

Unusual and noteworthy nesting records for Guatemala

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Se reporta el primer registro de un nido de *Cyanolyca cucullata* en Guatemala, observado en un bosque nuboso en Alta Verapaz. También se reportan sitios inusuales de nidos para *Trogon violaceus* en un panal de avispas, *Myiozetetes similis* en un árbol muerto acostado sobre una playa del Atlántico y *Thraupis abbas* debajo de un techo metálico. Se reportan fechas inusuales de anidación en Guatemala para *Trogon melanocephalus* en septiembre, *Glyphorhynchus spirurus* entre diciembre y febrero y *Tiaris olivaceus* entre septiembre y octubre.

The study of nesting strategies of Neotropical birds requires intensive field effort. Such data are therefore less common in ornithological literature than other general aspects of avian natural history. Research into the natural history of Ecuadorian birds is being made currently by Greeney *et al.*⁵, whilst Skutch^{16,18,19,20,21,22} added much information on the nests of Central American birds during countless hours of nest monitoring.

Nesting activity of Central American birds generally peaks in April–June¹⁴. However, several species nest over a longer period of at least ten months, e.g. Inca Dove *Columbina inca*^{4,11} and Ruddy Ground-dove *C. talpacoti*^{4,17}. The breeding season of some species is linked to food supply, which can differ from the general nesting season. For example, several hummingbirds nest year-round^{15,22,27}. Skutch¹⁵ found that the nesting season of several small granivores (Emberizidae) depends on the severeness of the dry season. Nesting during autumn was recently reported for several species in El Salvador (O. Komar in Jones⁹). Here, we report some unusual nesting records of Guatemalan birds based on incidental observations.

Study sites and methods

Data were collected during observations at the following sites: El Vesubio Reserve (14°33'N 91°10'W), Atitlán Volcano, dpto. Suchitepéquez; Los Tarrales Reserve, dpto. Suchitepéquez (14°31'N 91°08'W); San Francisco del Mar, Punta de Manabique Wildlife Refuge (PMWR), dpto. Izabal (15°50'N 88°25'W); Cabo Tres Puntas, PMWR (15°58'N 88°36'W); Manglar, PMWR (15°53'N 88°29'W); Sanimtacá (15°30'N 90°28'W), dpto. Alta Verapaz; Rocjá Pomtilá, south-east of Laguna Lachuá National Park (LLNP), dpto. Alta Verapaz (15°52'N 90°37'W). Species nomenclature follows AOU^{1,2}.

Results

Black-headed Trogon *Trogon melanocephalus*

On 6 September 2000, at c.08h00, KE observed an adult male *T. melanocephalus* delivering food to a nest cavity in an arboreal termitary, 1.5 m above the water surface in flooded swamp forest, c.1.5 km south-west of Manglar, PMWR. Skutch^{14,23} reported *T. melanocephalus* nesting in April–July, which suggests that our September record is outside the normal breeding season of this species.

Violaceous Trogon *Trogon violaceus*

On 9 April 2005, at c.08h00, DMB observed a single *T. violaceus* perched adjacent to a bell-shaped hymenopteran vespiary at c.1,500 m, in El Vesubio Reserve, on Volcán Atitlán. On closer inspection, a tail was protruding from the vespiary (Fig. 1), which was apparently being used as a nest by the trogons. The nest was suspended from a horizontal limb of a rather sparsely foliated tree. The tree was at an incline of c.30° relative to the slope, and the nest was c.20 m above ground. Nest sites similar to that described here have been reported from Panama and Costa Rica^{21,29}. In Middle America nests have been observed in holes of dead trees, decaying stumps and in a clump of epiphytic orchid roots^{7,9,13,24}. Our report documents a vespiary being used as a nest in northern Central America.

Wedge-billed Woodcreeper *Glyphorhynchus spirurus*

Of 23 mist-netted *G. spirurus* (July–September 1999, November 1999–February 2000, June–July 2000) in LLNP, Alta Verapaz, six trapped between 1 December and 21 February had well-developed brood patches (C. Avendaño & KE unpubl.). These data indicate that *G. spirurus* nests in this region mainly during the rainy season. However, on 20 August 2004, E. Caal observed an adult *G. spirurus* with nesting material entering a cavity, 2 m above ground, in a live tree in forest near Rocjá Pomtilá. The nest had two eggs on 27 August, two nestlings on 2 September and was



Figure 1. Violaceous Trogon *Trogon violaceus* perched next to a hymenopteran vespiary nest; note the tail of the mate emerging from the base of the nest (D. M. Brooks)



Figure 3. Nest of Yellow-winged Tanager *Thraupis abbas* under the roof of a metal building (D. M. Brooks)



Figure 2 (a) Nest of Azure-hooded Jay *Cyanolyca cucullata*; (b) juvenile in the nest. (c) the nest site (K. Eisermann)

empty on 15 September. This record suggests that at least some breed earlier, in accordance with the findings of others^{20,28} in southern Central America, where nesting is reported March–July. Beebe³ reported nesting in June–November in northern South America.

Social Flycatcher *Myiozetetes similis*

On 13 May 2001, KE found a *M. similis* nest in a dead tree on the sandy beach near San Francisco del Mar on the Atlantic coast. The nest was 1 m above ground, at the edge of the surf and contained three nestlings almost ready to fledge. *M. similis* is a species of open habitats with variable nesting sites. Skinner¹² described nests in a coffee

plantation being placed at 1.2–9.0 m in trees and bushes, with the lowest nests always located in open areas. Dickey & van Rossem⁴ mentioned branches over water as typical nesting sites in El Salvador. In PMWR and Alta Verapaz, several other nests were recorded 1 m above the water surface of lagoons (KE unpubl.). However, the nesting site on the edge of the ocean is noteworthy, because it faced high risk of being destroyed by strong winds or waves. Conversely, the risk of predators such as snakes was lower than at usual nesting sites.

Azure-hooded Jay *Cyanolyca cucullata*

On 30 May 2004, KE found a nest of *C. cucullata* in cloud forest at Sierra Sacranix, c.2 km north-west of the village Sanimtacá, at an elevation of 1,500 m. The nest was in a 4 m-tall understory tree, 3 m above ground (Fig. 2). Nest diameter was c.30 cm. It contained one juvenile almost ready to fledge. *C. cucullata* is common in the Sierra Sacranix, but this is the first nesting record of *C. cucullata* for Guatemala. We are aware of one previous description involving two nests of this species, in Costa Rica³⁰, also placed in small trees, 5 m and 7 m above ground.

Yellow-winged Tanager *Thraupis abbas*

On 7 April 2005, at c.16h00, DMB observed a pair of *T. abbas* showing strong site fidelity to the central concrete plaza of Finca Los Tarrales. Closer observation revealed the pair had an active nest directly below the proximal corner of a metal roof overhang at the front of a metal building (Fig. 3). The nest was constructed primarily of feathers, dried grasses and other fine plant material, was 16 cm in diameter, at a height of 4 m above ground, and located just 25 m from tropical forest. The nest was unusual for this species, as it was embedded in a man-made structure rather than in densely foliated trees or palm fronds⁸. The reason for the tanagers using the underside of a rusty metal roof when tropical forest was so close by was probably to diminish the risk of predation. Although domestic cats may have been present around the plaza, it would have been extremely difficult for them to reach the nest. Other bird species are well known to place their nests in sites difficult for predators or parasites to access, either due to physical²⁶ or biological²⁵ barriers.

Yellow-faced Grassquit *Tiaris olivaceus*

Nesting of *T. olivaceus* was observed in Rocjá Pomtilá in September 2004 by E. Caal. On 5 September an adult was observed carrying material to the nest, which was 1 m above ground in an orange tree *Citrus* sp., and on 12 September an adult was incubating. The nest contained two

eggs on 17 September and two nestlings on 24 September. On 27 September and 5 October adults were observed feeding the nestlings. The nest was empty by 10 October. This is apparently the first report of September nesting by *T. olivaceus* in Guatemala. Griscom⁶ reported a nest with eggs in Guatemala in May. In Costa Rica, Skutch^{15,16} recorded the main nesting season as May–July, but also mentioned nests with eggs in August and October–January.

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