

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

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FIRST NEST RECORD OF THE ASH-THROATED GNATEATER (*CONOPOPHAGA PERUVIANA*)

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Primera descripción del nido de *Conopophaga peruviana*.

Key words: *Conopophaga peruviana*, Ash-throated Gnatcatcher, nesting biology, Peru.

INTRODUCTION

The gnatcatchers (Conopophagidae) form a family of eight poorly known Neotropical understory insectivores. Few studies have been conducted on gnatcatchers, and natural history and nesting biology are largely unknown. The single published report of gnatcatcher nesting biology is from Hilty (1975) who describes the nest and behavior of the Chestnut-crowned Gnatcatcher (*Conopophaga castaneiceps*). Here, we describe the previously unknown nest and egg of the Ash-throated Gnatcatcher (*C. peruviana*) which differs in bulkiness and habitat from that of the Chestnut-crowned Gnatcatcher.

NEST DESCRIPTION

One nest was located in primary undisturbed rain forest at Cocha Cashu Biological Sta-

tion, Manu National Park, Dept. of Madre de Dios, Peru (elevation c. 400 m). The area is described by Gentry (1990). The nest was discovered on the afternoon of 29 November 2000. The female remained on the nest until deliberately flushed, revealing one egg and one nestling. The cup-nest was located 0.7 m above the ground within a whorl of ferns stemming from the trunk of an understory *Rinorea* sp. tree (tree height = 3.5 m, diameter at nest height = 4.4 cm). A second whorl of 12 fern stems was located 1.8 m above the nest. The nest was constructed from thin woody hemi-epiphytic root material. The small cup had an outside and inside diameter of 6.8 cm and 5.8 cm, respectively. Its inside depth was 3.7 cm. Percent canopy cover above the nest was 96%, and horizontal concealment was estimated at 100% (north), 50% (south), 100% (east) and 70% (west). The radial area surrounding the nest site was characterized by an extremely open understory. At a 1 m height, only four woody saplings of < 8 cm were within 1.5 m of the nest tree, and only one other tree (dbh = 15 cm) was within

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FIG 1. Female Ash-throated Gnatcatcher (*Conopophaga peruviana*) on nest.

3 m of the nest tree.

The nest was monitored for six days, from 29 November to 4 December 2000. On the day of discovery (15:30 h), the nestling was completely naked with fused eyes, and appeared to have hatched recently. The female was observed on the nest the next day at 14:45 h, and the following day (1 December) at 08:36 h. On 3 December, the female was flushed at 13:00 h to reveal one nestling. The egg was not in the nest. The nestling had a few pinfeathers which had not broken through the sheaths, and its eyes were still fused closed. Photos were taken of the nest with the adult female, and after she flushed (Figs. 1 & 2). The female was again seen on the nest on 4 December at 07:20 h, and flushed when I was 4 m from the nest. She stayed within a few meters of the nest on the ground, dragging a wing in a “broken-wing” display, which she had not done previ-

ously. At 15:50 h that day, the nest was empty, with no obvious signs of damage.

DISCUSSION

Various aspects of the nest site and nesting behavior described here differ from those previously reported for gnatcatchers. Hilty (1975) describes a nest of the Chestnut-crowned Gnatcatcher as within a “thicket,” and Ridgely & Tudor (1994) state that the main habitat requirement for the Ash-throated Gnatcatcher is “dense, often tangled... regenerating growth at treefalls and viny tangles on ridges.” In contrast to these reports, the nest described here was within a microhabitat characterized by an extremely open understory. The nest itself was small and compact, rather different than Hilty’s (1975) description of the Chestnut-crowned Gnatcatcher’s as “looking much like a pile of debris.” Addi-



FIG 2. Nest of Ash-throated Gnatcatcher (*Conopophaga peruviana*) with 5–6 day old nestling.

tionally, Hilty (1975) states that “distraction behavior at the nest site does not seem to be well developed.” Parents wing-flicked and called when a human approached the nest described in Hilty (1975), but never performed distraction displays like the one described here.

It is interesting that over six days of nest observation we never saw a male on the nest. The female was seen on different days at 07:20, 08:36, 13:00, 14:45, 15:30, and 15:50 h. It is possible that the female performs all incubation, and is only assisted by the male in nestling feeding. Hilty (1975) describes seeing both sexes feeding Chestnut-crowned Gnatcatcher nestlings.

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