m and 2.5 km above El Mirador). The nest was well concealed in a small cavity behind tall herbaceous vegetation at the foot of a large landslide, and 1.5 m above and beside the road. The 35 cm-long cavity had an entrance 25 cm wide by 18 cm high; the nest was situated in its innermost part (20 cm wide x 15 cm high), being constructed of fine twigs and grasses to form a coarse, bulky cup with a 65–70 mm inner cup diameter, and depth from the rim of 45–75 mm. A single egg (length 27.5 mm, diameter at widest point 18.5 mm) was very pale creamy to greenish-white and covered in chestnut-rufous blotches (see photo).

The lack of breeding information for this species is probably due to its unobtrusive habits. Extensive forest habitat preferred by this species remains on the steep, virtually inaccessible eastern slope of the Andes, in both southern Colombia and north-eastern Ecuador. Considering this, the species' status of near-threatened may require re-evaluation.

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