

Far from the birding crowd: range extensions and recent additions to the Bolivian avifauna

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The author takes us on his travels off Bolivia's beaten track, encouraging us to push back the established boundaries of the Neotropics' birdlife.

Not so long ago a few weeks pottering about in the Bolivian rainforests produced records of over 50 new species for the country¹⁷. Around the same time a couple of short walks in and around Noel Kempff Mercado National Park led to the addition of 38 species to the Bolivian avifauna^{4,5,9}. Those bumper crops are a thing of the past, and the scope for new discoveries has been whittled away by successive waves of surveys^{2,3,15,16}.

When Remsen & Traylor¹⁸ compiled acceptable records of birds in Bolivia, the

country's avifauna stood at 1,274 species. Many new records, including those mentioned above, have since added to that total, and the most recent compilation of Bolivian birds⁸ listed roughly 1,400 species, a figure which seems to have stabilised over the last few years. Bolivia now has the sixth highest bird list of any country in the world (after Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador and Indonesia), a remarkable feat for a land-locked nation.

During the course of field studies between 2001 and 2005 I made trips to poorly known regions of



Figure 1. Rufous Twistwing *Cnipodectes* sp. nov. at Extrema, dpto. Pando: first record for Bolivia



Figure 2. Male Green-tailed Goldenthrout *Polytmus theresiae* at Guayaramerin, dpto. Beni: first documented record for Bolivia



Figure 3. Pale-bellied Mourner *Rhytipterna immunda* at Guayaramerin, dpto. Beni: first record for Bolivia



Figure 4. Citron-bellied Attila *Attila citriniventris* at Piedritas, dpto. Pando: first record for Bolivia

Figs. 1–8: all photographs by Joseph Tobias



Figure 5. "Campinarana" Flycatcher *Cnemotriccus fuscatus duidae* at Piedritas, dpto. Pando: first record for Bolivia



Figure 6. Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher *Myiobius barbatus* at Los Indios, dpto. Pando: first record for Bolivia



Figure 7. Male Black Manakin *Xenopipo atronitens* at Guayaramerin: first record for dpto. Beni



Figure 8. White-tailed Shrike-tyrant *Agriornis andicola* at Sajama National Park: first record in a Bolivian protected area, and only the third country record in the last 30 years

Bolivia, and was rewarded with some interesting sightings, including the first documented Bolivian records for at least ten species. These records—along with notes on identification, exact sites, dates and habitat descriptions—are published elsewhere^{19,20}. The purpose of this article is to give a rundown of the most interesting sightings, along with supporting photographic evidence. Other images have been published in Tobias & Seddon²⁰, or will be made available on the internet. Most of the records mentioned here are also corroborated by sound recordings deposited in the Macaulay Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, USA, or the National Sound Archive at the British Museum, London, UK.

First country records

Surveys at the lowland fringe of Madidi National Park in 2001 resulted in the first record of Wire-crested Thorntail *Discosura popelairii* for Bolivia. At the time this locality was considerably further south than the southernmost known record in Peru, in the Marcapata valley, but recent records come from close to the Bolivian border in dpto. Puno (V. H. García-Soliz *per* S. K. Herzog *in litt.* 2006).

A survey at Extrema in eastern dpto. Pando, in November 2004, resulted in four new records for the country. An undescribed Twistwing *Cnipodectes* sp. nov. appeared to be fairly common in patches of *Guadua* bamboo (Fig. 1), the White-cheeked Tody-Tyrant *Poecilatriccus albifacies* was scarce in the same habitat, and a single Chestnut-throated Spinetail *Synallaxis cherriei* was heard and lured into a mist-net using tape-playback. Finally, a large flock of swifts included 2–3 Chimney Swifts *Chaetura pelagica*, a long-overdue addition to the Bolivian avifauna (see Tobias & Seddon²⁰). None of these records was unexpected. The twistwing and tody-tyrant are known from just over the border at Iberia, in Dpto Madre de Dios, Peru (D. J. Lebbin *in litt.* 2004), and the spinetail is quite widespread, occurring patchily in eastern Peru south to within a few hundred kilometres of the Bolivia border (T. S. Schulenberg *in litt.* 2005).

Amazonian stunted forests held more surprises. Fieldwork in this habitat around Guayaramerin, dpto. Beni, produced documented records of Ruby-topaz Hummingbird *Chrysolampis mosquitus*, a species known in Bolivia by a series of dubious, provisional, or unpublished and undocumented records (see Tobias & Seddon²⁰). In the same area, the Green-

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tailed Goldenthrout *Polytmus theresiae* was common (Fig. 2), and the Pale-bellied Mourner *Rhytipterna immunda* was present in small numbers (Fig. 3). Both species were not previously known in Bolivia.

After much time spent trying to access short-stature forests in eastern dpto. Pando, I only succeeded in spending a few mornings in fairly tall *campinarana*-type habitat, and never reached the truly stunted forests reported elsewhere^{15,16}. One interesting observation in lower-stature forest included the first Bolivian record of Citron-bellied Attila *Attila citriniventris* (Fig. 4), a species with a patchy distribution south of the Amazon. Another addition to the Bolivian avifauna was *Cnemotriccus fuscatus duidae* (Fig. 5), a distinctive form sometimes known as "Campinarana Flycatcher" or "Varillal Flycatcher". Part of the Fuscous Flycatcher complex, it will probably be elevated to the rank of species when a full review is published by B. M. Whitney and co-authors (*in litt.* 2006).

In lower stature forests of eastern dpto. Pando I came across an unfamiliar *Xiphorhynchus* taxon resembling Ocellated Woodcreeper *X. ocellatus* (photo published elsewhere²⁰). This species has long been included on lists of Bolivian birds^{8,18}, but all known records are referable to the race *brevirostris*, which are best separated, along with other Andean forms, as Tschudi's Woodcreeper *X. chunchotambo*^{1,13}. These dpto. Pando birds differed so strikingly from *chunchotambo* in voice and ecology that I was certain they represented a species hitherto unknown in Bolivia. Credit for their identification is due to Bret Whitney, who recognized a cut of the voice as *X. ocellatus perplexus*, a little known but vocally distinctive race which he had tape-recorded near the type locality at Sarayacu, Ucayali, Peru (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 2005). For the moment they are the first records of "true" Ocellated Woodcreeper from Bolivia, although further taxonomic work may re-shuffle this complex of forms, perhaps isolating *perplexus* as a species in its own right.

Sulphur-rumped Flycatchers *Myiobius barbatus* found in nearby *terra firme* forest at Los Indios, Dpto Pando, were the first Bolivian records of this widespread humid forest species (Fig. 6). Although the race involved was presumably *amazonicus*, with a yellowish olive chest, and therefore similar to Black-tailed Flycatcher *Myiobius atricaudus*, a comparison of sound recordings, and close examination of specimen material showed the Pando birds to be Sulphur-rumped Flycatchers. The Black-tailed Flycatcher is

thought to occur in Amazonia, perhaps in *várzea* forest, but convincing records are rare (M. Cohn-Haft *in litt.* 2006).

Second country records and other interesting sightings

A survey of 11 forested Amazonian river-islands in 2004–2005²⁰ resulted in the second Bolivian record of Pearly-breasted Conebill *Conirostrum margaritae*, itself a recent addition to the Bolivian avifauna²¹. Sightings of Parker's Spinetail *Cranioleuca vulpecula* and Brownish Elaenia *Elaenia pelzelni* were also second records for the country, but in this case they were the first documented sightings since 1937⁷. In general, I was disappointed not to find some of the river-island or flooded-forest species known from just over the border in Brazil, on the upper rio Madeira⁶, including Olive-spotted Hummingbird *Leucippus chlorocercus*, Zimmer's Woodcreeper *Xiphorhynchus kienerii*, Lesser Hornero *Furnarius minor*, Lesser Wagtail-Tyrant *Stigmatura napensis*, and Bicolored Conebill *Conirostrum bicolor*, none of which are known from Bolivia. Further fieldwork may yet uncover populations, but they seem to be rare in the region, even in apparently suitable habitat. The non-navigable stretch of the upper rio Madeira, here characterised by rapids and rocky islands, may present a barrier to the dispersal of some of these forms.

Other second records included Rufous-faced Crane *Laterallus xenopterus* (globally Vulnerable), Black Manakin *Xenopipo atronitens* (Fig. 7) and Red-shouldered Tanager *Tachyphonus phoenicius* in dpto. Beni, and Amazonian Parrotlet *Nannopsittaca dachilleae*, Collared Puffbird *Bucco capensis* and Green Oropendola *P. viridis* in dpto. Pando. In addition, I found the White-tailed Shrike-tyrant *Agriornis andicola* (Vulnerable) at Sajama National Park, dpto. Oruro (Fig. 8): the first record from any Bolivian protected area, and only the third record in the last 30 years (S. K. Herzog *in litt.* 2006). Lastly, a record of a male Cerulean Warbler *Dendroica cerulea* (Vulnerable) at Tunquini research station, dpto. La Paz, was the fourth record for Bolivia and the first in 66 years. Full details of all these records are given elsewhere²⁰.

The sheer number of these discoveries, and those reported by others, emphasises how poorly Bolivia is known from an ornithological perspective. Large areas of the country have never been surveyed, and any visit to new terrain is likely to produce important results.

Sjoerd Mayer epitomised the independent ornithologist, pioneering several overland walking routes in Bolivia in the 1990s and tape-recording birds in remote regions. His efforts resulted in the description of one new species to science¹², and the elevation to species status of two long-neglected forms^{10,11}, as well as the publication of an immensely valuable collection of Bolivian bird vocalisations¹⁴, with another on the way (S. Mayer *in litt.* 2005). I hope this article inspires more ornithologists and wayfaring birders to visit Bolivia, and to follow his footsteps away from the well-worn trail.

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