

FIRST DESCRIPTION OF THE NEST, NEST SITE, EGGS AND NESTLINGS OF NARIÑO TAPACULO (*SCYTALOPUS VICINIOR*)

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Primera descripción del nido, sitio de anidación, huevos, y pichones del Churrín Nariño (*Scytalopus vicinior*).

Key words: Nariño Tapaculo, *Scytalopus vicinior*, nest description, eggs, nestlings, Ecuador.

The genus *Scytalopus* is the largest of the endemic Neotropical family Rhinocryptidae. While *Scytalopus* is widespread through most of South America's mountainous regions (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001, Hilty 2003, Hennessey *et al.* 2003) as well as southern Central America (Stiles & Skutch 1986), the members of this genus are rarely seen due to their secretive habits, being more commonly noticed because of their conspicuous songs or calls. Until recently, the genus *Scytalopus* was taxonomically poorly understood (Krabbe & Shulenberg 1997, Coopmans *et al.* 2001), and there is still little published information on the natural history of its members (Krabbe 2003). Although recent publications (Young & Zuchowski 2003, Greeney & Rombough 2005, Greeney & Gelis 2005) have contributed to our understanding of their breeding biology, only about a third of *Scytalopus* species had their nest described (Krabbe 2003). Nariño Tapaculo (*Scytalopus vicinior*) is endemic to the mountains of the Chocó bioregion (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001), occurring in subtropical forest on the Pacific

Andean slope from SW Colombia to NW Ecuador.

As is typical of the genus, Nariño Tapaculo inhabits dense understory thickets, closely associated with ravines and riparian vegetation as well as pronounced hillsides. Here we provide the first description of the nest, nest site, eggs and nestlings for the Nariño Tapaculo.

On 29 July 2006, we walked a recently made trail in the private Inti Llacta Reserve (00°03'N, 78°42'W). While passing a steep bank, we flushed a small blackish bird and found a nest containing two all-white, unmarked eggs. The nest was about 80 cm from the main trail and close to 1 m above it on the bank. Three days later, we returned to re-examine the site and confirmed that the nest was that of the Nariño Tapaculo, the most common rhinocryptid in the Inti Llacta Reserve (Arcos & Solano unpubl.). We confirmed identification through visual and vocal cues. At the time of our return, the nest contained a recently hatched, but dead, nestling, and an undeveloped egg (32.0 x 19.0



FIG. 1. Entrance tunnel made of rootlets and aroids leading to the nest of Nariño Tapaculo (*Scytalopus nini*), in subtropical cloud forest, Inti Llacta Reserve, Pichincha, Ecuador, 2006. Photograph by A. Solano-Ugalde.

mm). The dead chick had fine, dark gray down, pinkish-yellow skin, closed eyes and a pale yellow gape. It was fairly thin and starting to decompose.

On our next visit (15 September), the nest was empty, and we collected data on the nest site and structure. The nest was adjacent to riparian forest, the most common plant fami-



FIG. 2. Hooded entrance of excavated Nariño Tapaculo (*Scytalopus vicini*) nest, Inti Lacta Reserve, Pichincha, Ecuador, 2006. Photograph by A. Solano-Ugalde.

lies in the immediate area being Arecaceae, Cyclanthaceae, Gesneriaceae, two species of pteridophytes and many species of bryophytes. The dominant vegetation in the understory and middle strata was *Heliconia* sp., Melastomataceae, Rubiaceae, Arecaceae, Clusiaceae, and tree ferns. The canopy height was c. 20 m, dominated by *Cinchona* sp., *Ceroxylum* sp., *Saurauia* sp., *Inga* sp., *Ocotea* sp. and *Cedrela* sp.

The entrance to the nest was naturally formed by various types of living rootlets. These, together with the fleshy root of an Araceae, gave shape to an external pathway (150 mm long) which led to the true nest (Fig 1.). The nest, at the far end of the natural tunnel, was a globular structure similar to those previously described for other *Scytalopus* (Skutch 1972, Stiles 1979, Krabbe & Schulen-

berg 1997, Young & Zuchowski 2003, Greeney & Rombough 2005, Greeney & Gelis 2005). The true entrance was ovoid in shape (87.4 mm wide x 56.7 mm high), and slightly hooded, with the roof protruding 33 mm beyond the floor (Fig 2.). Both the floor and roof were of similar thickness (24.4 mm). This roof extension, creating a hooded entrance, was a structural feature previously unknown in *Scytalopus* nests (Krabbe 2003, Greeney & Rombough 2005, Greeney & Gelis 2005). Inside, below the entrance of the nest, a boulder protruded 32 mm above the nest floor forming a step which descended to a depression where the egg and dead chick were found. The internal measurements of the nest chamber were 85–95 mm deep (front to back) and wide by 80–90 mm high (floor to ceiling). The natural tunnel leading to the nest

entrance was formed by rootlets and other forbs (Fig 1.). The nest was predominantly constructed of at least three species of bryophytes, little pieces of dead leaves, a few sticks and different kinds of rootlets. When the nest was excavated, we noted that approximately 55% was underground, while the remaining 45% was buried only under leaf litter, contrary to the entirely enclosed nests previously described for the genus (Skutch 1972, Stiles 1979, Krabbe & Schulenberg 1997, Young & Zuchowski 2003, Greeney & Rombough 2005, Greeney & Gelis 2005). While this nest may have failed due to the construction of the new trail, we also noted a large infestation of mites in the nest. According to Young & Zuchowski (2003), the nest of Silvery-fronted Tapaculo (*S. argentifrons*) showed differences in thickness between the roof and floor. While we did not observe such differences, other aspects of nest construction appear similar to other *Scytalopus* (see references above). It remains to be seen if Nariño Tapaculo breeds only in the non-rainy season (from which our observations derive) or if year round breeding occurs, as suggested for the Chusquea Tapaculo (*S. parkeri*; Krabbe 2003). Nariño Tapaculo is restricted to the Chocó bioregion and is common through its limited range (Hilty & Brown 1986, Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). However, our observations constitute the first breeding data for this poorly known species. We hope that the information provided will stimulate the publication of further detailed breeding information for this poorly known tapaculo.

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