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REDISCOVERY OF THE RECURVE-BILLED BUSHBIRD FOR THE CORDILLERA CENTRAL OF COLOMBIA

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Redescubrimiento del Hormiguero Pico de Hacha para la Cordillera Central de Colombia.

Key words: Recurve-Billed Bushbird, *Clytoctantes alixii*, Cordillera Central, Colombian Andes, Antioquia, Pescadero-Ituango.

INTRODUCTION

The Recurve-billed Bushbird (*Clytoctantes alixii*) is a restricted-range species known from few locations in northwestern Venezuela in the Sierra de Perija and northern Colombia at the foothills of the Magdalena Valley in Santander and Cesar, Serranía de San Lucas in Bolivar, and only some foothill sites north of the Andes in Antioquia, Cordoba, and Caldas (Tobias *et al.* 2006, Zimmer & Isler 2003). It has been nationally and internationally categorized as endangered (Renjifo *et al.* 2002, Birdlife International 2007).

The bushbird was originally described at the end of the 19th century, and was not recorded until 1914 in the Cordillera Central of the Colombian Andes in the northern region of Antioquia province, when several individuals were collected in Puerto Valdivia(Chapman 1917, Collar *et al.* 1992). Other than this, only one additional record exists for the Cordillera Central in Antioquia in Hacienda Belen, dated from April 1948 (Collar *et al.* 1992). The last official record for the Central Colombian Andes was made in May 1951 in La Sofía, Caldas province (Collar *et al.* 1992).

There were no records of the species in any location within its range since 1965 (Willis 1988), until it was found in April 2004 in the Sierra de Perija, Venezuela (C. Sharpe pers. com.). Shortly afterwards, it was rediscovery for Colombia in 2005 at Ocaña, Norte de Santander province, in mature secondary growth with a strong bamboo component (Laverde & Stiles 2007).

Here I present the rediscovery of the Recurve-billed Bushbird for the Cordillera Central foothills of the Colombian Andes, in a new locality, 56 years after the last sighting of the species in this cordillera, and in a habitat different from the other locations. Additionally, I present some general notes on its ecology and the description of its typical vocalization.

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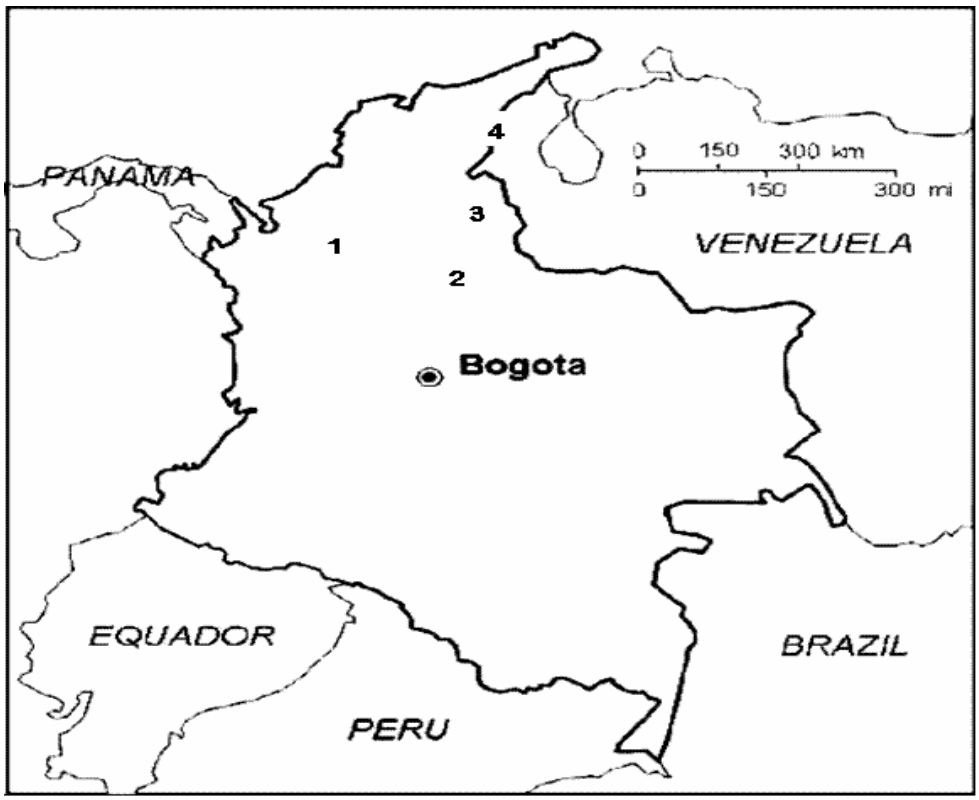

FIG. 1. Location of the new population of Recurve-billed Bushbird in the Cordillera Central of Colombia (1). Other locations where recently found (2) San Vicente de Chucurí, (3) Ocaña, and (4) Serranía de Perijá, Venezuela.

METHODS

I made the observation while conducting surveys of the avifauna in the foothills of the western slope of the Central Cordillera in northern Antioquia, Alto Chirri Hamlet, Briceño Municipality (Fig. 1). The survey site was about 38 km southwest of Puerto Valdivia where the bushbird was collected in 1914.

The vegetation consisted of second growth dry forests with dense undergrowth, mainly concentrated along streams, and regenerating fields and pastures facing the Cauca river. Elevation ranged from 300 to 800 m a.s.l. The forests in the area are in better condition close to the river, mainly due to the steep slopes that limit wood extraction.

Two 3-day visits were conducted to the area in April and August 2007. Birds were recorded using walking surveys along a 1.2-km pathway that follows the Chirri stream which flows into the Cauca river. All birds heard or seen were recorded, without estimating observational distances. The survey routes were covered about twice a day.

RESULTS

The Recurve-billed Bushbird was first

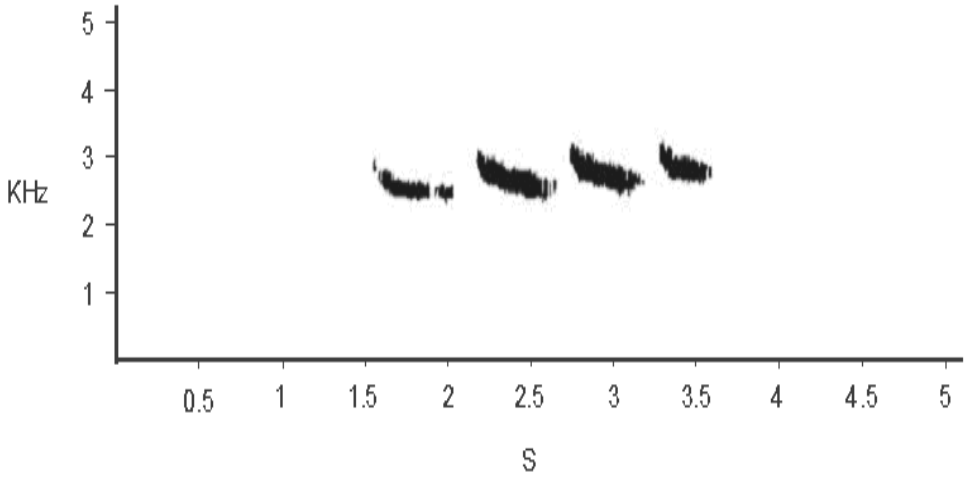

FIG. 2. Sonogram of vocalisations of the Recurve-billed Bushbird observed in this study.

observed at 09:00 h on 24 April 24 2007 (07°04'53"N, 75°40'34"W; 745 m a.s.l.). A female was sighted pecking a dead stem of a fallen tree locally called taquís (*Centrolobium paraense*), in a dense young second growth forest near a pathway, approximately 80 cm above the ground. I observed the bird for about 30 s, after which it quickly disappeared, flying low through the understory. No additional sightings were achieved, and further records were obtained by hearing.

I recorded the song of this species with a digital voice recorder VN-240PC. The song consisted of four, half second-long, loud whistles, at 3 KHz, sometimes presenting a variation in length on the fourth note. The song was occasionally finished with one or two softer notes. The vocalization has a narrow frequency range which varied around 730 Hz, with slightly descending notes. The entire song length was close to 2.2 s (Fig. 2). This loud territorial song was typically heard during the first 3 h after dawn. The bird showed little response to playback.

The species appears to be detected less commonly than other antbirds that are typical for the area, although it was recorded with a frequency of about 3 pairs vocalizing along the 1.2-km pathway (n = 6).

DISCUSSION

The habitat in the foothills of the western slope of the Cordillera Central of Colombia where this new population was discovered is quite different from the other places where the bushbird has recently been found farther east. In most of those locations, the bird has been associated to Neotropical bamboos, but this particular habitat is very rare in this dry region. The observation of the bird feeding on dead stems and branches of a fallen tree in this area of the Cauca interandean valley shows that the bushbird might not be strongly dependant on bamboos and can use secondary habitats such as vine tangles and tickets, and possibly a variety of different plants.

The general pattern of the loud song described by Laverde & Stiles (2007) for the bushbird in the Colombian eastern Andes resembles that of the bird recorded in this study, particularly in duration and frequency

of the three initial notes. Nevertheless, duration of the fourth note seems to vary significantly, both local and regionally, and this could reflect an interesting vocal geographic variation which deserves further analysis.

A particular characteristic observed for the Recurve-billed Bushbird was its patchy distribution throughout the survey area. This might indicate particular habitat requirements (e.g., diet and behavior), which should be studied.

The fact that this is the only population known for the Cordillera Central in the westernmost portion of its range, around 300 km away from the other recently discovered populations on the eastern Andes of Colombia and the Sierra de Perijá in Venezuela, makes this area extremely important for the conservation and research of this species.

The region has an extensive history of deforestation for cattle-ranching and illicit crops, mainly coca fields. Paradoxically, the deforestation intensity decreased over the last few decades due the intense political disorder in the area. At present, as the area has become politically more stable, people have returned to their lands, thus possibly increasing the pressure on the forest in recent years.

Nevertheless, the major short-term conservation threat is the construction of the Pescadero-Ituango hydroelectric dam on the Cauca river. With the approval of this project, the dam will be constructed in the next few years, and the area will be flooded destroying most of the habitat of this species, as well as the habitat for many other bird species of conservation concern recorded in the area, such as Blue-knobbed Curassow (*Crax alberti*), Military Macaw (*Ara militaris*), Sooty-Ant Tanager (*Habia gutturalis*), and Wattled Guan (*Aburria aburri*), among others, as well as several endemics (Colorado in prep.). Due to this, and the fact that the region represents one of the last remnants of dry forest for the northern Colombian Andes (one of the most threatened habitats in the world), there is urgent need for protection of the area.

Future surveys in the area must include an intensive search in dry forests remnants along the Interandean valley of the Cauca river on both slopes (Cordillera Central and Occidental), particularly further north toward the Municipality of Puerto Valdivia, where other good patches of natural dry forest remain. This will increase our understanding of the range of the species throughout the area.

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