

First nesting record of Lanceolated Monklet *Micromonacha lanceolata* and notes on its conservation status

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Un nido activo del Monjecito Lanceolado *Micromonacha lanceolata* es descrito por primera vez. Este raro bucónido de bosques húmedos tropicales y estribaciones bajas se registró anidando en una galería excavada en la pared de tierra del borde del sendero, en un margen de bosque disturbado. Se encontraron dos huevos en el fondo de la galería que permanecieron por cerca de 15 días de observación sin eclosionar. Aunque muy poco se conoce sobre la historia natural de esta especie catalogada como casi amenazada, su verdadero estado de conservación parece ser más favorable de lo que se considera actualmente.

Introduction

Lanceolated Monklet *Micromonacha lanceolata* occurs locally in humid lowland forest and foothills from Costa Rica to eastern Peru, adjacent west Brazilian Amazonia with three records from Bolivia, within an altitudinal range of 300–2,100 m, but principally below 1,500 m^{8,15}. Throughout its range, it is known only from scattered localities, and it is ranked as Near-threatened⁴. Nevertheless, *M. lanceolata* has probably been largely overlooked due to its secretive habits and inconspicuous vocalisations¹⁰. Very little is known of its natural history and there are no published records of this species' reproductive behaviour^{8,13}. It appears to favour semi-open areas, lightly disturbed humid forest and forest borders^{9,13}, although it has also been recorded in tall primary forest¹¹ (P. Salaman pers. comm.). Here we describe the first nest to be discovered, present short notes on its breeding biology, and briefly discuss its conservation status.

M. lanceolata in Ecuador

M. lanceolata inhabits tropical lowland and foothill humid forests on both the eastern and western Andean slopes, where it is reported as a rarely encountered species¹⁴. Although it is known from few sites (see Table 1), locally it is not considered threatened because its range is well covered by the National System of Natural Protected Areas (SNAP) and private reserves⁷. In west Ecuador, *lanceolata* was first documented by Fjeldså & Krabbe⁶ from Lita, Imbabura province (c.00°47'N 78°26'W) and subsequently reported (supported by specimens) by Marín *et al.*⁹ in an isolated mountain range 60 km from the Andes Cordillera (Filo de Monos, Montañas de Chindul; 00°05'S 79°50'W, 460 m). Nevertheless its presence had already been expected by Chapman³ and, indeed, a specimen held at Museo Ecuatoriano de Ciencias Naturales (MECN) was collected at Pacto, Pichincha province (00°12'N 78°52'W, 1,350 m), in 1926. Furthermore, there are various sight records from the mid- and late 1980s (P. J. Greenfield pers. comm.).

Field observations

In Los Cedros Reserve, on the west slope of the Andes, Imbabura province (00°18'N 78°46'W, 1,300–2,200 m), we found an active nest of *M. lanceolata* in a tall disturbed humid forest border at an abandoned banana plantation, near Los Cedros river, at 1,300 m. It was discovered when an adult *lanceolata* was seen flying from a burrow in the trail embankment and perching low down inside the forest, 10–15 m from the bank, where it remained motionless for c.20 minutes.

The nest was a 40 cm-deep gallery excavated in the trail embankment 73 cm above the forest floor. The burrow had a rounded entrance (6 cm height x 5 cm width) with the interior height being c.4 cm. The burrow curved downward slightly and ended in an enlarged chamber covered with a few dead leaves. Two pure white eggs, oval in shape and relatively large for the bird and chamber size, were found inside. The eggs were not measured in order to avoid prolonged disturbance of the nest. Sparse vegetation covered the nest entrance (Fig. 1). The surrounding area possessed a relatively open understorey dominated by young trees (Fig. 2) and the canopy (20 m height) had 40% coverage.

The nest was found on 19 May 1999 and at the time of the last inspection (31 May) both eggs were still present. No further inspections were made. During the two weeks of field observation an adult was recorded daily incubating the eggs in the first and last hours of the day (at 06h00–10h00 and after 16h00) when the temperature was notably lower, while it was absent closer to midday (10h30–15h00) when temperatures were highest. However, on several occasions, the adult was observed perched motionless near the nest when not incubating. We were unable to sex this bird or to determine whether we observed the same bird on each occasion. Subsequently, the bird was mist-netted, photographed and measured (Fig. 3 and Table 2). No other individuals of *lanceolata* were observed or heard in the area during our visit.



Figure 1. Nest of Lanceolated Monklet *Micromonacha lanceolata* in Los Cedros Reserve, north-west Ecuador (M. Cooper)



Figure 2. Nesting habitat of Lanceolated Monklet *Micromonacha lanceolata* (J. F. Freile)



Figure 3. Adult Lanceolated Monklet *Micromonacha lanceolata* (J. F. Freile)

Table 1. Localities for Lanceolated Monklet *Micromonacha lanceolata* in Ecuador (*old localities in which the vegetation is now highly modified) (+ = protected; - = unprotected).

Localities	Source	Protection status
P.N. Yasuni	Best et al. ²	+
Reserva Manta Real	Best et al. ²	+
Vía a Chiriboga	Best et al. ²	-
Vía Loja–Zamora	Best et al. ²	+
Río Bombuscaro	Best et al. ²	+
Reserva Jatun Sacha	Best et al. ²	+
Filo de Monos, Cord. de Chindul	Marin et al. ⁹	-
Lita	Fjeldså & Krabbe ⁶	-
Pañacocho	C. S. Balchin (<i>in litt.</i>)	+
Tinalandia	C. S. Balchin (<i>in litt.</i>) / M. Reid (<i>in litt.</i>)	+
Around Mindo	J. A. Lyons (<i>in litt.</i>)	+
Sacha Lodge	L. Jost (pers. comm.)	+
Pedro Vicente Maldonado and surrounding area	M. Reid (<i>in litt.</i>)	-
Gualaquiza*	Chapman ¹	-
Sarayacu*	Chapman ¹	-
Montalvo*	MECN	-
Pacto*	MECN	-
Río Pucayacu*	MECN	-
Reserva Los Cedros	present work	+

Discussion

This record constitutes the first report of *M. lanceolata* breeding. A nesting period of May–August has been reported for some Bucconidae species, particularly among the related genera *Nonnula* and *Malacoptila*⁸.

The adult was observed apparently excavating the burrow 8–10 days prior to 19 May by LE, so the eggs were probably laid during the week before the nest was investigated closely. Therefore, we estimate that the incubating period of *lanceolata* occupies c.15 days. It appears likely that *lanceolata*, at least in the west Andean foothills of Ecuador, breeds in April–May and July. In Los Cedros these are the final months of the rainy season, July–August being the driest months with less than 100 mm of rain per day⁵. The only other evidence of breeding we

Table 2. Morphometric measurements of an adult Lanceolated Monklet *M. lanceolata*.

Measurements (mm), <i>Micromonacha lanceolata</i> , sex unknown	
Culmen length	21.9
Culmen width at base	11.5
Tarsus length	16
Wing length	61
Tail length	43.3
Weight (g.)	21.9
Moult	None, brood-patch enlarged

can find is that of a pair feeding a young bird in December 1995 in Pilón Lajas Biosphere Reserve, Bolivia (B. Hennessey pers. comm.). More detailed observations on the species' breeding behaviour are clearly needed.

Conservation status

Collar *et al.*⁴ considered *lanceolata* as Near-threatened. Subsequently numerous records demonstrate that the species frequently occurs in second growth and is much more common and widespread than previously thought^{1,12} (J. A. Lyons, P. J. Greenfield and J. Sterling pers. comm.).

We believe that this rarely recorded species should now be considered as incorrectly categorised based on the three following points: a large percentage of its currently known distribution range is well-covered by protected areas (within Ecuador see Table 1), although the Andean foothills are poorly protected in Colombia (P. Salaman pers. comm.) and western Ecuador (P. J. Greenfield pers. comm.; pers. obs.); large areas of natural habitat still exist within nature reserves and national parks (e.g. Podocarpus and Yasuni National Parks in Ecuador; Pilón Lajas Biosphere Reserve and Carrasco National Park in Bolivia) as well as in unprotected areas that are near-intact due to their inaccessibility (e.g. Cordillera de Cutucú, río Nangaritzza valley and Cordillera del Cóndor in Ecuador); and *M. lanceolata* appears to tolerate moderate human activity at forest borders and within small mature forest patches, including coffee shade plantations such as in Pasco, Peru (P. J. Greenfield, J. A. Lyons, M. Reid and J. Sterling pers. comm.; pers. obs.).

Therefore, we believe that *M. lanceolata* is best removed from the list of Near-threatened species^{1,12}. The low number of records and poor knowledge of its natural history appear to be consequences of its secretive behaviour and not indicative of true rarity. Apparently *M. lanceolata* has been overlooked at many localities throughout its wide range. Specific studies are required in order to determine its habitat preferences and natural history, and their effect on the species' conservation status.

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