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

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Cotinga 21 (2004): 60-62

We report 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. It is uncommon to rare in the Lesser Antilles and coastal northern Central America, and rare to casual in Costa Rica and Panama. D. caerulescens is a rare non-breeding visitor to extreme northern South America, with records in December—March. In Venezuela, Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps reported records from Ocumare de la Costa (pto. Aragua) and Cerro Platillón (pto. Guárico), the latter representing the southernmost published record, at 09°54'N 76°31'W, c.200 km south of the Caribbean coast. Hilty & Brown mentioned four records for Colombia, one from the Santa Marta Mountains (pto. Magdalena) and three south-east of Titujura (pto. Guajira).

We report the first record of D. caerulescens for Ecuador by c.1,200 km. This also represents the only record of D. caerulescens in April, May or June in South America, 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. caeruleus 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 chirped 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 either buzzy or 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.

Social behaviour

We always observed the bird near a mixed-species flock. Woodpecker Woodcreeper Troglydytes sol Dendroica fus. canadensis, Slaty-capped Flycatcher Pyrrhophyrtis, Or xanthogaster, Pt. xanthocerca, F. Beryl-spangled 3-capped Tanager Mountain-tanager

Several inters Dendroica caerulescens and 14 February, it poecilocerus s. Aulacorhynchus agitated (irregu sideways) as it a toucanet, but did r of scolding. We ak o Diglossopsis cyc hostility. On 23 M was involved in Myioborus melan in Cecropi.
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 Treecreeper Maccormickia squamiger, Streaked Tuftedcheek Pseudocolaptes boissonneautii, White-tailed Tyrannulet Mecocerculus poecilocercus, Streak-necked Flycatcher Mioeetes striaticollis, Cinnamom Flycatcher Pyrrhomyias cinnamomea, Pale-edged Flycatcher Myiarchus subulatus, Brown-capped Vireo Vireo leucophrys, Mountain Wren Troglodytes solitarius, Blackburnian Warbler Dendroica fusca, Canada Warbler Wilsonia canadensis, Slate-throated Whitestart Myioborus minimus, Spectacled Whitestart M. melanocephalus, Golden-collared Honeycreeper Iridophanes pulcherrima, Masked Flowerpiercer Diglossopis cyanea, Capped Conebill Conirostrum albifrons, Chestnut-breasted Chloropura Chloropura pyrrhophrax, 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 Aulacocynus prasinus. The warbler appeared agitated (irregular wing-flicking and shifting sideways) as it approached within 1 m of the toucanet, but did not vocalize 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 (62%) 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). Thus, its foraging behaviour was similar to that of the species in its normal non-breeding range (e.g. Jamaica) and we also observed it probing an Erythrina (Leguminaceae) 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 and Venezuela. Its presence in Ecuador in June is also significant in that late-spring dates from Caribbean non-breeding grounds are 11 to 14 May, with most departing in April. The species has not been reported outside of September–March in Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia or Venezuela. Although published records of D. caerulescens in Costa Rica and Colombia are from below 1,500 m, the Ecuadorian bird's occurrence in cloud forest at 2,170 m was similar to at least one Venezuelan record, from cloud forest at 1,960 m.

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.
Cotinga 21

First record of Black-throated Blue Warbler for Ecuador

caurulescens is normally strongly territorial on its wintering grounds and generally does not join mixed-species foraging flocks. Flock participation has been noted in wintering populations in Cuba, in vagrant D. caurulescens in Costa Rica and Panama, and is common on migration.

Acknowledgements
PRM, RCD and HFG are grateful to Cabañas San Isidro and the Bustamante family for permitting us to work on their property and, in particular, Carmen Bustamante and Mitch Lysinger for supporting our work. They also thank Gail Adams, Bruce Di Labio, Chris Funk and Janet Martin for their help, and Paul Conover for creating still images from the video footage. MD and HC thank Robert S. Ridgely for correspondence concerning their sighting, and Tony Nunnery for his field leadership.

References

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Cotinga 21
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