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The Taxonomic Status of *Myrmeciza stictothorax* (Todd)

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Despite the large increase in recent years in our knowledge of the distributions of South American birds, there remain an intriguing few species still known only from the holotype or the type series. Among the large family Formicariidae (*sensu* AOU 1983), there are several such species, including *Thamnophilus praecox*, *Pithys castanea*, *Phlegopsis barringeri* (all known only from the holotype), and *Myrmeciza stictothorax*. It has been suggested that *Phlegopsis barringeri* is based on an interspecific hybrid (Willis 1979), and we suspect that *Thamnophilus praecox* and *Pithys castanea* may have a similar basis. We now propose that the fourth taxon, *Myrmeciza stictothorax*, is neither a valid biological species nor an interspecific hybrid, but is a name based on a plumage abnormality of a male of the widespread species *Myrmeciza atrothorax*. We suggest it is possible, however, that *stictothorax* may be a valid subspecies of *atrothorax*.

Todd (1927) described a new genus, *Myrmophylax*, in which he placed what was then known as *Myrmoderus atrothorax*, and also a species described in the same publication, *stictothorax*. Peters (1951) retained the genus *Myrmophylax*, but Zimmer (1932) and Meyer de Schauensee (1966) placed both *atrothorax* and *stictothorax* in *Myrmeciza*. We follow the latter treatment, but do so more because it is a familiar format than because we are convinced that it is correct. As Zimmer (1932) noted, the genus *Myrmeciza* is very

heterogeneous, and we suspect that it is not monophyletic; the relationships of the species assigned to *Myrmeciza* are outside the scope of this paper.

Todd (1927) described *stictothorax* on the basis of a male and a female from the same locality, Apacy, on the west bank of the lower Rio Tapajós, Brazil. *Stictothorax* does not differ appreciably in size from *atrothorax* (Table 1), and Todd recognized the similarity of the two specimens of *stictothorax* to the respective sexes of *atrothorax*. The male of *stictothorax* differs from the male of *atrothorax* solely by the pattern of the breast, where approximately 20 of the black breast feathers contain white central regions. These white chest spots are variable in size, but all are small. The spots vary from 1.4 × 0.5 mm to 2.8 × 1.5 mm, approximately.

In examining the series of *Myrmeciza atrothorax* at several institutions (Carnegie Museum of Natural History [CM], American Museum of Natural History [AMNH], Field Museum of Natural History, and Museu de Zoologia, Universidade de São Paulo), we have seen 126 specimens of adult male *atrothorax*. Among these, we found two specimens, both of the nominate subspecies, that have white markings on the breast feathers (Fig. 1). Specimen CM 56178, from French Guiana, has several feathers on the breast that have extensive pale (white or pale gray) subterminal patches. Such markings are not comparable to the pattern of the markings on the chest of the holotype of *stictothorax*. Two or three feathers, however, in the center of the breast of this specimen have white shafts and are similar to the white-marked breast feathers of *stictothorax*. AMNH 309869, from northern Brazil (Ma-

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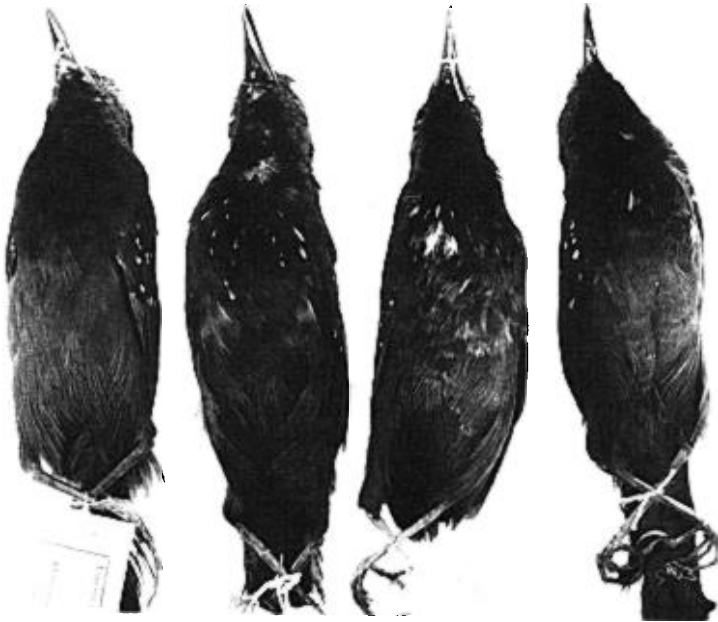


Fig. 1. Males of *Myrmeciza atrothorax* and *M. stictothorax*. From left to right: *atrothorax* (AMNH 286612, Igarapé Bravo); *stictothorax* (CM 77834 [holotype], Apacy); *atrothorax* (AMNH 309869, Manaus); and *atrothorax* (CM 56178, French Guiana). Note the close similarity of all specimens, the variability in the size of the white breast spots of the holotype of *stictothorax*, and the similarity to the markings of *stictothorax* of some of the white markings on the two right-hand specimens of *atrothorax*.

naus), has several feathers on the upper breast with white shaft streaks or small central spots (very similar to those of *stictothorax*), and other streaks that are quite broad, covering nearly the entire exposed area of the feather.

Neither of these two specimens is identical to the type of *stictothorax*. They indicate to us, however, that there is a rare tendency in *atrothorax* for males to have white breast markings, some of which are very similar to those of the type of *stictothorax*. We believe that the type of *stictothorax* represents merely a male *atro-*

thorax with a particularly well-defined pattern such as that described above.

Zimmer (1932) reported a male specimen of *atrothorax* from Igarapé Bravo, on the west bank of the lower Rio Tapajós. We have examined this specimen (AMNH 286612), which is typical of *atrothorax* in every respect. This locality is approximately 100 kilometers from Apacy. The presence of *atrothorax* at a site so close to the type locality of *stictothorax* led Meyer de Schauensee (1966) to regard *stictothorax* as a species. This specimen documents that unequivocal *atrothorax* occurs in this region, and to us is further support of our belief that the male *stictothorax* is merely an aberrant *atrothorax*.

As noted above, the female of *stictothorax* closely resembles the comparable plumage of *atrothorax*. The female of *stictothorax* differs from the female of *atrothorax* solely by its more extensively white underparts, the orange-buff color of the center of the underparts being restricted to a band across the chest. We have seen no female of any population of *atrothorax* that can match the female *stictothorax*. The modest plumage differences between the two taxa hardly seem worthy of recognition at the level of a biological species, especially in light of a general tendency within antbirds for a relatively high degree of intraspecific geographic variation in female plumage (Hellmayr 1929). The differences between the females of the two

TABLE 1. Selected measurements* of *Myrmeciza atrothorax melanura* and *M. stictothorax*.

Measurement	<i>M. atrothorax</i>	<i>M. stictothorax</i>
Males		
Wing chord (10)	57.7 (54.6–61.0)	58.0
Tail (9)	53.4 (47.7–56.8)	56.0
Tarsus (9)	25.3 (24.2–26.1)	23.5
Females		
Wing chord (8)	57.9 (53.0–60.0)	57.0
Tail (8)	52.5 (49.3–54.3)	55.0
Tarsus (8)	25.0 (23.2–25.9)	24.5

* Mean, range (in parentheses), in mm; sample sizes follow the name of the measurement.

taxa do raise the possibility that *stictothorax* may have taxonomic validity as a subspecies of *atrothorax*.

There are seven currently recognized subspecies of *atrothorax*, most of which are localized in western Amazonia. In eastern Amazonia, the nominate subspecies occupies an extensive area on the north bank of the Amazon River. The subspecies *melanura* occurs in southeastern Bolivia (Department of Santa Cruz) and in western Brazil (State of Mato Grosso). Aside from the two specimens of *stictothorax*, the only specimen of *atrothorax* from eastern Amazonian Brazil south of the Amazon River is the male (assigned by Zimmer [1932] to *melanura*) from Igarapé Bravo mentioned above. These localities are 700 km from the other known populations of *melanura* in Amazonia south of the Amazon River. It seems possible that the population of *atrothorax* that occurs along the lower Rio Tapajós, which apparently is isolated from other populations of this species, may be subspecifically distinct from *melanura*, and if so the name *stictothorax* would apply. Both Zimmer (1932) and Pinto (1938) treated *stictothorax* as a subspecies of *atrothorax*, without comment (and while treating the Igarapé Bravo specimen as *melanura*), although Pinto (1978) later regarded *stictothorax* as a species. The question of whether *stictothorax* is recognizable as a subspecies of *atrothorax* cannot be settled without additional material from the area, particularly of female-plumaged birds.

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clusions) and answered our queries. R. S. Ridgely and M. B. Robbins also made helpful comments on the manuscript.

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