

First record of American Wigeon *Anas americana* in Ecuador

Tatiana Santander G., Esteban A. Guevara and Nicolás Peñafiel

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Se reporta el primer registro del Silbón Americano *Anas americana* en un humedal al interior de la hacienda El Carrizal, cantón Pedernales, provincia de Manabí, Ecuador. Se trata de dos individuos machos en plumaje reproductivo encontrados junto a la Cerceta Aliazul *A. discors* y el Pato Silbador Canelo *Dendrocygna bicolor*.

On 29 December 2010 we observed two American Wigeons *Anas americana* in a freshwater pond at Hacienda El Carrizal, Pedernales (00°16'N 80°01'W; 1 m), north-west prov. Manabí, Ecuador, for c.30 minutes (Fig. 1). While conducting an exploratory visit to the site, at c.08h00, we observed two ducks swimming with Blue-winged Teals *A. discors*. They were considerably larger than the teals and had an obvious white patch near the tail. The other three duck species present—Fulvous *Dendrocygna bicolor* and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks *D. autumnalis*, and Masked Duck *Nomonyx dominicus*—do not

show this feature. They were observed again at 15h30 in the same place, in relatively open water with some emergent vegetation. A large proportion of the open water was covered by abundant aquatic vegetation, Water Hyacinth *Eichornia* sp., Water Lettuce *Pistia stratiotes*, Water Lily *Nymphaea* sp., Duckweed *Lemna* sp., Rush *Juncus* sp., and West Indian Marsh Grass *Hymenachne* sp. being among the commonest plants. The pond is artificial and is used as a shrimp farm, although production is currently suspended, but cattle and horses are present in the drier areas and along the grassy



Figure 1. Male American Wigeons *Anas americana* at El Carrizal Hacienda, prov. Manabí, north-west Ecuador, 29 December 2010 (Esteban Guevara)

dykes. There is a small relict of natural vegetation with tall trees (c.20 m) and dense understorey adjacent to the pond, but most of the environs are devoted to cattle farming. On 5 February 2010 we observed two *A. americana*, presumably the same birds, in the same place with *A. discors* and *D. bicolor*.

Identification

We used the Sibley guide for identification⁶ and the observation was made using binoculars and a telescope. The two ducks had short bluish bills with a black tip, an obvious white stripe from the bill base to the crown, contrasting with the greenish-toned dark mask behind the eye. The rest of the head and neck were greyish, with whitish cheeks, and the body was brown with a small white patch on the upperwing and a prominent white patch on the rear flanks, contrasting with the black tail. Based on plumage we identified the birds as male *A. americana* coming into breeding plumage, but we are unsure of their age.

Distribution

American Wigeon is a common dabbling duck with large wintering and breeding ranges. It breeds in north-west North America as far north as northernmost Alaska and Canada. On migration and in winter it is widespread through Mexico to northern South America^{4,6,7}, being a winter visitor to Central America, the Caribbean, Colombia, Trinidad and occasionally Venezuela⁵. In Colombia, it is an uncommon and erratic winter visitor mainly to the northern lowlands but as far south as Valle³.

Our record is the first in Ecuador, and probably constitutes the southernmost of American Wigeon in South America. If the species is found to regularly winter in Ecuador, this would increase its range c.540 km south. Due to the species' ability to use varied habitats in winter (e.g., freshwater marshes, rivers, lakes, reservoirs, estuaries, bays and agriculture)⁴ these birds found suitable conditions for at least a month. It is plausible that *A. americana* is expanding its wintering range considering the species' large and increasing population^{1,2}, but equally this record might only represent an accidental occurrence.

It will be important to monitor this and other nearby wetlands in the future to clarify the status of this and other waterfowl species. In addition, we point to the need for additional research on aquatic birds in Ecuador, in order to document changes to the known distribution of waterfowl given that anthropogenic climate change and habitat availability could influence the distribution of both resident and migratory species.

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Tatiana Santander G. and Esteban A. Guevara

Aves&Conservación—BirdLife in Ecuador, Pasaje Joaquín Tinajero E3-05, Quito, Ecuador. E-mails: tsantander@avesconservacion.org and eguevara@avesconservacion.org.

Nicolás Peñafiel

Quito, Ecuador. E-mail: nicolaspenafielloaiza@gmail.com.