

New and interesting records of birds from a dry forest reserve in south-west Ecuador

Karl S. Berg

Resumen

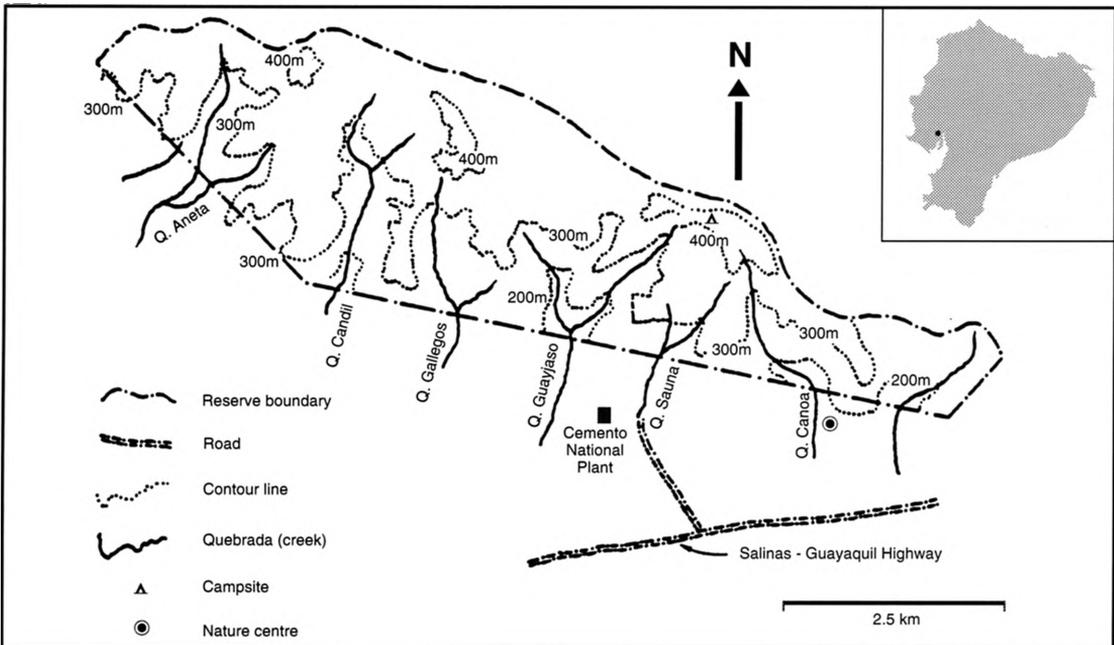
La reserva forestal Cerro Blanco es una de las pocas áreas protegidas con más de 200 ha de bosque seco sobre el oeste ecuatoriano. Aunque existen listas de registros de aves en la reserva, con frecuencia no se conocen las fechas ni localidades en que fueron tomados. De otro lado, esta información no incluye observaciones de algunas de las partes de más difícil acceso en la reserva, ni muestra con precisión las diferentes altitudes, los tipos de bosques o las estaciones. Una información más amplia será cada vez más importante para la conservación y manejo de la vida silvestre de la reserva a medida que se intensifica la industria y la agricultura alrededor de Guayaquil, y se amenaza con aislar ecológicamente Cerro Blanco. Este artículo presenta los registros de aves para la reserva, detalles de algunas especies poco conocidas o amenazadas, y una lista actualizada de las especies del bosque.

Cerro Blanco (02°10'S 80°02'W) is a protected dry tropical forest approximately 15 km west of Guayaquil, Guayas province, south-west Ecuador. The 2,000 ha forest is at the southern end of the Cordillera de la Costa that runs from the Gulf of Guayaquil, north to the province of Esmeraldas (see Map). The southern end of this cordillera, where Cerro Blanco is located, is named the Cordillera de Chongón. The Cerro Blanco reserve comprises dry and semi-deciduous humid forest in ravines and ridges which reach an altitude of c.400 m. The dry forests of south-west Ecuador and north-west Peru (the Tumbesian region) are biologically isolated by surrounding geographical features: the Andes to the east; the desert scrub of coastal Peru, and coastal El Oro and Guayas provinces, Ecuador to the south and west; and the humid forest of north-west Ecuador and western Colombia to the north. Consequent high levels of endemism, combined with the problems of rapid human population growth and associated deforestation, have attracted the attention of national and international conservation organisations (see Parker & Carr¹⁰). Cerro Blanco is one of very few Ecuadorian protected areas in the Tumbesian centre of endemism that are larger than 200 ha. The reserve is host to several threatened, and numerous poorly known birds^{1,10}, in an area where massive biological extinction may have already occurred². Between June 1992 and May 1993, records were kept of all species encountered during nine visits to the reserve. The 4-6 hour surveys were conducted with the

aid of various fieldguides^{3,5,8,9} and were made 15 to 45 days apart throughout the 10 month period. Trails surveyed were Quebrada Canoa, Buenavista, the road between the Mirador de los Monos and Quebrada de los Papagayos (see Map). Based on lists compiled since the creation of the reserve^{4,6,7,10}, these most recent observations include several new species for Cerro Blanco, and provide details of poorly known, often endemic and/or threatened birds.

Perhaps the most interesting discovery was that of the threatened **Pacific Royal Flycatcher** *Onychorhynchus [coronatus] occidentalis*¹. This curious and beautiful flycatcher had not been previously recorded but was seen on five different occasions during the surveys, with an active nest found in April 1993 at Quebrada Canoa. The species was seen making short, darting flights for insects (especially middle-storey lepidoptera), and was occasionally found in loose, mixed-species bird flocks. The nest was an odd structure, c.1 m long, hanging precariously from branches and vines 2-3 m above a forested creek (see also¹³). The nest material was collected on the wing and comprised slender twigs, tendrils, moss and fine roots, the latter taken from epiphytes and plants with roots exposed on the creek bank (see also¹³). The unkempt appearance of the nest seems to be a method of camouflaging, especially appropriate in wet forest where similar collections of moss and other plant matter hang from nearly every tree.

Data from two other nests (one of which



Map of the Bosque Protector Cerro Blanco (map based on original from Fundación Natura)

failed) found at Manta Real (75 km south-east of Cerro Blanco) in March-April 1993, suggests incubation of the two eggs takes 26-34 days. The eggs are brownish with ruddy streaks becoming fused at the larger end, and are placed in a small shallow chamber. The chicks are scaled or barred brown and grey, much as has been described of the Central American form *O. [coronatus] coronatus*¹¹. According to Parker & Carr¹⁰, a healthy presence of **Pacific Royal Flycatchers** is one of the best indicators of "good" moist forest in south-west Ecuador. Cerro Blanco, Machalilla National Park and Jauneche reserve are the only Ecuadorian protected areas where this globally threatened species has been found.

Other records include a colourful female **Pygmy Kingfisher** *Chloroceryle aenea*, the first record for the reserve, was seen on two occasions perched less than 1 m from the ground at the side of a small pool near the Quebrada Canoa ridge-top. This creek, as with most in the area, is dry for half the year apart from occasional small pools that remain at certain points along the creek. These pools are the only source of water for many months, and are important to populations of mammals (and birds) needing water throughout the year¹⁰. A surprise encounter with a **Rufous-necked**

Wood-rail *Aramides axillaris* along the Buenavista trail was after a night of heavy rain which flooded the nearby mangroves, and may have forced this bird onto the higher ground in the reserve, although records from the Sozoranga area of Loja, and Tumbes National Forest in Peru, suggest that deciduous forests are also favoured habitats of this species (B. J. Best pers. comm.).

The **Henna-hooded Foilage-gleaner** *Hylocryptus erythrocephalus*, a rare and threatened Tumbesian endemic¹, was seen on three separate occasions (also recorded by N. Krabbe in 1992). The first sighting was in a thicket on a ridge-top at the source of the Quebrada de los Papagayos. The bird was apparently visiting a nest-hole in the side of the creek, which was wet but not flowing. This species is easily frightened and difficult to see, especially where the vegetation is dense. However, the call, once known, is heard continuously (*dee-dee-dee-dee... dee-dee-dee-dee*). Cerro Blanco and Machalilla National Park are the only protected areas in Ecuador where this species has been observed. Unfortunately, most of the Cerro Blanco reserve has been at least selectively logged during the present century¹⁰. Primary forest only persists along quebradas (creeks) and on steep banks where

it is rather patchy, but sufficient remains to allow an enjoyable excursion into one of the last significant tracts of Ecuadorian dry tropical forest, where in fact the avifauna is very similar to that of the more pristine Tumbes National Forest in Peru¹⁰.

The Quebrada Canoa trail is close to the guard-house and has a well maintained trail and boardwalk along which the threatened¹ **Pacific Royal Flycatcher**, **Grey-breasted Flycatcher** *Lathrotriccus griseipectus* and **Ochre-bellied Dove** *Leptotila ochraceiventris* can all be seen, often some distance up the creek. At least three male **Ochre-bellied Doves** called persistently from viny thickets in the undergrowth along the quebrada in January 1991, although it seems likely that this rare dove occurs here only during the wet season (December–April)¹⁰. The clear whistle of the **Grey-and-gold Warbler** *Basileuterus fraseri* is commonly heard during most walks in the forest, as they forage in the middle-storey, especially above creek banks. Through the numerous light-gaps **Grey-backed Hawks** *Leucopternis occidentalis* (also threatened¹) can be seen soaring overhead, often giving a single *sshreee* call. A pair of this threatened hawk was thought to be nesting in tall trees along this quebrada in January 1991¹⁰. Other species of interest due to their restricted distributions include **Pale-browed Tinamou** *Crypturellus transfasciatus*, several of which have been heard along this quebrada (in January), and large numbers of **Grey-cheeked Parakeet** *Brotogeris pyrrhopterus* which have been seen in the tops of tall *Ficus* trees in the

quebrada bottom¹⁰. Several groups (of 18-25) of the threatened **Saffron Siskin** *Carduelis siemiradzkii*, known from only a few localities in an area of c.10,000 km² in south-west Ecuador and adjacent Tumbes, Peru, have also been found along Quebrada Canoa^{1,10}.

The Buenavista trail begins at the base of the hillside and traverses the scrubby secondary forest, eventually arriving at the ridge-top from where one can view the forested quebrada below. The raucous grunting of the Mantled Howler Monkey *Alouatta palliata* or the powerful squawk of the **Great Green Macaw** *Ara ambigua guayaquilensis* can be heard from this point. This later species, a small group of which is present on Cerro Blanco, is present as a remnant population that barely survives here and in the Cordillera de Colonche to the north-west¹⁰. Flocks of 30-50 **Grey-cheeked Parakeets** *Brotogeris pyrrhopterus* are a common sight, as are sightings of the smaller **Pacific Parrotlet** *Forpus coelestis*. At first light, or just as the sun is setting, large flocks (50-70 pairs) of **Red-lored Amazons** *Amazona autumnalis* pass to and from Cerro Blanco and Cerro Azul (to the north) to the mangroves across the highway, where they apparently roost. Once along the ridge of the Buenavista trail, the forest becomes taller and at several points one can look directly into the upper middle-storey of the forest. Also along this trail, interesting dry forest and scrub endemics such as **Elegant Crescentchest** *Melanopareia elegans*, **Collared Antshrike** *Sakesphorus bernardi* and the threatened **Blackish-headed Spinetail** *Synallaxis tithys* and the **Henna-hooded Fo-liage-gleaner**¹ (see above) can be found. Raptor watching is particularly good in the reserve with some 32 species recorded, due in part to the excellent visibility afforded within a deciduous, dry tropical forest.

To access the more remote parts of the reserve (i.e. Quebrada de los Papagayos), roads do exist, but special permission is needed from the management and must be coordinated through La Cemento Nacional, the cement manufacturer that owns the reserve. Tourists wishing to visit the reserve should give prior notice to the Fundación Natura office in Guayaquil (Tel: [593]-4-201-628). Admission to the reserve is US\$5 per person, and camping sites are available. Taxis from Guayaquil will do the trip for c.US\$10, although the bus line



Collared Antshrike *Sakesphorus bernardi*
(David D. Beadle)



Top left: Pygmy Kingfisher *Chloroceryle aenea*, male (D. Wechsler - Vireo)

Top right: Pygmy Kingfisher *Chloroceryle aenea*, female (D. Wechsler - Vireo)

Bottom left: Blackish-headed Spinetail *Synallaxis tithys* (Rob Williams)

Bottom right: Grey-and-gold Warbler *Basileuterus fraseri* (Rob Williams)

"La Chongonera" runs from Parque Victoria, in the centre of Guayaquil out past the reserve to the pueblo of Chongón, every hour for less than US\$0.50. Guayaquil, although rather inhospitable at first glance, is a modern city of nearly 2 million people (the largest city in Ecuador), and numerous interesting birding locations are within easy reach. Cerro Blanco, home to at least 39 dry forest/scrub endemic bird species and located only 15 minutes from Guayaquil, is a must for any birdwatcher in Ecuador.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix: a list of the birds of Cerro Blanco Forest Reserve, Guayas province, south-west Ecuador.

Pale-browed Tinamou	King Vulture	Zone-tailed Hawk	Black Hawk-eagle
<i>Crypturellus transfaciatus</i> *	<i>Sarcoramphus papa</i>	<i>Buteo albonotatus</i>	<i>Spizaetus tyrannus</i>
Least Grebe	Black Vulture	Roadside Hawk	Osprey
<i>Podiceps dominicus</i>	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>	<i>Buteo magnirostris</i>	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Pied-billed Grebe	Turkey Vulture	Short-tailed Hawk	Laughing Falcon
<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	<i>Buteo brachyurus</i>	<i>Herpetotheres cachinnans</i>
Neotropic Cormorant	Pearl Kite	Grey Hawk	Collared Forest-falcon
<i>Phalacrocorax olivaceus</i>	<i>Gampsonyx swainsonii</i>	<i>Buteo nitidus</i>	<i>Micrastur semitorquatus</i>
Magnificent Frigatebird	Hook-billed Kite	Harris' Hawk	Barred Forest-falcon
<i>Fregata magnificens</i>	<i>Chondrohierax uncinatus</i>	<i>Parabuteo unicinctus</i>	<i>Micrastur ruficollis</i>
Great Egret	Swallow-tailed Kite	Grey-backed Hawk	Red-throated Caracara
<i>Egretta albus</i>	<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>	<i>Leucopternis occidentalis</i>*	<i>Daptrius americanus</i>
Snowy Egret	Double-toothed Kite	Plumbeous Hawk	Crested Caracara
<i>Egretta thula</i>	<i>Harpagus bidentatus</i>	<i>Leucopternis plumbea</i>	<i>Polyborus plancus</i>
Striated Heron	Plumbeous Kite	Mangrove Black Hawk	Bat Falcon
<i>Butorides striatus</i>	<i>Ictinia plumbea</i>	<i>Buteogallus subtilis</i>	<i>Falco rufigularis</i>
Cattle Egret	Snail Kite	Great Black Hawk	Peregrine Falcon
<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis</i>	<i>Buteogallus urubitinga</i>	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Wood Stork	Bicoloured Hawk	Savanna Hawk	American Kestrel
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	<i>Accipiter bicolor</i>	<i>Buteogallus meridionalis</i>	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
Black-bellied Whistling-duck	Red-backed Hawk	Crane Hawk	Rufous-headed Chachalaca
<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>	<i>Buteo polyosoma</i>	<i>Geranospiza caerulescens</i>	<i>Ortalis erythroptera</i> *

- Crested Guan
Penelope purpurascens
 Rufous-fronted Wood-quail
Odontophorus erythrorus
 Rufous-necked Wood-rail
Aramides axillaris
 Common Gallinule
Gallinula chloropus
 Sungrebe
Heliornis fulica
 Killdeer
Charadrius vociferus
 Greater Yellowlegs
Tringa melanoleuca
 Spotted Sandpiper
Actitis macularia
 Rock Dove
Columba livia
 Pale-vented Pigeon
Columba cayennensis
 White-winged Dove
Zenaida asiatica
 Ecuadorian Ground-dove
*Columbina buckleyi**
 Croaking Ground-dove
Columbina cruziana
 Blue Ground-dove
Claravis pretiosa
Ochre-bellied Dove
Leptotila ochraceiventris*
 White-tipped Dove
Leptotila verreauxi
 Pallid Dove
Leptotila pallida
 Great Green Macaw
Ara ambigua
 Red-masked Parakeet
*Aratinga erythrogenys**
 Pacific Parrotlet
*Forpus coelestis**
 Grey-cheeked Parakeet
*Brotogeris pyrrhopterus**
 Bronze-winged Parrot
Pionus chalcopterus
 Red-lore Amazon
Amazona autumnalis
 Grey-capped Cuckoo
Coccyzus lansbergi
 Squirrel Cuckoo
Piaya cayana
 Smooth-billed Ani
Crotophaga ani
 Groove-billed Ani
Crotophaga sulcirostris
 Striped Cuckoo
Tapera naevia
 Barn Owl
Tyto alba
 Spectacled Owl
Pulsatrix perspicillata
 Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl
Glaucidium brasilianum
 Common Potoo
Nyctibius griseus
 Lesser Nighthawk
Chordeiles acutipennis
 Pauraque
Nyctidromus albicollis
 Anthony's Nightjar
*Caprimulgus anthonyi**
 White-collared Swift
Streptoprocne zonaris
 Grey-rumped Swift
Chaetura cinereiventris
 Short-tailed Swift
Chaetura brachyura
 Long-tailed Hermit
Phaethornis superciliosus
 Little Hermit
Phaethornis longuemareus
 Blue-tailed Emerald
Chlorostilbon mellisugus
 Violet-bellied Hummingbird
Damophila julie
 Amazilia Hummingbird
Amazilia amazilia
 Rufous-tailed Hummingbird
Amazilia taczali
 Long-billed Starthroat
Heliomaster longirostris
 Short-tailed Woodstar
*Myrmia micrura**
 Black-tailed Trogon
Trogon melanurus
 Violaceous Trogon
Trogon violaceus
 Ringed Kingfisher
Ceryle torquata
 Green Kingfisher
Chloroceryle americana
 Pygmy Kingfisher
Chloroceryle aenea
 Blue-crowned Motmot
Momotus momota
 White-necked Puffbird
Notharchus macrorhynchus
 Ecuadorian Piculet
*Picumnus sclateri**
 Black-cheeked Woodpecker
Melanerpes pucherani
 Golden-olive Woodpecker
Piculus rubiginosus
 Lineated Woodpecker
Dryocopus lineatus
 Scarlet-backed Woodpecker
Veniliornis callonotus
 Red-rumped Woodpecker
Veniliornis kirikii
 Guayaquil Woodpecker
Campephilus guayaquilensis
 Olivaceous Woodcreeper
Sittasomus griseicapillus
 Streak-headed Woodcreeper
Lepidocolaptes souleyetii
 Red-billed Scythebill
Campylorhamphus trochilirostris
 Pacific Hornero
Furnarius [leucopus] cinnamomeus
Blackish-headed Spinetail
Synallaxis tithys*
Henna-hooded Foliage-gleaner
Hylocryptus erythrocephalus*
 Streaked Xenops
Xenops rutilans
 Great Antshrike
Taraba major
 Collared Antshrike
*Sakesphorus bernardi**
 Plain Antvireo
Dysithamnus mentalis
 Pacific Fire-eye
Pyriglena pacifica
 Elegant Crescentchest
*Melanopareia elegans**
 Short-tailed Field-tyrant
Muscigralla brevicauda
 Masked Water-tyrant
Fluvicola nengeta
 Vermillion Flycatcher
Pyrocephalus rubinus
 Fork-tailed Flycatcher
Tyrannus savana
 Tropical Kingbird
Tyrannus melancholicus
 Snowy-throated Kingbird
Tyrannus niveigularis
 White-ringed Flycatcher
Conopias parva
 Boat-tailed Flycatcher
Megarhynchus pitangua
 Baird's Flycatcher
*Myiodynastes bairdii**
 Streaked Flycatcher
Myiodynastes maculatus
 Rusty-margined Flycatcher
Myiozetetes cayanensis
 Social Flycatcher
Myiozetetes similis
 Dusky-capped Flycatcher
Myiarchus tuberculifer
 Sooty-crowned Flycatcher
*Myiarchus phaeocephalus**
 Tropical Pewee
Contopus cinereus
Grey-breasted Flycatcher
Lathrotriccus griseipectus*
 Black-tailed Flycatcher
Myiobius atricaudus
 Bran-coloured Flycatcher
Myiophobus fasciatus
Pacific Royal Flycatcher
Onychorhynchus occidentalis*
 Yellow-olive Flycatcher
Tolmomyias sulphurescens
 Common Tody-flycatcher
Todirostrum cinereum
 Scale-crested Pygmy-tyrant
Lophotriccus pileatus
 Tawny-crowned Pygmy-tyrant
Euscarthmus meloryphus
 Yellow-bellied Elaenia
Elaenia flavogaster
 Pacific Elaenia
*Myiopagis subplacens**
 Mouse-coloured Tyrannulet
Phaeomyias murina
 Southern Beardless Tyrannulet
Campostoma obsoletum
 Slaty-capped Flycatcher
Leptopogon superciliaris
 Ochre-bellied Flycatcher
Mionectes oleaginea
Slaty Becard
Pachyramphus spodiurus*
 Cinnamon Becard
Pachyramphus cinnamomeus
 Black-and-white Becard
Pachyramphus albogriseus
 One-coloured Becard
Pachyramphus homochrous
 Grey-breasted Martin
Progne chalybea
 Blue-and-white Swallow
Notiochelidon cyanoleuca
 Southern Rough-winged Swallow
Stelgidopteryx ruficollis
 White-tailed Jay
*Cyanocorax mystacalis**
 Fasciated Wren
Campylorhynchus fasciatus
 Speckled-breasted Wren
Tyrrothorus sclateri
 Superciliated Wren
*Tyrrothorus superciliaris**
 House Wren
Troglodytes aedon
 Long-tailed Mockingbird
Mimus longicaudatus
 Swainson's Thrush
Catharus ustulatus
 Plumbeous-backed Thrush
*Turdus reevei**
 Ecuadorian Thrush
*Turdus maculirostris**
 Long-billed Gnatwren
Ramphocaenus melanurus
 Tropical Gnatcatcher
Poliotilta plumbea
 Rufous-browed Peppershrike
Cyclarhis gujanensis
 Red-eyed Vireo
Vireo olivaceus
 Lesser Greenlet
Hylophilus minor
 Shiny Cowbird
Molothrus bonariensis
 Giant Cowbird
Scaphidura oryzivora
 Russet-backed Oropendola
Psarocolius angustifrons
 Yellow-rumped Cacique
Cacicus cela
 Yellow-billed Cacique
Amblycercus holosericeus
 Scrub Blackbird
Dives warszewiczi
 White-edged Oriole
*Icterus graccannae**
 Yellow-tailed Oriole
Icterus mesomelas
 Peruvian Meadowlark
Sturnella bellicosa
 Tropical Parula
Parula pitayumi
 American Redstart
Sertophaga ruticilla
 Northern Waterthrush
Seiurus noveboracensis
 Masked Yellowthroat
Geothlypis aequinoctialis
 Grey-and-gold Warbler
*Basileuterus fraseri**
 Bananaquit
Coereba flaveola
 Orange-crowned Euphonia
Euphonia saturata
 Thick-billed Euphonia
Euphonia lanirostris
 Blue-grey Tanager
Thraupis episcopus
 Hepatic Tanager
Piranga flava
 Summer Tanager
Piranga rubra
 White-shouldered Tanager
Tachyphonus luctuosus
 Guira Tanager
Hemithraupis guira
 Black-and-white Tanager
Conothraupis speculigera
 Streaked Saltator
Saltator albicollis
 Buff-throated Saltator
Saltator maximus
 Southern Yellow Grosbeak
Phaeucticus chrysogaster
 Blue-black Grassquit
Volatinia jacarina
 White-tailed Seedeater
Sporophila americana
 Parrot-billed Seedeater
Sporophila peruviana
 Chestnut-throated Seedeater
Sporophila telasco
 Saffron Finch
Sicalis flaveola
 Crimson Finch
Rhodospingus cruentus
 Black-capped Sparrow
*Arremon abeillei**
Saffron Siskin
Carduelis siermiradzhii*
 Species highlighted in bold are threatened¹ (these total eight), and those marked with an asterisk (*) are endemic to the Tumbesian endemic bird area¹¹ (totalling 29 species).

List compiled by Karl S. Berg, based on Farquhar⁴, Jones *et al.*⁶, Krabbe⁷, Parker & Carr¹⁰ and personal observations (1992-1993).