

New and noteworthy records for Tumbesian birds in Ecuador

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Proveemos información que extiende la distribución hacia el norte de seis especies de aves del Área de Endemismo de la región Tumbesina ecuatoriana, incluyendo el primer reporte del Tiranito Colicorto *Muscigralla brevicauda* en territorio continental de Manabí y una nueva localidad para la Estrellita Esmeraldeña *Chaetocercus berlepschi*. Estos registros provienen del Bosque de Pacoche y alrededores. El Bosque de Pacoche está protegido y los habitantes de sus alrededores han adoptado un interesante, y al parecer sostenible, uso de sus tierras. Es necesario monitorear la presencia de éstas y otras especies de aves endémicas en el área. Recomendamos que se lleven a cabo iniciativas activas y eficaces de conservación que permitan la sobrevivencia a largo plazo de las especies presentes en el área.

Generally, the ranges of birds in Tumbesian Ecuador are well described^{5,14}, though an improved understanding is of particular importance for those considered threatened, currently one Critically Endangered, six Endangered, eight Vulnerable and two Near-Threatened species⁴. Here we detail a new site for six species endemic to the Tumbesian Endemic Bird Area^{4,14,16} in Ecuador, and the first observations of Short-tailed Field Tyrant *Muscigralla brevicauda* in mainland prov. Manabí¹⁴.

We collected information in August 2005, May and September 2006, and October 2007, during exploratory field trips to Pacoche forest and its environs, as part of an initial assessment of the conservation status of Rufous-headed Chachalaca *Ortalis erythroptera*¹⁷. Pacoche is c.15 km south of Manta, prov. Manabí (01°04'S 80°52'W), and supports c.400 ha of *Garúa* forest¹ surrounded by remnants of deciduous woodland and arid scrub¹⁴. The *Garúa* forest has been degraded by logging, agriculture and cattle grazing. Remnants are abutted by the small towns of San Lorenzo, Ligüique, Pacoche, Santa Rosa and Las Piñas⁷. Additionally, we visited remnant forests (mostly arid scrub¹⁴) near Santa Marianita (10 km south of Manta) and Rocafuerte (28 km north of Manta). We surveyed trails commonly used by villagers, from sea level to coastal foothills (0–335 m), totalling 12 km, and 78 hours of observation over 21 days. The following accounts summarise our most interesting observations; taxonomy and nomenclature follows Ridgely & Greenfield¹⁴.

Species accounts

West Peruvian Screech Owl *Otus roboratus*

On 29 August 2005, we found a West Peruvian Screech Owl being held as a pet in Rocafuerte. The owner claimed to have secured it in a nearby forest patch the same year. The bird was photographed and the images are housed in the Aves & Conservación (CECIA) archive. Additionally, at

dawn on 23–24 May 2006, we heard at least one calling at a forest border adjacent to riparian habitat c.1.5 km south-west of Los Patos (near Pacoche forest). It called at least five times from 05h15–05h35, with a Spectacled Owl *Pulsatrix perspicillata* audible nearby. *O. roboratus* is considered uncommon to locally common in deciduous woodland and scrub of south-west Manabí and southward¹⁴, and was only recently discovered to occur this far north in Manabí⁸.

Short-tailed Woodstar *Myrmia micrura*

On 22 May 2006, for c.5 minutes, we observed a male near Las Piñas. This individual was in striking breeding plumage and was foraging on the yellow flowers of a roadside woody vine/shrub (*Cordia lutea*, Boraginaceae), which was very abundant and in full bloom. The *M. micrura* aggressively interacted with a Little Woodstar *Chaetocercus bombus*, a sympatric and poorly known species^{10,14}. *Cordia lutea* was also numerous beside the road between Las Piñas and Manta, but we did not observe any hummingbirds there. Short-tailed Woodstar was known to range as far north as Machalilla National Park, but our record extends its range further north in Manabí¹⁴.

Esmeraldas Woodstar *Chaetocercus berlepschi*

On 16 October 2007, at the turn-off to Fundación Por Amor headquarters, we found a female Esmeraldas Woodstar feeding at a blooming Verbenaceae tree. The following field marks were noted: vivid green back with contrasting white rump-sides, whitish breast, belly and vent, buff throat, white postocular stripe and short square green tail with dark outer rectrices. A Rufous-tailed Hummingbird *Amazilia tzacatl* chased the woodstar away from the flowers. On 18 October 2007, a male Esmeraldas Woodstar was found in a blooming tree, across the main Manta–San Lorenzo road nearby (c.50 m away). It exhibited the following additional field marks: metallic bright pink throat and green pointed forked tail with dark

outer rectrices. During pauses between hectic feeding bouts, the bird perched 4 m above ground, at the top of an *Inga* sp. tree close by. Finally, on 19 October 2007, two males were observed in a series of chasing flights, following which both birds foraged in the same purple-flowered tree, albeit in opposite parts of the crown and pausing in distant perches between bouts. After c.5 minutes they re-engaged in territorial dispute and were lost from view.

Henna-hooded Foliage-gleaner *Hylocryptus erythrocephalus*

In 28 August 2005, we detected a single of this range-restricted and Vulnerable furnariid^{4,10}. It was almost 6 m above ground, rather higher than previously noted^{1,9,10,14}. We observed the bird for c.5 minutes, foraging insects on dead leaves in the low branches of a *Ficus* (Moraceae). The tree was in a fairly deep canyon of the río San Lorenzo, wherein native understorey plants had been replaced with citrus shrubs in the immediate vicinity. Although the species was considered likely to occur along much of the coastal cordillera, our record represents a new locality and one of the northernmost sites for this threatened bird¹⁴.

Grey-and-white Tyrannulet *Pseudelaenia leucospodia*

On 23 September 2006, in southern coastal Santa Marianita, we observed a single Grey-and-white Tyrannulet for c.5 minutes, initially perched on a c.1 m-high shrub, sporadically emitting a distinctive two-note buzzy call. Most native vegetation had been cleared, but remnants of coastal desert scrub persisted nearby. This species was previously considered absent from mainland Manabí¹⁴.

Short-tailed Field Tyrant *Muscigralla brevicauda*

Also on 23 September 2006, in southern coastal Santa Marianita, a small, distinctly short-tailed and plain-coloured flycatcher, which we immediately identified as a Short-tailed Field Tyrant was found. It was following a Black-capped Sparrow *Arremon abeillei* in a series of hops and short flights. The field tyrant was also previously considered absent from mainland Manabí¹⁴, with isla de la Plata being the only locality from which both this species and Grey-and-white Tyrannulet were previously known in the province^{6,14}.

Saffron Siskin *Carduelis siemiradzki*

On 21–25 May 2006, we observed pairs and groups of up to 24 individuals of this rarely encountered species^{9,11–14}. Most observations were in roadside vegetation between Los Patos and San Lorenzo. On several occasions we observed males constantly vocalising, but we did not obtain further evidence

suggestive of breeding. Flocks comprised juveniles, females and males, mostly foraging on the abundant seeds of a common roadside shrub, *Vernonia pallens* (Asteraceae). In the late afternoon of 24 May, 23 (all ages/sexes) gathered atop a *Guadua* bamboo (*Bambusa guadua*, Poaceae), before flying out of sight to a forested area where they presumably roosted. Currently classed as Vulnerable⁴, the Cordillera de Colonche is usually regarded as the species' northernmost limit, though there is a record of a pair at Segua Marsh¹¹, which like our own, is further north.

Most of the above-mentioned Tumbesian endemics were known to range only as far north as Machalilla National Park (southern Manabí)^{4,6,10,14}, but Saffron Siskin and West Peruvian Screech Owl are now known to range further north in prov. Manabí^{8,11}. Our observations extend the known ranges of the other restricted-range species north to central Manabí, whilst the presence of Short-tailed Field Tyrant in mainland Manabí is reported for the first time. These new records may be the result of poor knowledge of the area, as most work on Tumbesian birds in Ecuador has been conducted further south^{1,2,6,12,14}. Due to the limited nature of our field work, we are uncertain if these species are present year-round or if they merely use the area seasonally. We encourage others to increase our ornithological knowledge of the area. We have noted the presence of several threatened Tumbesian endemics^{4,10} (Grey-backed Hawk *Leucopternis occidentalis*, Grey-cheeked Parakeet *Brotogeris pyrrhopterus*, Blackish-headed Spinetail *Synallaxis tithys* and Pacific Royal Flycatcher *Onychorhynchus occidentalis*), but their status and populations are unknown¹⁵. Currently, the forest is legally protected through an agreement with the municipality of Manta, as the forest is an important watershed for surrounding communities⁷. Although Pacoche is under some pressure from the adjacent communities, local farmers acknowledge the benefits of keeping large trees and forest cover to protect their crops. Given that lowland forest in most of western Ecuador is still being lost to agriculture, cattle grazing, logging and other anthropogenic pressures^{1,3,6,9,10}, Pacoche must represent one of the northernmost localities for several threatened Tumbesian birds. We urge local and regional decision makers, and NGOs to formulate adequate management plans for, and monitor, this protected forest, to ensure its long-term survival.

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