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THE BROWN-BACKED MOCKINGBIRD (*MIMUS DORSALIS*) AS A SHINY COWBIRD (*MOLOTHRUS BONARIENSIS*) HOST

Rosendo M. Fraga

Tucumán 335, piso 11 C, (1049) Buenos Aires, Argentina. *E-mail*: chfraga@yahoo.com

La Calandria Castaña (*Mimus dorsalis*) como hospedadora del Tordo Renegrado (*Molothrus bonariensis*).

Key words: Brown-backed Mockingbird, *Mimus dorsalis*, Shiny Cowbird, *Molothrus bonariensis*, brood parasitism, altitudinal ranges, northwestern Argentina.

According to Lowther & Post (1999) the Brown-backed Mockingbird (*Mimus dorsalis*) has not been reported as a Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*) host. This mockingbird is endemic to the highlands of Bolivia and northwestern Argentina (Olrog 1979, Ridgely & Tudor 1989, Fjeldsa & Krabbe 1990). I report here data documenting its status as a Shiny Cowbird host.

The observation site was Angosto del Perchel, Departamento Tilcara, Jujuy province, Argentina (23°30'S/65°22'W, altitude 2550 m). This small settlement is located in the middle section of the Quebrada de Humahuaca, a long (150 km) mountain gorge that descends from the puna highlands (3400 m) south to the city of Jujuy (1250 m). The Angosto has some irrigated field and orchards along the valley bottom, but otherwise the main vegetation is a thorny scrub with columnar cacti.

On 27 January 2005, I detected by voice a fledged Shiny Cowbird associated with a pair of Brown-backed Mockingbirds. The next day I observed and tape recorded the interaction

during 2 h. The cowbird was the only chick attended by the mockingbirds, and was fed eight times with insects and some unidentified berries. Both foster parents scolded vigorously to some approaching village dogs. On a *Prosopis* shrub used as a perch by the host pair, I saw a deserted nest, similar to structures built by other mockingbird species (see Fraga 1985). The nest contained a broken Shiny Cowbird egg (identified by size and coloration).

The Shiny Cowbird breeds in Argentina from sea level to at least 3100 m; at this upper altitude I have seen cowbird fledglings using Rufous-collared Sparrows (*Zonotrichia capensis*) as hosts. Adult Shiny Cowbirds of both sexes were abundant at Angosto del Perchel, singing and performing courtship behavior. The altitudinal range of Brown-backed Mockingbirds is variously given as 2300–3500 m (Ridgely & Tudor 1989), or 1700–4200 m (Fjeldsa & Krabbe 1990), creating a considerable range overlap with Shiny Cowbirds.

The Brown-backed Mockingbird was reported as a Shiny Cowbird host by Dinelli

(1918). Dinelli mentioned several parasitized nest of this mockingbird (found by the collector E. Budin), but without giving details of numbers, dates and localities. These imprecise records are perhaps doubtful. Nevertheless, Dinelli himself (Dinelli 1918) found a Brown-backed Mockingbird nest with one host and two Shiny Cowbird eggs in November, at 2400 m a.s.l. in Jujuy province. Although the precise site and year are not stated, the altitudinal data suggests that it could be Tilcara, a main town in the Quebrada de Humahuaca, just 7 km. south from Angosto del Perchel. Dinelli visited Tilcara in November 1905 (Paynter 1985), and Brown-backed Mockingbirds are common around this town (pers. observ.). My record confirms the status of Brown-backed Mockingbird as a Shiny Cowbird host, and shows that this species can rear parasite chicks.

The data show that all seven South American species of mockingbirds (genus *Mimus*) are Shiny Cowbird hosts (Fraga 1985). Chalk-browed Mockingbirds (*M. saturninus*) have evolved some antiparasitic defenses against cowbird parasitism (Fraga 1985), and further studies may show that similar

defenses occur in other members of the genus.

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