

Observations at a nest of Thrush-like Antpitta *Myrmothera campanisona* in eastern Ecuador

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Encontramos un nido del Chululú Campanero *Myrmothera campanisona* en la Amazonía del Ecuador. Durante cuatro horas de observación, la cobertura de los dos huevos fue casi del 100%. Ambos adultos participaron. El nido y los huevos fueron parecidos a los de Guyana Francés, pero los huevos fueron mas pequeño. Este es el primer registro de la reproducción de este especie en Ecuador.

Thrush-like Antpitta *Myrmothera campanisona* is one of a species-pair in this genus belonging to the ground antbirds (Formicariidae). It is distributed from south-east Colombia, southern Venezuela and the Guianas to north-west Bolivia and Amazonian Brazil¹¹. One race, *signata*, occurs in Ecuador¹⁰. Brief descriptions of nests from French Guiana were published for Thrush-like Antpitta¹⁵, and a nest of Tepui Antpitta *M. simplex* was recently described from Guyana¹. No other information is available on the breeding biology of this genus, thus here we make a brief addition to the literature with observations at the nest of a Thrush-like Antpitta in eastern Ecuador.

On 15 May 2003, JBLH found a nest of Thrush-like Antpitta and pointed it out to JFVB, who

photographed the nest and two eggs. The nest was on the south side of the río Napo, Sucumbios province, north-east Ecuador, at an elevation of 250 m. It was within heavily disturbed, but intact, forest owned by the community of Sani Isla and adjacent to Yasuni National Park. For more complete site descriptions of nearby areas see DeVries *et al.*⁴ and Freiberg & Freiburg⁷. On 20 May HFG visited the nest and took measurements. At 09h30 a video camera was set up 3 m from the nest, concealed by vegetation, and the nest was filmed for 4.25 hours.

The nest was located in a broad drainage surrounding a small creek, c.0.5 km from the banks of the Napo. Surrounding vegetation was typical of flooded forest in the area and contained few large

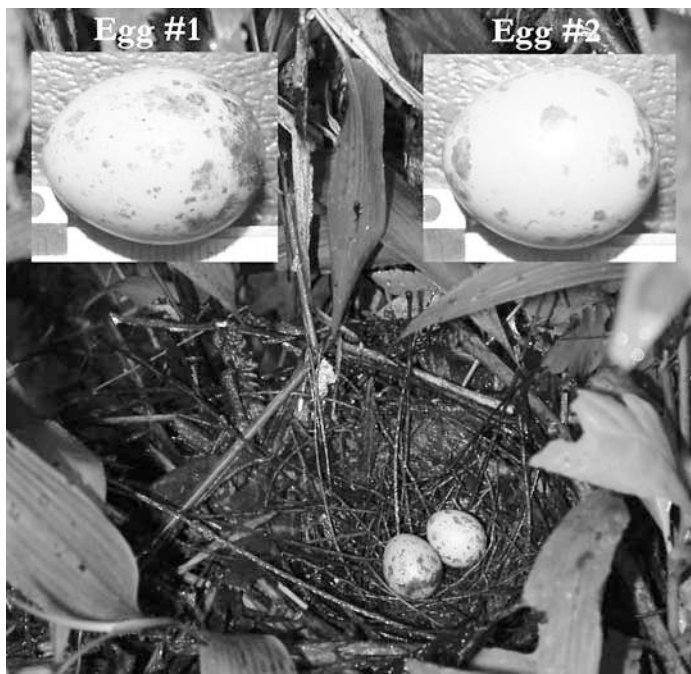


Figure 1. The nest and eggs of the Thrush-like Antpitta *Myrmothera campanisona* on 20 May 2003, Sucumbios province, eastern Ecuador: top left inset; detail of egg 1; top right inset; detail of egg 2 (Harold F. Greeney)

trees. The nest was 15 cm above ground and suspended in a clump of large grasses (Fig. 1). The bulky cup was constructed of large (mostly 3–9 mm-diameter) sticks, ranging in length from 4–25 cm, and a few dead leaves. It was sparsely lined with softer, dead leaf petioles, and well concealed by surrounding vegetation. The cup measured 9.5 cm wide by 4 cm deep. The outside dimensions of the nest were difficult to determine due to its untidy construction, but in width it ranged from 15–23 cm and was c.10 cm thick. The eggs were rich turquoise to blue-green with heavy brown markings, and varied considerably in shape and patterning. The first egg (Fig. 1, left) measured 24.9 × 19.9 mm, was blue-green, and had an irregular wreath of markings around the larger end. The second egg (Fig. 1, right) measured 22.5 × 19.0 mm, had a paler turquoise background, and was more sparsely patterned.

On 20 May, HFG spent a total of 15 minutes at the nest before leaving the camera running. The eggs were hot to the touch upon his arrival, and it is likely that an incubating adult was flushed by his approach. An adult returned to the nest just 7.25 minutes after HFG left the area. It paused motionless for 22 seconds on the rim before settling onto the eggs, but otherwise appeared unaffected by the intervention. This adult sat for 46 minutes before walking off the back of the nest, being replaced by the second adult 4 seconds later. The second adult sat for 139 minutes before it left upon the arrival of the other adult. The incubating adult stood and passed the incoming adult on the rim of the nest with little or no visible interaction. On all occasions, adults walked while entering or leaving the nest. The final bout lasted 40 minutes before the tape ended. Coverage of the egg from 09h30 to 13h30, beginning once the adult first returned, was essentially 100%. While sitting on the nest adults stood a total of six times. On three occasions they leaned into the nest and gently drew the bill backwards towards their belly a single time. We took this to be rolling of the eggs. On five of these occasions the adult probed firmly, but gently, into the lining of the nest several times, as if removing small objects. On one occasion the adult appeared to peck sharply at, and eat, a small insect from an adjacent leaf. Apart from these brief bouts of movement, averaging (±SD) 16±7.7 seconds, the adults were uncommonly still while incubating compared to other passerines observed by HFG.

The nest of the Thrush-like Antpitta described here was nearly identical in situation and form to those described for this species from French Guiana¹⁵, and similar to that described for Tepui Antpitta¹. The eggs were also similar to those previously described for this species, but were markedly smaller than those measured in French Guiana (27.3 × 20.9 mm and 27.0 × 20.9 mm)¹⁵, and

smaller than those of Tepui Antpitta (26 × 20 mm and 27 × 20 mm)¹. As has been noted in Tepui Antpitta, Streak-chested Antpitta *Hylopezus perspicillatus*, Scaled Antpitta *Grallaria guatemalensis* and White-bellied Antpitta *G. hypoleuca*^{1,5,9,12}, Thrush-like Antpitta adults share incubation duties. Rather than the prolonged exchanges seen in Scaled Antpittas, however, where both adults were present at the nest for up to 30 seconds⁶, the unceremonious exchange observed here resembles that reported for Streak-chested Antpitta and White-bellied Antpitta^{9,14}. The near-total coverage of the eggs during the observation period is like that described for Streak-chested Antpittas¹⁴, and similar to the over 85% coverage in White-bellied and Scaled Antpittas^{5,6,9}. The 'rapid probing' behaviour, moving the bill in and out of the nest lining in a sewing machine-like fashion, seen in Scaled Antpitta⁶ and Bicoloured Antvireo *Dysithamnus occidentalis*⁸ was not observed in Thrush-like Antpitta.

The lack of published information concerning the natural history of most Neotropical birds is appalling. This is due, in part, to the logistical difficulties presented by working in most areas, but is also a result of the current academic trend to devalue basic natural history research³. Given that 15 species of antpittas are listed as Endangered, Vulnerable, or Near Threatened², and that, apart from the work of Skutch^{12–14} on Streak-chested Antpitta and of Dobbs *et al.*^{5,6} on Scaled Antpitta, we still know little about the basic natural history of antpittas, we hope this trend will not persist. We encourage others to publish findings that will add to our base knowledge of these, and other highly threatened, Neotropical species.

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