

## West Peruvian Screech-owl

*Otus roboratus*



The West Peruvian Screech-owl *Otus roboratus* occurs in the Equatorial Pacific lowlands of Ecuador and Peru and the Marañón drainage of north-east Peru. It has been described as fairly common<sup>6,7</sup>, though it remains little known, and has been recorded from relatively few localities. It has previously been classified as a subspecies of Tropical Screech-owl *Otus choliba*<sup>5</sup>, but is now generally acknowledged to represent a distinct species<sup>4,7,8</sup>.

The West Peruvian Screech-owl is a canopy bird of deciduous and semi-deciduous forests, and *Acacia* scrub. In Peru it is listed as inhabiting dry forest and, presumably erroneously, *Polylepis* forest by Parker *et al.*<sup>6</sup>. In western Ecuador and Peru it is principally found in the lower tropical zone, but has been recorded to 1,800 m near Sozoranga, Loja province, Ecuador<sup>2</sup>. In the Marañón drainage it has been recorded as high as 2,500 m<sup>6</sup>.

The species was described by Bangs and Noble in 1918, from Bellavista, north-west Peru<sup>1</sup>; it had previously been collected near Vincas, now in Los Ríos, Ecuador, by Salvadori and Festa, who identified their specimen as a Vermiculated Screech-owl *Otus (Scops) guatemalae*<sup>3</sup>. There is also an early series of specimens from the Río Percio, near the

type locality<sup>3</sup>.

In Ecuador the species occurs as far north as Jauneche, Los Ríos (M. Catsis and P. Coopmans *in litt.*). It is found in several protected areas including Parque Nacional Machilla, Ecuador and Parque Nacional Tumbes, Peru.

The photographed bird was one of several found calling in dry deciduous forest on the banks of the Río Calvas at Hacienda Linderos in extreme southern Loja, Ecuador, in August 1991. The area is fully described in Williams & Tobias<sup>9</sup>. The bird was photographed in the field and subsequently mist-netted. It was not sexed but thought from its call repertoire likely to be male; it had a wing chord of 146 mm and a weight of 70 g. The only other owl observed in the area was Pacific Pygmy-owl *Glaucidium peruanum*, which was fairly common, though Burrowing Owl *Speotyto cunicularia*, Barn Owl *Tyto alba* and Striped Owl *Asio clamator* have all been recorded in the arid south-west in similar habitats.

The species is grey-brown with rufous upperparts and paler underparts with white spots and dark herringbone marks; at a distance the appearance is of dark streaking with a slight herringbone effect. In the hand it becomes clear that

the dark shaft streaks of the breast feathers are complemented by a series of incomplete horizontal bars. There is no information on geographic variation in plumage.

Being the only screech-owl over a large part of its range and distinct from any congeners in its habitat preferences, this species has yet to be found sympatrically with any other *Otus* species, at least west of the Andes (there is little information available from the Marañón drainage). The only other *Otus* occurring away from montane forest west of the Andes in Ecuador is the Vermiculated Screech-owl *Otus guatemalae*, which is known from very few localities and, being confined to humid forest, is consequently absent from the drier lowlands.

As with most nightbirds, the species is most easily located and identified by call. The species principally vocalises just after dusk and pre-dawn, although it will often continue calling through the early part of the night. There are at least four documented calls<sup>5</sup>: a rapid series of notes, rising in an almost dove-like tone and lasting for c. 1.5 seconds; a grunting bark "hoo" often given in pairs but also singly; a series (seven is typical) of short yelps given at half-second intervals; a harsh rising trill, marginally increasing in frequency towards the end and lasting about 2.5 seconds (this appears to be the typical song).

### Acknowledgements

Guy Kirwan commented on a draft of the manuscript. The sponsors of the two Amaluza expeditions to south-west Ecuador are listed in Williams & Tobias<sup>9</sup>.

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### Back cover

Top left: Swallow-tailed Cotinga *Phibalura flavirostris*, Itatiaia National Park, Brazil (Chris Gibbons)

Top right: Swallow-tailed Cotinga *Phibalura flavirostris*, nest with nestlings, Itatiaia National Park, Brazil (Chris Gibbons)

Bottom left and right: West Peruvian Screech-owl *Otus roboratus*, Río Calvas at Hacienda Linderos, extreme southern Loja, Ecuador: August 1991 (Robert S. R. Williams)

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**Swallow-tailed Cotinga *Phibalura flavirostris***  
(Chris Gibbons)



**West Peruvian Screech-owl *Otus roboratus***  
(Robert S. R. Williams)



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