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THE DISCOVERY OF THE HABITAT OF GOULD'S HUMMINGBIRD, *HYLONYMPHA MACROCERCA*

BY WILLIAM H. PHELPS AND WILLIAM H. PHELPS, JR.

THIS species and monotypic genus were described by Gould (1873: 429) from a trade-skin obtained on the London docks from a lot containing others of the species. Later in the same year a large lot of skins of the same species was received in London, but since then no known records have come to light and the habitat of this large, striking, long-forked-tailed hummingbird has always been an enigma. Elliot (1878: 97) gives the habitat as "Northern Brazil." Salvin (1892: 326) says, regarding the range: "Uncertain; said to be the Amazon Valley near the middle."

Boucard (1893–1895: 284) describes the finding of the type specimen as follows: "A good number of specimens of this remarkable species were offered for sale in 1873 at the London docks. Another lot came shortly after. No more has come since. The typical specimen was a poor skin. It was secured by Mr. H. Whitely and sold by him to John Gould. I remember as if it were yesterday, and the excitement it caused to him. At that time I was living at Great Russell Street. He brought it to me at once, and I could scarcely believe that it was a real species. We thought at first that it was a tail of something else stuck into the body of a *Chalybura*, but after a careful examination we agreed that it was a new and remarkable genus. I have never been

able to know, with certainty, where it came from, but it is probable that the locality for this curious bird is north Brazil or Trinidad."

Hartert (1900: 124) says that the habitat is not known exactly, but is probably in the interior of northern or central Brazil. Brabourne and Chubb (1912: 128) designate "Venezuela" as type locality and give the range as "Interior of Venezuela."

Simon (1921: 352) says, regarding this species, that a definite locality had been given to Gould by Whitely—"Matura district, Manawas, on the Bia River, north Brazil"—but that he did not know that place and that he believed it to be rather fantastic. He says that, to his knowledge, the species had been sent to Europe only in two lots, the second one consisting of 60 males and two females according to Whitely. He calls attention to the fact that all the specimens were prepared in the manner of the old hunters of Trinidad who were accustomed to go on expeditions to the coasts of Venezuela, the Guianas and northern Brazil.

Peters (1945: 91) gives the range as "unknown" and in a footnote comments: "Simon believes that as all the known specimens of this bird are in the old Trinidad make, that they were collected by Trinidad hunters somewhere on the opposite mainland of South America between the mouth of the Orinoco and that of the Amazon. My own guess is that since *Hylonympha* is closely allied to *Heliodoxa*, a genus all of whose members are confined to the subtropical zone, the home of *Hylonympha* will be found somewhere in the mountains of Venezuela."

Jouanin (1946: 105), commenting on Trinidad trade-skins, says it was not probable that the Trinidad commercial collectors frequented the high mountainous regions of the Andes of Cumaná, of difficult access, because that beautiful hummingbird, *Aglaiocercus kingi berlepschi*, had never been found among the Trinidad skins. He concludes that some of the skins were collected in Trinidad, itself, and the rest on the adjoining coast of Venezuela, especially on the Paria Peninsula, and that it was improbable that the native hunters would frequent the unhealthy region of the Orinoco delta.

Regarding *H. macrocerca*, Jouanin (p. 110) says that its habitat remains a complete mystery, that Simon was right in considering Whitely's "Marrawas" locality fantastic, and that the only thing certain is that the specimens are Trinidad trade-skins, from their make. He calls attention to a paper entitled 'Note sur *l'Hylonympha macrocerca*' by E. Deyrolle (Revue et Magasin de Zoologie, [ser 3] 7: 63, pl. 2, 1879), in which that author, a well known Parisian naturalist, says he received from Rio de Janeiro a number of skins of this mysterious bird. He believes however, that the Rio region was not the

habitat of the species but only a secondary source of supply, the skins having been shipped to Rio which at that time was a center for shipment to Europe not only of hummingbirds of all origins but also of butterflies.

De Schauensee (1947: 113) says: "Because *Neolesbia* is so rare in collections does not necessarily mean that it is rare in nature or that it is a hybrid. All one need do is to point to the case of *Hylonympha macrocerca*, one of the biggest (no less than 8.5 inches in total length), most distinct and brilliant of humming birds, which was described from trade skins as far back as 1873 and whose country of origin still remains a mystery."

Peters's guess was right. Ramón Urbano, collector for the Phelps Collection, obtained five males and nine females between September 13 and 23, 1947, on the summit of Cerro Azul, at the altitude of 920 meters (3036 feet). This mountain lies immediately back of Cristóbal Colón (Macuro) at the tip of the Paria Peninsula and only about 25 miles distant from the main island of Trinidad and 30 from Port of Spain.

Urbano says the mountain is called "Azul" (blue) because it is usually enveloped in dense mist. He describes the summit as very damp with abundant mosses and high corpulent trees. A partial identification of the avifauna of the summit shows that it supports a number of subtropical species. Chapman (1925: 3) calls attention to the fact that subtropical species descend to much lower levels in northeastern Venezuela than in Colombia; he says: ". . . others, which in the Colombian Andes we are not accustomed to find below four or five thousand feet occur as low as two thousand four hundred feet in northeastern Venezuela."

The inhabitants of Cristóbal Colón tried to dissuade Urbano from collecting the upper slopes of the mountain by telling him of the great danger from the deadly bushmaster snake (*Lachesis muta*, "coaima") which they claimed was very abundant. On that account he had much difficulty in obtaining the necessary guides. He did not encounter the snake. He camped in a vacant hut at 500 meters altitude on the trail from Cristóbal Colón to the Caribbean coast which crosses the flank of the mountain at 800 meters elevation. From there he collected on the summit every day by cutting trails.

There have been four other collections made on the Paria Peninsula. It must have been that those expeditions confined their collecting to the Tropical Zone without ascending the mountains into the Subtropical Zone or they, most assuredly, would have found *Hylonympha;* it is a common bird as shown by the number which arrived in London

in 1873 and by our series collected now on Cerro Azul. These previous collections (Phelps 1944: 325–444) were: 1895—Compte de Dalmas, Yacht Chazalie, who collected at Güiria and Yacua; 1913—Leo E. Miller (American Museum of Natural History) who collected at Cristóbal Colón, May 4–June 29, 595 specimens; 1911—Francis E. Bond (Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia), who collected 71 species at Cariaquito during July and March; 1937—Gladys Gordon Fry (Weber Venezuelan Expedition), who collected 178 specimens at Yacua, Pargo, San Francisco and Güiria in February and March.

We know that Miller collected on Cerro Azul at an elevation of 500 meters, as his types of *Columba subvinacea peninsularis* Chapman, and *Oreopeleia linearis pariae* (Chapman) were collected at that altitude on the "mountains above Cristóbal Colón."

Probably *H. macrocerca* will be found in the Subtropical Zone of the entire Paria Peninsula mountain chain as it is continuous. The reason why it has not been found in the Mt. Turumiquire region, farther to the west, is probably because there is a tropical break in the Cordillera south of Carúpano in the region of El Pilar. Urbano collected a number of Subtropical Zone birds on Cerro Azul which are unknown in the Turumiquire region, showing that the Paria Peninsula has an indigenous subtropical avifauna.

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Caracas
Venezuela

ANTING BY FOUR SPECIES OF BIRDS

BY HERVEY BRACKBILL

SINCE anting by birds became a prominent topic several years ago and I first became aware of the act, I have seen fifteen performances by four species of birds in the wild. This experience bears out the suggestion of Mrs. Margaret M. Nice (1945: 302) that anting may be comparatively common and merely overlooked by ornithologists, partly because it is not always done ostentatiously. The performances I saw varied greatly in both manner and duration.

The birds I have seen ant are the Southern Robin (*Turdus migratorius achrusterus*), twice; Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), twice; Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), four times; and Purple Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula stonei*), seven times; the last-named species has not previously been recorded as anting with ants. The dates have ranged from May 15 through all the spring and summer months to August 30, in the years 1943 to 1947, inclusive. Except for one in Prince George's County, Maryland, all of the observations have been made in Baltimore City.

For identification of the ants used, and comment on some maimed specimens, I am greatly obliged to Mr. M. R. Smith, Associate Entomologist, Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, U. S. Department of Agriculture. I am also indebted to Mrs. Nice and Mr. H. R. Ivor for criticism of the present paper, and to Mrs. Nice for the loan of A. H. Chisholm's *Ibis* paper of 1944.

My observations are as follows.

STARLING

August 30, 1943. Time: 5:15 p. m., Eastern Standard. Place: lawn in Walbrook section of Baltimore. Ant: *Lasius niger* var. *neoniger*. Observation: from third-floor balcony 50 yards away; 8 × binocular.