First record of Black-throated Blue Warbler *Dendroica caerulescens* for Ecuador

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Reportamos aquí el primer registro de la Bijirita Azul de Garganta Negra *Dendroica caerulescens* para Ecuador, que también representa el registro más austral para la especie, por c.1.200 km, y el único registro en el mes de junio fuera de su zona de nidificación. Observamos un macho adulto de *D. caerulescens* entre el 7 de febrero y 4 de junio de 2002, en un bosque nublado secundario, a 2.170 m, en la ladera este de los Andes, cerca de Cosanga, provincia de Napo. Se lo solía observar en compañía de un bando mixto, que consistía principalmente de paseriformes residentes.

The primary non-breeding range of Black-throated Blue Warbler *Dendroica caerulescens* is the Bahamas, Greater Antilles and Caymans[2,6]. It is uncommon to rare in the Lesser Antilles[10] and coastal northern Central America[7], and rare to casual in Costa Rica[12] and Panama[15]. *D. caerulescens* is a rare non-breeding visitor to extreme northern South America, with records in December–March[13]. In Venezuela, Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps[9] reported records from Ocumare de la Costa (dpto. Aragua) and Cerro Platillón (dpto. Guárico), the latter representing the southernmost published record, at 09°54'N 67°31'W, c.200 km south of the Caribbean coast. Hilty & Brown[5] mentioned four records for Colombia, one from the Santa Marta Mountains (dpto. Magdalena) and three south-east of Titujura (dpto. Guajira).

We report the first record of *D. caerulescens* for Ecuador[14] and the southernmost of the species[5,9] by c.1,200 km. This also represents the only record of *D. caerulescens* in April, May or June in South America[13], and apparently the only record for June outside of the USA or Canada.

Observations and description

On 7 February 2002, HC and MD identified a male *D. caerulescens* foraging in roadside vegetation, on the east slope of the Andes, at Yanayacu Biological Station (00°35'S 77°53'W), c.5 km west of Cosanga, Napo province, Ecuador. It was observed for c.2–4 minutes at a distance of c.10 m among a mixed-species feeding flock. No vocalisations were heard. Although MD was initially unsure of the bird's identification, HC instantly recognised the species through prior field experience with *D. caerulescens* from Canada. Subsequently, PRM, RCD and HFG observed an adult male (presumably the same) *D. caerulescens* between 14 February and 4 June 2002, at 2,170 m, also at Yanayacu. The bird was discovered, by PRM, at 06h30 on 14 February 2002, as it foraged with a mixed-species passerine flock. We observed and videotaped the warbler (Fig. 1) until 08h00 and subsequently monitored it every few days until 30 March. In April–early May, the bird was apparently absent from the area or, more likely, foraging with a different, unobserved flock. We observed it again on 17 May–4 June, during which time it foraged with or in the vicinity of the original flock and sang in the early morning. The bird inhabited the border of primary forest, in secondary forest along a narrow road, and shrubby vegetation within a regenerating clearing, up to 30 m from the forest edge.

The *D. caerulescens* was similar in size to several other warblers in the mixed-species flock (see below). Plumage was marked by a blue-grey crown, slate-blue back and dark grey uppertail (Fig. 1). Belly and undertail-coverts white, and underside of tail mostly white. Bill black, as were the face, throat, upper breast and its sides. Primaries and secondaries dark grey, with a striking, large square white patch at base of primaries, suggesting that the bird was at least two years old. Video-grabs documenting the record have been archived at VIREO (Visual Resources for Ornithology, The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA) with the accession numbers v06/45/001 and v06/45/002.

Vocalisations

During February and March, the only vocalisation given was the species' characteristic *chip* call note, which has a very 'thick' quality. It chipped frequently as it foraged with the mixed-species flock (e.g. 28–36 chips/minute on 14 February). Between 17 May and 4 June, the warbler sang irregularly each morning during the first 3–4 hours of daylight. It gave two song types, including the species' classic 3–4-syllable *zu-zu-zu-zee* song, in which all syllables possess a buzzy quality and the last is higher pitched. The other song was a variation of this, in which the last phrase broke into a rapid, stuttered series of 3–4 emphatic *chit-chit-chit* notes, which were neither buzzy nor higher pitched. The classic song appeared to be prevalent, although the variant was quite frequently uttered and did not seem to be in response to any particular stimulus.

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pulcherrima, M
cyanea, Capped
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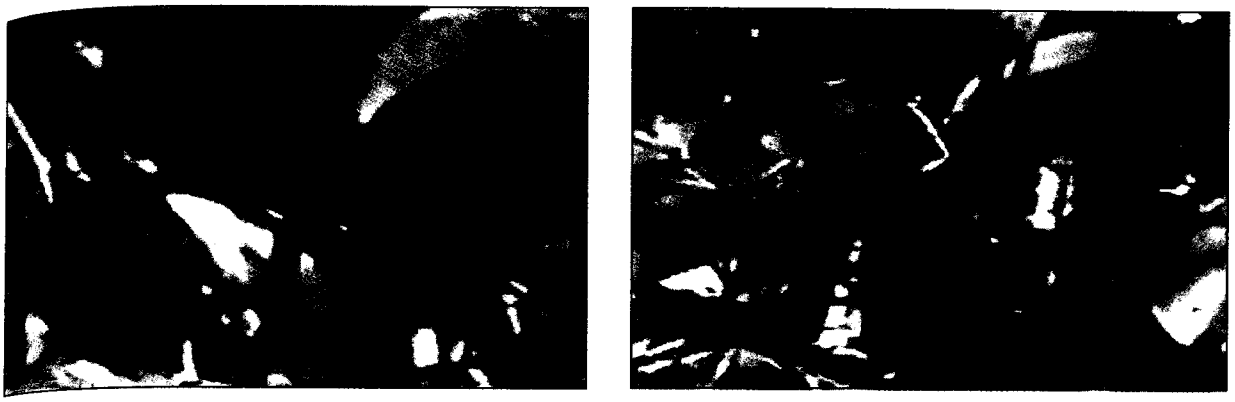

Figure 1. Video-grabs of an after-second-year male Black-throated Blue Warbler *Dendroica caerulescens*, at 2,100 m, near Cosanga, Napo province, Ecuador, 14 February 2002 (Paul R. Martin).

Social behaviour

We always observed the *D. caerulescens* within or near a mixed-species flock consisting of Crimson-mantled Woodpecker *Piculus rivolii*, Yellow-vented Woodpecker *Veniliornis dignus*, Montane Woodcreeper *Lepidocolaptes lacrymiger*, Pearled Treerunner *Margarornis squamiger*, Streaked Tuftedcheek *Pseudocolaptes boissonneautii*, White-tailed Tyrannulet *Mecocerculus poecilocercus*, Streak-necked Flycatcher *Mionectes striaticollis*, Cinnamon Flycatcher *Pyrrhomyias cinnamomea*, Pale-edged Flycatcher *Myiarchus cephalotes*, Brown-capped Vireo *Vireo leucophrys*, Mountain Wren *Troglodytes solstitialis*, Blackburnian Warbler *Dendroica fusca*, Canada Warbler *Wilsonia canadensis*, Slate-throated Whitestart *Myioborus miniatus*, Spectacled Whitestart *M. melanocephalus*, Golden-collared Honeycreeper *Iridophanes pulcherrima*, Masked Flowerpiercer *Diglossopis cyanea*, Capped Conebill *Conirostrum albifrons*, Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia *Chlorophonia pyrrhophrys*, Orange-bellied Euphonia *Euphonia xanthogaster*, Saffron-crowned Tanager *Tangara xanthocephala*, Flame-faced Tanager *T. parzudakii*, Beryl-spangled Tanager *T. nigroviridis*, Black-capped Tanager *T. heinei* and Blue-winged Mountain-tanager *Anisognathus somptuosus*.

Several interspecific interactions between the *D. caerulescens* and resident species were observed. On 14 February, it investigated a *Mecocerculus poecilocercus* scolding an Emerald Toucanet *Aulacorhynchus prasinus*. The warbler appeared agitated (irregular wing-flicking and shifting sideways) as it approached to within 1 m of the toucanet, but did not vocalise or show any other signs of scolding. We also observed it foraging within 1 m of *Diglossopis cyanea* and *Tangara heinei* without hostility. On 23 March, however, the *D. caerulescens* was involved in an agonistic interaction with *Myioborus melanocephalus* as both foraged 18–22 m up in a *Cecropia*. One displaced and chased the other, although we were unable to determine which was the aggressor.

Foraging behaviour

The warbler foraged 3–25 m above ground in secondary forest and its borders, primarily for insects, which it took from live foliage of trees (68%) and epiphytes (11%), live leaf petioles (13%) and in the air (8%) (N=38). It took prey primarily by gleaning from a perched position (71%), but also employed the aerial sally-strike (10.5%), sally-glide (10.5%) and flutter-chase (8%) (N=38)[11]. Thus, its foraging behaviour was similar to that of the species in its normal non-breeding range (e.g. Jamaica)[6,8]. We also observed it probing an *Erythrina* (Leguminaciae) flower, drinking a clear liquid that may have been nectar and/or water, and taking unidentified food, presumably fruit, as it perched for an extended period at the base of a *Cecropia* cone.

Discussion

This report of *D. caerulescens* represents a significant southern extension of the species' known occurrence, with all previous South American records being within 200 km of the Caribbean coast, in northern Colombia[5] and Venezuela[9]. Its presence in Ecuador in June is also significant in that late-spring dates from Caribbean non-breeding grounds are 11 to 14 May[1,4], with most departing in April[6]. The species has not been reported outside of September–March in Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia or Venezuela[5,9,12,13,15]. Although published records of *D. caerulescens* in Costa Rica and Colombia are from below 1,500 m[5,15], the Ecuadorian bird's occurrence in cloud forest at 2,170 m was similar to at least one Venezuelan record, from cloud forest at 1,950 m[9].

Foraging behaviour of the male *D. caerulescens* in Ecuador was similar to that of the species on its Caribbean non-breeding grounds. Its participation in a mixed-species flock, however, differed from the species' typical wintering social behaviour. *D.*

caerulescens is normally strongly territorial on its wintering grounds and generally does not join mixed-species foraging flocks[6]. Flock participation has been noted in wintering populations in Cuba[3], in vagrant *D. caerulescens* in Costa Rica[15] and Panama[12], and is common on migration[6].

Acknowledgements

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