

>> BIRDING SITES CHILEAN WOODSTAR

# Seeing Chilean Woodstar around Arica, Chile

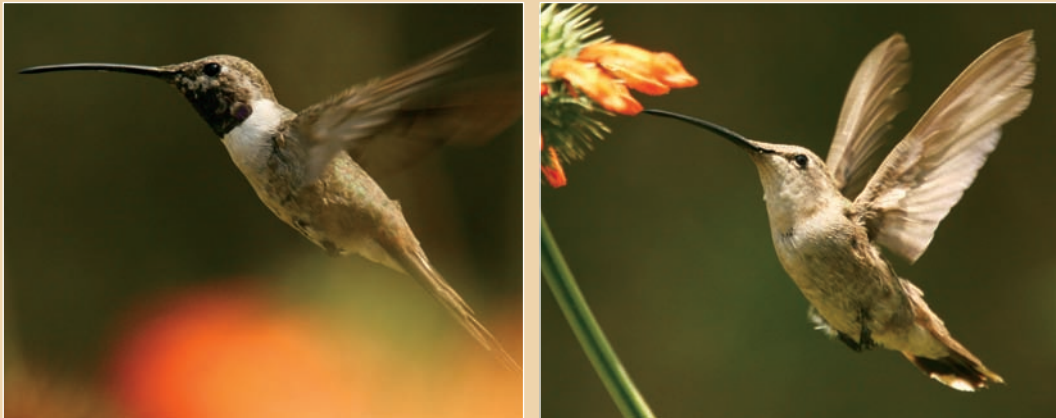
James Lowen, Fabrice Schmitt and David Capper

A voluntary initiative of an enlightened Chilean family is helping birders to see hummingbirds near Arica, including the endangered Chilean Woodstar.

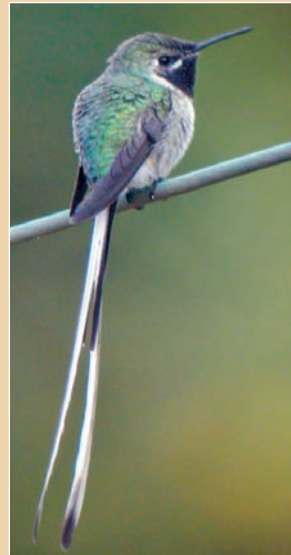


Main photo and inset top: Male Chilean Woodstar *Eulidia yarrellii* (Juan Aguirre). Note the distinctive crossed over rectrices

Inset bottom: Female Chilean Woodstar *Eulidia yarrellii* (Alvaro Jaramillo)



Oasis Hummingbird *Rhodopsis vesper* (left: male; right: female) is the commonest hummingbird in the area (James Lowen)



Above right: Male Peruvian Sheartail *Thaumastura cora* (Alvaro Jaramillo). The species arrived in Chile in 1971 and is now thought to be outcompeting Chilean Woodstar *Eulidia yarrellii*

Above middle: Peruvian Sheartail *Thaumastura cora* (James Lowen). This is probably an immature male with a short tail: differs from male Chilean Woodstar *Eulidia yarrellii* in longest tail feathers being the central, not outer, ones; these being straight, not curved; and having white on the face above and in the gorget



Above upper left: Female Peruvian Sheartail *Thaumastura cora* (Charles Hesse). While this individual superficially resembles Chilean Woodstar *Eulidia yarrellii*, given its clean white underparts, the longest, white tipped rectrices are narrow in shape and contrast in length with the short first rectrix (the shadow of which can just about be seen)—both features that point to Peruvian Sheartail

Above lower left: Female Peruvian Sheartail *Thaumastura cora* (James Lowen). A typical individual, differing from female Chilean Woodstar *Eulidia yarrellii* in its buffy throat, longer tail with more obvious white tips and habit of pumping its tail while hovering

Below: The globally Vulnerable Slender-billed Finch *Xenopsingus concolor* is a speciality of the lush valleys around Arica (James Lowen)



**>> BIRDING SITES CHILEAN WOODSTAR**

The Chilean Woodstar *Eulidia yarrellii* is an Endangered hummingbird with a restricted range. Endemic to the Peru–Chile Pacific slope Endemic Bird Area<sup>5</sup>, the Chilean Woodstar occurs only in two desert valleys in extreme northern Chile, with stragglers found north to Tacna and possibly Moquegua departments in south Peru<sup>1</sup>. The two desert valleys were traditionally thought to be the Lluta and Azapa<sup>1</sup>, but the woodstar now appears extinct in the former and has recently been found to occur in Vitor valley to the south<sup>2</sup>. Formerly abundant, the latest population estimate—following surveys in September 2003—is just 1,539 birds<sup>2</sup>, considerably less than the 2,500–9,999 estimated by BirdLife International<sup>1</sup>. Remaining native habitat in these heavily cultivated valleys is confined to small patches, and the indigenous plants favoured by the species are severely threatened<sup>1,2</sup>. As an inevitable but unfortunate consequence, this delightful nectar-feeder is high on the wish-list of most birders' trips to Chile. New distributional information and a new family-run initiative may increase birders' chances of succeeding in seeing it.

The best current site for the Chilean Woodstar appears to be the Vitor valley, 45 km south of Arica along the Pan-American highway. Recent work suggests this may be the woodstar's stronghold<sup>2</sup>: it is commoner there than the Peruvian Sheartail *Thaumastura cora*, which, since its arrival in Chile in 1971<sup>3</sup>, has been voraciously expanding its range and is thought to be outcompeting the woodstar<sup>2</sup>. Bird anywhere in the valley, but focus particularly on the area around Chaca.

Traditionally, birders visiting northern Chile have had best luck with Chilean Woodstar in the Azapa Valley, east of Arica. To get there, head east from central Arica on the road 18 de septiembre. Turn left at the first roundabout a few km out of town, then right at the second, following the signs for Azapa. Pearman<sup>4</sup> and most trip reports suggest that you scour flowering bushes between about

km 9 and the village of San Miguel de Azapa, including around the Faculty of Andean Studies/archaeological museum.

The 'new' site with a reasonable chance of Chilean Woodstar is in San Miguel de Azapa itself. At km 14, turn south (right if coming from Arica) opposite a 'Centro de Llamadas' (telephone centre). Drive for a few hundred metres down a dirt track past Agroturismo los Placeres on your left. The road bends right then left, bringing you suddenly to floristically palatial surroundings.

The 'Palacio de los Picaflor' (Hummingbird Palace), alternatively called 'Refugio Floral del Picaflor de Arica' (Floral Refuge of Chilean Woodstar), is a private garden, owned and managed by the Madrid family. Unlike most 'hummingbird gardens', the Palacio attracts its birds by natural means rather than sugar-filled feeders. Banks of brightly-coloured flowers extend over an area of about 50 m by 30 m and attract scores of hummingbirds.

Oasis Hummingbird *Rhodopsis vesper* is abundant, with easily 50 birds on show at close range (and easily photographable). There are quite a few Peruvian Sheartail *Thaumastura cora* and smaller numbers of the woodstar, which is also present near the river, 500 m distant. We have seen the woodstar on two of our three visits, with one bird on one occasion and two on the other. Others have had mixed success. The two best areas are on the opposite side of the track to the Madrid's house: one about 5 m from the road, the other about 25 m back, at the far left hand side. We saw birds feeding primarily around ornamental non-native orange flowers *Leonotis leonurus* (for which see the top right photograph on page 41).

The various members of the Madrid family are keen to help you in your quest. They claim to know the birds reasonably well (although are prone to misidentifications of this tricky species). The family does not charge an entry fee, but donations are gratefully accepted to finance upkeep of the garden: we contributed 5,000 Chilean pesos per person (GB£5/USD\$10).

While in the Azapa valley area, you should look out for a few other local specialities. You might bump into Slender-billed Finch *Xenopsingus concolor* (globally Vulnerable) virtually anywhere in the lower Azapa valley, but we actually found it commonest where the parallel Lluta Valley meets the sea, a few km north of Arica. To get here, head north from Arica until you come to a huge roundabout: right/east leads to Putre/Lauca/Bolivia, and straight on/north to

“Banks of brightly-coloured  
flowers attract scores of  
hummingbirds”

Peru; ignore these options and instead head left/west and follow the road down to the coast. Drive back towards Arica and park by the bridge over the river. Check the bushes for Slender-billed Finches, the river mouth for terns and migrant waders, and beach-side dry fields south of the bridge for Peruvian Thick-knee *Burhinus superciliaris*.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the Madrid family for guiding us round their land and for their contribution to the conservation of a globally threatened hummingbird. We are grateful to Juan Aguirre and Cristian Estades for their comments on this article and for sight of their draft paper. We thank Juan Aguirre, Charles Hesse and Alvaro Jaramillo for the photographs that illustrate the article. Thanks to Juan Aguirre, Peter Burke and Alvaro Jaramillo for commenting on identification issues. David and James also thank Penny Pereira for her companionship.

#### REFERENCES

1. BirdLife International (2006) Species factsheet: *Eulidia yarrellii*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 4/1/2007.
2. Estades, C. F., Aguirre, J., Escobar, M. A. H., Tomasevic, J. A., Vukasovic, M. A. & Tala, C. (in press) Conservation status of the Chilean Woodstar *Eulidia yarrellii*. *Bird Conserv. Intern.*
3. Jaramillo, A., Burke, P. & Beadle, D. (2003) *Field guide to the birds of Chile*. London: Christopher Helm.
4. Pearman, M. (1995) *The essential guide to birding in Chile*. Belper, UK: Worldwide Publications.
5. Stattersfield, A. J., Crosby, M. J., Long, A. J. & Wege, D. C. (1998) *Endemic Bird Areas of the world: priorities for bird conservation*. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.

#### JAMES LOWEN

Rioja 3730, 1636 La Lucila, Buenos Aires, Argentina.  
E-mail: [lowen.james@gmail.com](mailto:lowen.james@gmail.com)

#### FABRICE SCHMITT

Andres de Fuenzalida 98, Dpt 904, Providencia,  
Santiago de Chile, Chile. E-mail:  
[fabrschmitt@yahoo.com.ar](mailto:fabrschmitt@yahoo.com.ar)

#### DAVID CAPPER

10A Kirkstall Rd, London, SW2 4HF, UK. E-mail:  
[capper.david@googlemail.com](mailto:capper.david@googlemail.com)

## MP3-CD sound collections

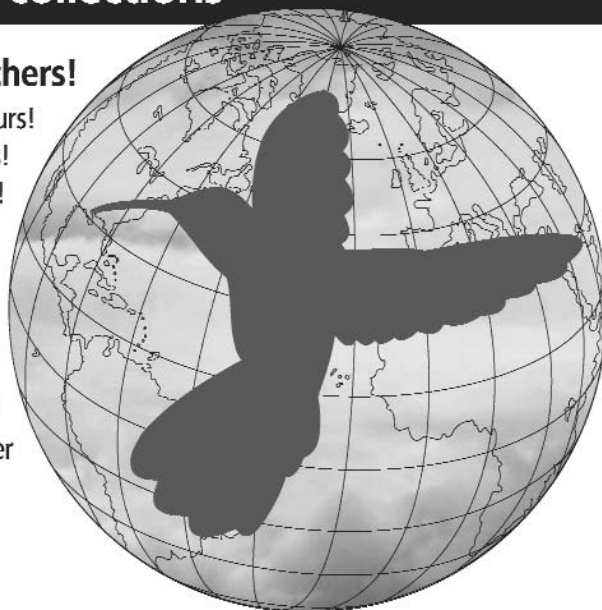
### Specially made for birdwatchers!

- Birds of Venezuela, 950 species, 8 hours!
  - Birds of Brazil, 1000 species, 10 hours!
  - Birds of Mexico, 650 species, 6 hours!
- All made by Peter Boesman.

Every title comes with plenty of extra info of every species, provided on disc and in a handy booklet.

MP3-CD sound collections can be used on any PC, Mac and on your MP3-player when you're in the field.

Ordering from [birdsounds.nl](http://birdsounds.nl)  
or your local distributor.



BirdSounds.nl · Hoofdstraat W.14 · NL-9951 AB Winsum · The Netherlands  
T +31(0)595-441000 · F +31(0)595-444911 · [info@birdsounds.nl](mailto:info@birdsounds.nl) · [www.birdsounds.nl](http://www.birdsounds.nl)