

First nest description of the Yellow-breasted Antpitta *Grallaria flavotincta* in north-west Ecuador

by Harold F. Greeney, Mery E. Juiña J., Segundo M. Imba Lliquin
& Jane A. Lyons

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Grallaria antpittas are poorly known members of the Grallariidae, distributed throughout the Andes and comprise 31 species. Despite many recent contributions to our understanding of their breeding biology (e.g., Freile & Renjifo 2003, Greeney & Martin 2005, Martin & Greeney 2006, Solano-Ugalde *et al.* in press), the breeding biology of most species is poorly documented (Greeney *et al.* 2008). Yellow-breasted Antpitta *G. flavotincta* inhabits humid montane forests (1,300–2,350 m) from north-west Colombia to north-west Ecuador (Hilty & Brown 1986, Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). While it is a range-restricted species, Yellow-breasted Antpitta is not considered globally threatened (BirdLife International 2009), but some authors consider the species to warrant Near Threatened status (Krabbe & Schulenberg 2003, Freile *et al.* in press). Other than specimens collected in breeding condition in June in Colombia (Krabbe & Schulenberg 2003), nothing has been published on its breeding biology. Here we describe a nest of Yellow-breasted Antpitta from north-west Ecuador.

Methods and Results

On 20 January 2009, SMIL found a nest of Yellow-breasted Antpitta at Reserva Las Gralarias (00°00'06"S, 78°43'09"W), at an elevation of 2,050 m, near Mindo, prov. Pichincha. At the time of discovery, the nest contained two turquoise eggs. He did not examine them closely, but they appeared lightly spotted. It is unclear, however, to what extent staining from the nest or eclosion fluids may have contributed to these markings. We took measurements and photographed the nest on 14 February, when it contained two nestlings that we estimated to be c.8 days old based on our experience with other *Grallaria*. The nestlings (Fig. 1) were pale-skinned with patches of black down on the dorsum. Their primary feathers had not yet broken their sheaths, but would probably have done so within the next 24 hours. Their mouth linings and gape were bright crimson-orange, contrasting starkly with the dark interior of the nest. They weighed 29.8 and 32.7 g. On the morning of 17 February the nest still contained two nestlings, but six days later the nest had partially fallen from its position and several feathers were found on the rim. While it is possible that the nestlings had fledged by this time, we feel it is likely that a predator destroyed the nest.

The bulky, open-cup nest was composed mostly of green moss and fern leaves intermixed with a few sticks, leaf rachises and vines. It was lined with dark rootlets and a few bare fern rachises. The nest was 1.5 m above ground and constructed against the side of a 9 m-tall living tree trunk that was 13 cm in diameter at breast height. The substrate, however, was made substantially larger by copious epiphytes and vines clinging to the trunk at the height of the nest. These created a platform of vegetation that provided a solid support for the nest. It appeared that the nest had been built into a natural depression atop the solid tangle. Externally, the cup measured 21 cm wide by 19 cm front to back, and 15 cm tall. The neatly formed cup measured 13 cm wide by 12 cm front to back, and 7.5 cm deep. The forest surrounding the nest was mature second growth, with an open canopy c.20 m in height. The understorey was relatively dense, with many tangles and fallen trees. A few epiphytic



Figure 1. Nest with two young Yellow-breasted Antpittas *Grallaria flavotincta*, Reserva Las Galarias, north-west Ecuador, 14 February 2009 (Harold F. Greeney)

ferns directly above the nest provided roughly 25% cover, but the nest was otherwise relatively visible from most directions.

Discussion

Unsurprisingly, the nest of Yellow-breasted Antpitta is a deep, bulky cup similar in form to those nests of other *Grallaria* that have been described (Greeney *et al.* 2008). In that it was well supported, the nest is most similar to species such as Rufous Antpitta *G. rufula* (Greeney & Gelis 2005), White-bellied Antpitta *G. hypoleuca* (Price 2003), Variegated Antpitta *G. varia* (Protomastro 2000), Pale-billed Antpitta *G. carrikeri* (Wiedefeld 1982) and Great Antpitta *G. excelsa* (Koefed & Auer 2004). The nest's composition, predominantly of moss and humid materials, most recalls nests of Rufous Antpitta (Whitney 1992, Greeney & Gelis 2005), Great Antpitta (Koefed & Auer 2004), Tawny Antpitta *G. quitensis* (Greeney & Martin 2005) and Stripe-headed Antpitta *G. andicolus* (J. Fjelds  in Greeney *et al.* 2008), as well as some nests of Moustached Antpitta *G. alleni* (Freile & Renjifo 2003, Londo o *et al.* 2004, Greeney & Gelis 2006) and Scaled Antpitta *G. guatemalensis* (Miller 1963, Rowley 1966, Dobbs *et al.* 2001, 2003). Unfortunately, for most species, so few nests are described that the phylogenetic importance of composition and placement suggested by Greeney *et al.* (2008) remains unclear.

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- Addresses: Harold F. Greeney & Mery E. Juiña J., Yanayacu Biological Station & Center for Creative Studies, c/o Foch 721 y Amazonas, Quito, Ecuador, e-mail: revmoss@yahoo.com. Segundo M. Imba Lliquin & Jane A. Lyons, Reserva Las Gralarias, c/o Av. Brasil N45–283 y Zamora, Quito, Ecuador.