

## NESTS AND EGGS OF SOME ECUADORIAN BIRDS

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In 1987 the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology initiated a study of the breeding biology of the birds of Ecuador. We reported earlier on our 1987 findings (Kiff *et al.* 1989). This paper presents further data obtained during June–August 1988 and includes new information on the breeding habits, nests, and eggs of four species. Two major areas were visited during this period: (1) Maquipucuna, near Nanegal, 40 km NW of Quito, Prov. Pichincha from 11 to 29 June 1988 and on 19 July 1988. Most of our work was done at between 1300 to 1500 m in areas covered with lower montane wet secondary forest and shrubby growth. (2) Filo de Monos, Montañas de Chindul, ca. 47 km NW of El Carmen, Prov. Manabi from 7 to 17 July 1988. Most of this time was spent between 400–460 m along a large ridge that contains some of the highest elevations in the Montañas de Chindul. Except for some hill top sites, most of the Chindul area has been largely deforested by the extensive subsistence level of agricultural and cattle ranching activities made possible by the construction of a new road between El Carmen and Pedernales. Nevertheless, on some slopes there are still large patches of mostly secondary forest or thickets.

Species nomenclature follows that of Meyer de Schauensee (1982) and subspecies that of Peters (1951, 1964). Egg shapes are those given by Preston *in* Palmer (1962). Measurements are in mm. Egg mass is given only for fresh or slightly incubated eggs. All specimens reported are housed at the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology (WVZ).

## SPECIES ACCOUNT

**Rose-faced Parrot *Pionopsitta pulchra***

While working in the Montañas de Chindul on 10 July, we discovered a nest of this species at the edge of a remnant forest of about 24 km<sup>2</sup> situated at 460 m elevation at one of the highest points in this mountain chain. We observed one bird of this species clinging quietly to the underside of a branch, close to the trunk, about 12 m from the ground. A second bird, also immobile, was seen higher up in the same tree. The first bird remained still for several minutes, then with a sudden movement it entered a small hole below the base of the branch. The nest tree was located in a clearing between the forest and a dirt road. It was almost branchless except for the uppermost canopy. The site was visited again on the following morning, and an adult bird was again found at the nest hole. The bird (WVZ # 45018) was collected, and it proved to be a female with a fully shelled egg and two other well formed ova in its oviduct, possibly indicating a clutch size of three. The shelled egg (WVZ # 157414) was pure white, subelliptical in shape, and measured 27.40 × 21.32. The presumed entrance to the nest cavity measured about 10 cm in diameter and had apparently been enlarged by the birds. The interior of the tree was completely hollow, forming a large, tube-like cavity. The bottom of the chamber was 12 m below the entrance, reaching the base of the tree. The chamber was about 60 cm in diameter, and it contained a large amount of woodchips with a slight depression on the edge of the chamber. The cavity did

not contain eggs, so the bird had presumably not laid yet. Previously, no information was available on the breeding habits of this species and little is known about its general behavior (Forshaw 1989). During our stay we occasionally observed these rather passive parrots feeding quietly in small groups in the interior of forest patches within middle to upper canopy levels.

**Red-rumped Woodpecker *Veniliornis kirkii cecilia***

During the course of our stay in the Montañas de Chindul on 7 July 1988, we found a nest of this species at 460 m elevation. The cavity was located about 6 m high in a rather slender living tree at the edge of a forest patch bordering a large man-made clearing. The cavity entrance measured 5 × 5 cm and 35 cm deep and the diameter of the interior diameter was about 8 cm. The nest was carefully opened on one side in order to inspect the contents. It contained a recently hatched young, naked and flesh-colored, and an apparently infertile egg. The egg (WFVZ # 157413) measured 22.03 × 15.56. It was white, slightly glossy, and oval in shape. There are no previous descriptions of the eggs of this subspecies, nor any published breeding records for Ecuador. Eggs of the race *V. k. kirkii* have been reported from Trinidad by Belcher & Smooker (1936), Herklots (1961), and French (1973) from Trinidad, where the species is reported to nest in tree-holes, palm trees and stumps, mostly during January–February. French (1973) reported young in mid-April. In Trinidad nesting seems to occur just before the rainy season, while in western Ecuador it appears to occur just after the rainy season.

**Ruddy Foliage-gleaner *Automolus rubiginosus nigricauda***

Even though this species is widely distributed from central Mexico to northwestern Bolivia, little is known about its nesting habits. The only previous account of its nesting was by Rowley (1966). While working in secondary forest in Maquipucuna on 23 June 1988, MM flushed an adult bird from a burrow in an embankment within a dark ravine in secondary forest. Two more visits were made to the burrow later in the day, but the elusive bird flushed and moved

quickly and only brief glimpses of it could be obtained. We returned to the nest at night and captured the incubating bird, a female (WFVZ # 45639), with a butterfly net. The burrow was located about 3 m from the ground in a natural embankment and was 45 cm deep. The inner chamber was oval in shape and measured 15 cm long and 10 cm high. The nest was a well formed platform was about 15 cm in diameter and was made of rootlets and lined with black fungal rhizomorphs. It contained two eggs (WFVZ # 158304), which were dull white in color and measured 33.15 × 21.09 and 29.75 × 20.20. They were long subelliptical and subelliptical in shape, respectively. The nest collected by Rowley in Oaxaca, Mexico and now in the WFVZ collection (WFVZ # 21315) was made of fine rootlets and lined with a thick layer of soft yellowish-brown plant fibers. Rowley (1966) commented on the relatively large size of the eggs, and the ones we collected also seemed large for this species. They weighed 6.87 g (× of 2), or 14.1 % of the female's body mass (48.5 g). Curiously, two Costa Rica nests of the similar *Automolus ochrolaemus* in the WFVZ collection contained no rootlets, but were made completely of leaf stems. As with *Thripadectes* species, the nests of *Automolus* species, seem to be made mainly of rootlets or leaf stems with other fibers occasionally used as lining material.

**Pale-eyed Thrush *Platycichla leucops leucops***

While working along the edge of a riparian forest at Maquipucuna on 25 June 1988, we found a nest of this species at the edge of a pasture. A bird was flushed several times, but its identity could not be confirmed. We eventually placed a mist net in the bird's escape route, and soon a female was secured (WFVZ # 45127). The nest was placed among small plants along a stream embankment about two meters above a trail, and it contained two eggs (WFVZ # 157405). The nest was cup-shaped, built of mosses, and lined with fine rootlets. No mud was found in the base of the nest, as is typical of the nests of *Turdus* and other closely related thrush species. A second nest was found during a second visit to Maquipucuna on 19 July 1988. Like the previous nest it was located about 2 m from the ground in a small cavity in a road embankment at the edge

of secondary forest. The nest was made of mosses, and the interior of the cup was lined with fine brown rootlets. It contained two eggs (WFVZ # 157418). The four eggs averaged 26.38 × 19.50 and were oval or subelliptical in shape. They were pale greenish-blue with spots, blotches, and dots of pale reddish-brown irregularly distributed over the surface, but concentrated on the larger end, forming a well defined cap. Previously, Goodfellow (1901) collected a possible nest of this species in Gualea, Prov. Pichincha, but identification was not certain. He collected two *Platycichla leucops* near the nest and stated "I supposed [the nest] to belong to them." However, since the nest was said to be in a bush, unlike the two we found, it was possibly misidentified. Belcher & Smooker (1937) reported three nests of the congeneric *Platycichla flavipes* from Trinidad, and all were located in ravines and rock faces on banks, as in the case of the Ecuadorian *P. leucops*.

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