

First nests of Grey-bellied Comet *Taphrolesbia griseiventris*

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El Cometa de Ventre Gris *Taphrolesbia griseiventris* es un colibrí extremadamente raro, siendo conocido solamente en algunas localidades de la parte norte central de Perú, cerca de Cajamarca. Poco se sabe de *T. griseiventris* salvo que habita áreas abiertas y semiáridas, donde visita las flores de agave y cactus. No hay información sobre su anidación. Durante una visita al norte de Perú en febrero 1999, tuvimos la fortuna de encontrar dos hembras de *T. griseiventris*—las dos con nidos. La primera se encontraba visitando flores de agave a 7 km de la entrada del aeropuerto de Cajamarca. Mientras la observamos, la vimos bajar a un pedazo de tierra cubierta con musgos que guindaba del paredón a la orilla del camino. Se posó e introdujo su cabeza en un pequeño huequito con los movimientos característicos de un colibrí dándole de comer a sus pichones. Luego, voló hacia arriba y desde una ramita expuesta cazó diminutos insectos voladores durante unos minutos antes de volver al nido y repetir el proceso. Debido a la altura del nido (unos tres metros), no pudimos examinar su contenido. El hueco de entrada conducía hacia una bolsita hecha de raicillas finas y tela de araña. La estructura estaba sujeta a unas raíces más gruesas que guindaban debajo de la masa de tierra colgante. El nido del segundo individuo fue encontrado entre Cajamarca y Celendín. Aún estaba en la etapa de construcción (varias veces observamos a la hembra llegar con material en su pico), pero se en las mismas condiciones que el anterior: debajo de un pedazo de tierra cubierta con musgos que colgaba de la parte superior del paredón hecho por el paso del camino. El hábitat general de los dos sitios era parecido: terreno inclinado y deforestado para la agricultura pero con pequeños parches de matorrales justamente encima de los nidos.

Grey-bellied Comet *Taphrolesbia griseiventris* is known from only a few localities in north-central Peru and is considered Vulnerable¹. Little is known of the species in life other than that it inhabits open semi-arid areas, feeding on flowering agave and cacti, as well as steep slopes and deep ravines, where T. A. Parker observed it feeding on a flowering *Puya* (Bromeliaceae)¹. It apparently occurs singly and is submissive to Giant Hummingbird *Patagona gigas* when the two occur together. The species' breeding biology is unknown².

On 17 February 1999, along the dirt road by the río Chonta (7 km beyond the entrance to Cajamarca Airport on the road to Molino, past Ventanillas de Otuzca) in cleared hilly terrain, I noticed a large hummingbird feeding at flowering agaves. With good views, I gained the impression of an extremely long-tailed, oversized female Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris*. It was entirely whitish below, except for some slight flecking on the throat; the back was green and the uppertail had a golden-orange sheen. The straight bill was mid-length in proportion to overall size. There was a small white spot behind the eye and the tail feathers were graduated up to a length at least equal with the body. When perched, the tail was often raised and lowered rapidly ('nervously'). In flight, it was occasionally opened in a L. Several male Sparkling Violetear *Colibri coruscans*, also visiting agaves, were only slightly larger in body size.

Returning to the vehicle to consult Fjeldså & Krabbe² I noticed it fly to a clump of rootlets dangling below some moss-covered earth extending from the overhang of the 3-m-high road-cut. The entire body entered the small hole, leaving only the tail feathers protruding. While at the hole, the bird pulled out several times only to poke the head back in again, each time in the distinctive rapid pulsating manner of a hummingbird feeding young. The female then flew to a perch above the bank in order to hawk small flying insects for several minutes before feeding the young again, and then flying off over the low scrubby ridge. I therefore examined the nest. Its entrance, which led into the pouch-like chamber, was protected by an overhanging clump of earth and mosses, being constructed of fine rootlets and cobwebs (including spider egg cases) attached to larger roots hanging from the earth mass, but I was unable to examine the contents.

The following day, February 18, on the road from Cajamarca to Celendín, above the village of Sucre, a similar female hummingbird was discovered while constructing a nest in exactly the same conditions: below a clump of overhanging moss-covered earth with dangling roots at a road-cut. This road-cut was higher (4–5 m) and the nest was invisible from my vantage. The bird appeared to be the same size and shape, but this individual was dappled green on the throat and breast-sides. The long tail feathers, which were bobbed repeatedly, had narrow white outer edges to the outermost (and longest) two feathers.

No orangish cast was evident on their upper surface. These differences made me suspect a different species, but J. Fjeldså (pers. comm.) confirmed its identity as *T. griseiventris*. The habitat was similar to that of the preceding day, although the hillside immediately above the nest was relatively brushy and supported species such as Golden-billed Saltator *Saltator aurantiirostris* and Rufous-naped Brush-finch *Atlapetes rufinucha baroni*.



Grey-bellied Comet *Taphrolesbia griseiventris* (Jon Fjeldså)

References

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2. Fjeldså, J. & Krabbe, N. (1990) *Birds of the high Andes*. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen Zool. Mus. & Svendborg: Apollo Books.

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