

A record of the *belizensis* subspecies of Yellow-headed Amazon *Amazona oratrix* from the Petén, northern Guatemala

Rob P. Clay

Cotinga 11 (1999): 20

Un grupo aparentemente familiar de *Amazona oratrix belizensis* fue observado en la costa norte del Lago Petén Itza, El Petén, norte de Guatemala, el 5 de septiembre de 1993. Se presenta una descripción completa de lo que representa el primer registro de esta forma en el país.

The Yellow-headed Amazon *Amazona ochrocephala* complex comprises a number of allopatric forms which have been variously treated as three species¹⁻³ or one highly variable species occurring from Mexico south to northern South America^{4,5}. The northern forms—*A. o. tresmariae*, *A. o. magna*, *A. o. oratrix* and *A. o. belizensis*—have been considered to constitute a species complex: Yellow-headed Amazon *A. oratrix*, and as such have been categorised as Vulnerable³. The Belizean race, *belizensis*, inhabits the pine savannas and adjacent evergreen forest patches of Belize^{2,4,7}. Despite the proximity of similar habitat in the Petén region of northern Guatemala, there is just one ambiguous record of “*Amazona ochrocephala*” for this region, given (it is not clear on what evidence) by Land⁶.

On 5 September 1993 the author, accompanied by T. Shrivistava, observed what appeared to be a family party of four *belizensis* in forest along the north shore of Lake Petén Itza, El Petén. Although this record has been mentioned by Collar *et al.*³ and Lousada & Howell⁷, full documentation has been hitherto lacking.

All four birds were seen perched and in flight, with a fifth unidentified *Amazona* seen briefly in flight. Of the four perched birds, two appeared to be adults and two juveniles. The two adults had yellow on the face extending to the lores, forehead, crown and ear-coverts, although the malar area, chin, throat and rear of the crown were green. At least one bird had some yellow feathers on the nape. In flight, both birds showed extensive red at the bend of the wing. The two presumed juveniles showed much less yellow on the face, this being restricted to the forecrown and a few flecks around the eyes. In flight they showed less red in the wing. All four birds had noticeably pale bills, although those of the two juveniles were slightly dusker. These descriptions clearly fit those published for both adult and juvenile *belizensis*^{4,7}.

The presence of *belizensis* in this region of Guatemala is not unexpected given its ecological similarity and proximity to the range of the subspecies in Belize⁷. What is perhaps surprising is that this constitutes the first record of *belizensis* for the Petén, suggesting that the subspecies may only occur in Guatemala as an occasional wanderer from neighbouring Belize.

References

1. American Ornithologists' Union (1983) *Checklist of North American birds*. Sixth edition. Washington DC: American Ornithologists' Union.
2. Collar, N. J., Gonzaga, L. P., Krabbe, N., Madroño N., A., Naranjo, L. G., Parker, T. A. & Wege, D. C. (1992) *Threatened birds of the Americas: the ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book*. Cambridge, UK: International Council for Bird Preservation.
3. Collar, N. J., Crosby, M. J. & Stattersfield, A. J. (1994) *Birds to watch 2: the world list of threatened birds*. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International (BirdLife Conservation Series 4).
4. Forshaw, J. M. (1989) *Parrots of the world*. Third revised edition. Willoughby: Landsdowne Editions.
5. del Hoyo, J., Elliot, A. & Sargatal, J. (eds.) (1997) *Handbook of the birds of the world*, 4. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.
6. Land, H. C. (1970) *Birds of Guatemala*. Wynnewood, Penn.: Livingston Publishing Company.
7. Lousada, S. A. & Howell, S. N. G. (1996) Distribution, variation, and conservation of Yellow-headed Parrots in northern Central America. *Cotinga* 5: 46–53.

Rob P. Clay

Guyra Paraguay: Conservacion de Aves, Belgica 165, C.C. 714, Asuncion, Paraguay. E-mail: guyra@highway.com.py.