Range extension for White-throated Earthcreeper *Upucerthia albigula* in Lima, Peru

Stephen E. Gast and Richard E. Gibbons

Presentamos la evidencia de una extensión en el rango de distribución de *Upucerthia albigula* aproximadamente a 350 km al norte de la última información publicada. Se observó a *U. albigula* entre 2,300 y 2,600 m de altura en pendiente de la prolongación orientada hacia el sur de los Andes occidentales en el departamento de Lima, donde se encuentra el hábitat típico de esta especie, lo cual fue descrito por observadores anteriores. La evidencia se presenta con la observación de reproducción de la especie y de múltiples machos territoriales o de parejas.

White-throated Earthcreeper *Upucerthia albigula* is a member of the Furnariidae that inhabits a narrow-elevation band on the Pacific slope of the Andes in Peru and Chile\(^5\). Its preferred habitat is described as arid shrubland with scattered columnar cacti\(^4,5\), arid-zone ravines with streams and bushes,\(^2\) or arid montane scrub with sparsely vegetated slopes, brushy ravines, desert scrub and adjacent hedgerows around pastures and agricultural land.\(^1\) The species is assessed as Least Concern by BirdLife International\(^1\). Fjeldså & Krabbe\(^2\) noted *U. albigula* as far north as Ayacucho on the slope ‘below’ (sic, presumably ‘above’\(^1\)) Campa de Nazca, at 2,675 m, and ranging south to northern Chile at Tarapacá near Putre, at elevations of 2,300–3,550 m. Koepcke\(^3\), in her seminal work on *U. albigula* as far north as Ayacucho (xeno-canto.org 33511). Comparable calls have been recorded by N. Krabbe and described by him as alarm-calls (xeno-canto.org 15985).

SEG visited the same area on 14 March 2009 with Noam Shany. The burrow was not in use, but an apparent juvenile with buffy, indistinct facial plumage was seen by NS downslope of the entrance. Further downslope, two adults were observed alternatingly taking turns excavating a hole in a ravine slope, occasionally taking prey. Soil was pried loose using the bill and then ‘shoveled’ downslope with a jumping movement using both feet. While one bird dug, the second perched quietly nearby.

Two additional occupied burrows were encountered within the next 2 km and one *U. albigula* was flushed from the first both on our ascent and again an hour later. A second *U. albigula* was flushed from the other burrow and, after a few minutes, a male returned near the entrance with a prey (apparently a worm), but stayed a few metres above the burrow on the ground and below the vegetation.

During the October visit birds were not heard vocalising, but they were readily audible in January and February. Only a short, weak series of calls was heard during the March visit from one distant bird. All visits were between 10h00 and 13h00. It was clear, hot and dry in October, misty and cloudy in January and February, and wet with much recent rainfall and very green conditions in March. Nest sites were all within road cuts in a substrate of friable, coarse-grained, weathered granodiorite. All observations at Tinajas have been on the south-facing slope above the first valley south of the

burrow was c.2 m above the road and extended at a slight angle upwards at the entrance, then falling gently away within c.40 cm. SEG remained near the burrow and the bird soon returned, appearing to pretend to feed within 10 m of SEG; it gave quiet and repeated short calls as if either to communicate with the burrow’s occupants or to distract SEG’s attention. These call notes were tape-recorded (xeno-canto.org 33511). Comparable calls have been recorded by N. Krabbe and described by him as alarm-calls (xeno-canto.org 15985).

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Lurin Valley at elevations of 2,300–2,600 m. Our observations indicate territorial singing during the rainy season, with vocal activity possibly reduced outside this period. The nesting period appears to extend into the wet season.

Whether *U. albigula* also occurs in dptos. Ica and Huancavelica, which lie between the previously known range and Tinajas, is unknown. However, satellite imagery (accessed on Google Earth) suggests that similar habitat occurs in the intervening area. If occupied by *U. albigula* throughout, this would increase the known range significantly, perhaps by as much as c.30% (Fig. 4).

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References


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