

A NEST OF THE CREAM-BELLIED GNATCATCHER, *POLIOPTILA LACTEA*

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The Cream-bellied Gnatcatcher (*Poliioptila lactea*, Polioptilidae), formerly recorded from Paraguay to Argentina and nearby Brazil, from northern Rio Grande do Sul (Belton 1994) to Espírito Santo, is now rare except at the southern and south-western limits of its range, due probably to fragmentation of the interior forests and lack of mixed flocks where it once lived. It is considered "probably endangered" by Collar *et al.* (1992). Iguazú National Park, in Misiones Province of northeastern Argentina, and nearby Iguazú National Park in Paraná State of Brazil, are currently among the best places to encounter the species.

On 13 August 1995, a clear and warm day, Bosso was showing Willis birds along a dirt road just north from the Iguazú airport, and Willis noted that a pair of gnatcatchers in a mixed flock were building the first recorded nest. Both observers watched building, and Bosso returned on 19 August but saw no activity at the now-completed nest. On 9 September, even the nest seemed gone.

The pair had been wandering, with "spie" calls much like several others of the genus, in a bird flock high in somewhat scattered epiphyte-laden treetops, by a marshy swale in the irregular woodland there, 11:20 on. The flock, centering on noisy *Sirystes sibilator*, included such species as *Pachyrhamphus castaneus*, *Philydor lichtensteini*, *Conopias trivirgata* and *Cyclarhis gujanensis*. Earlier, scattered males had given songs like those recorded by Belton & F. Silva (Library of Natural Sounds, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York) as they wandered near

or far from bird flocks in the dryer woods along the road.

Sonographic analyses (Canary 1) of the recordings at Cornell show a 7–8 note song, the former (Belton) in 1.09 s and the latter (Silva) in 1.3 s. Each "swee" or "tee" note is of about 0.1 s, rising from 4–5 kHz to near 6 kHz, with a slight drop at the end; the first four notes of each song are more "peaked," so the song is actually "tee tee tee tee swee swee swee". The last notes are also somewhat bisyllabic in amplitude analysis (Fig. 1).

Belton's recording also has faint "gyp" and "gypsy" notes, the "gyp" descending from 6 to 2 kHz in 0.16 s, followed in one case in 0.2 s by a "psy" or "spie" of 0.25 s, possibly different birds. The sonograms are not clear, but the "spie" seems to rise slightly at the start, then slope downward slightly for most of the note, with the main harmonics peaking at 2.7 and 3.6 kHz (with faint copies at 1.8 and near 4). We cannot confirm that the notes are actually *lactea*, but they sound like one.

Three noisy wing bursts on the Belton recording, probably a gnatcatcher in flight, are of 5 beats in 0.134 s each (or counting 5 notes and 5 intervals, at the rate of some 35 per second), with pauses of 0.28 and 0.36 s between bursts.

At 11:40 both of the pair were carrying lichens to a cup nest saddled in a four-branched crotch some 25 m up in a 30-m tree with bare crown. Their visits were rapid, a second or two sitting in the small nest and then off to get more lichens on limbs up to 30 m off. Mostly, they brought lichens from other limbs of the nest tree. Once the ♀ rose and challenged the ♂ when both returned at the same moment. He flitted off and returned a few seconds later after

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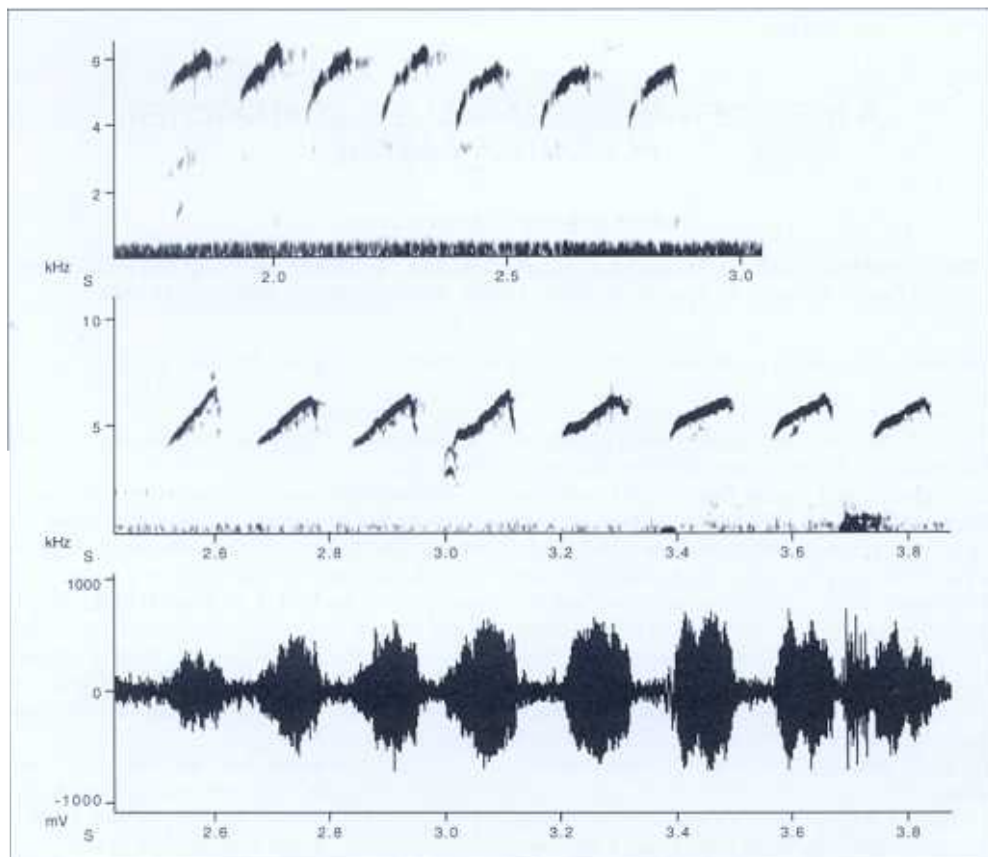


FIG. 1. Songs of *Polioptila lactea*, recorded by W. Belton (above) and F. Silva (center), with amplitude analysis (below) for the recording by Silva (LNS, Cornell).

she had completed her work and left. In general, they were silent, with rarely a “*spie*” note.

On 19 August, there seemed to be green moss or leaves on the sides of the nest, as well as lichens. The nest was rather like that of other species in the genus, except that it was in a more hidden crotch and not out on an open limb.

Winter nesting in open-crowned trees in a similar cup is recorded also for Buff-throated Purpletufts, *Iodopleura pipra* (Willis & Oniki 1988), perhaps because such sites are too hot later in the spring. Belton (1994) recorded a ♂ *P. lactea* with large testes in late September, a ♀ with ovary small in early August, indicating that the species also nests later in the year, perhaps in leafy tree crowns where locating the nest would be difficult.

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