

1994

## **New and interesting records of birds from a dry forest reserve in south-west Ecuador**

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### **Recommended Citation**

Berg, Karl S. "New and interesting records of birds from a dry forest reserve in south-west Ecuador." *Cotinga* 2 (1994): 14-19.

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## New and interesting records of birds from a dry forest reserve in south-west Ecuador

Karl S. Berg

### Resumen

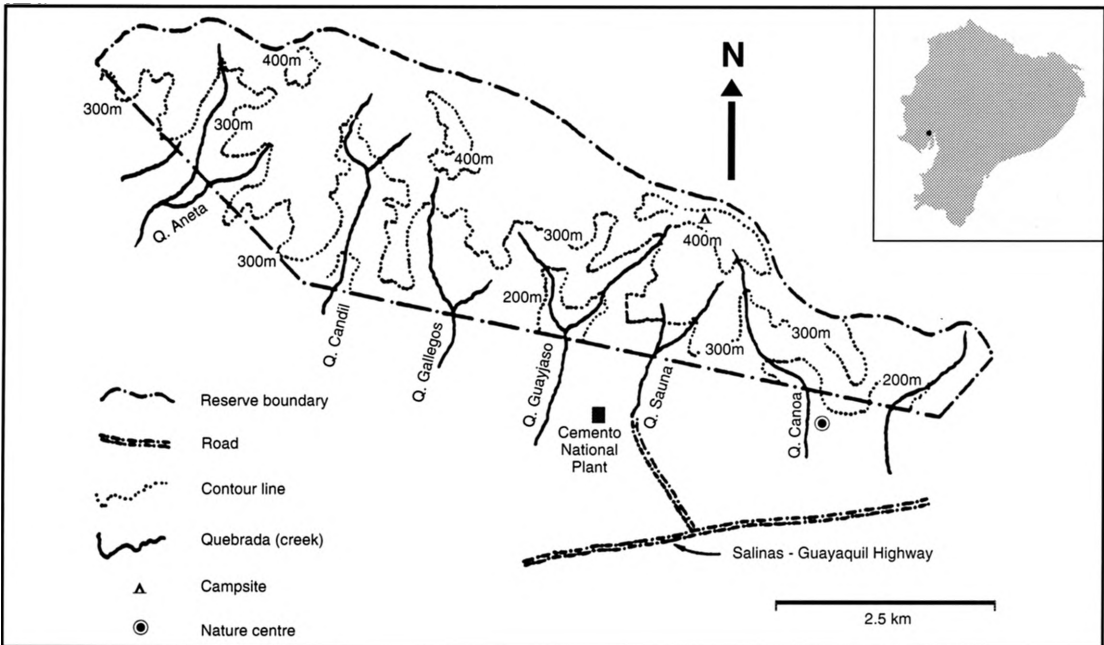
La reserva forestal Cerro Blanco es una de las pocas áreas protegidas con más de 200 ha de bosque seco sobre el oeste ecuatoriano. Aunque existen listas de registros de aves en la reserva, con frecuencia no se conocen las fechas ni localidades en que fueron tomados. De otro lado, esta información no incluye observaciones de algunas de las partes de más difícil acceso en la reserva, ni muestra con precisión las diferentes altitudes, los tipos de bosques o las estaciones. Una información más amplia será cada vez más importante para la conservación y manejo de la vida silvestre de la reserva a medida que se intensifica la industria y la agricultura alrededor de Guayaquil, y se amenaza con aislar ecológicamente Cerro Blanco. Este artículo presenta los registros de aves para la reserva, detalles de algunas especies poco conocidas o amenazadas, y una lista actualizada de las especies del bosque.

Cerro Blanco (02°10'S 80°02'W) is a protected dry tropical forest approximately 15 km west of Guayaquil, Guayas province, south-west Ecuador. The 2,000 ha forest is at the southern end of the Cordillera de la Costa that runs from the Gulf of Guayaquil, north to the province of Esmeraldas (see Map). The southern end of this cordillera, where Cerro Blanco is located, is named the Cordillera de Chongón. The Cerro Blanco reserve comprises dry and semi-deciduous humid forest in ravines and ridges which reach an altitude of c.400 m. The dry forests of south-west Ecuador and north-west Peru (the Tumbesian region) are biologically isolated by surrounding geographical features: the Andes to the east; the desert scrub of coastal Peru, and coastal El Oro and Guayas provinces, Ecuador to the south and west; and the humid forest of north-west Ecuador and western Colombia to the north. Consequent high levels of endemism, combined with the problems of rapid human population growth and associated deforestation, have attracted the attention of national and international conservation organisations (see Parker & Carr<sup>10</sup>). Cerro Blanco is one of very few Ecuadorian protected areas in the Tumbesian centre of endemism that are larger than 200 ha. The reserve is host to several threatened, and numerous poorly known birds<sup>1,10</sup>, in an area where massive biological extinction may have already occurred<sup>2</sup>. Between June 1992 and May 1993, records were kept of all species encountered during nine visits to the reserve. The 4-6 hour surveys were conducted with the

aid of various fieldguides<sup>3,5,8,9</sup> and were made 15 to 45 days apart throughout the 10 month period. Trails surveyed were Quebrada Canoa, Buenavista, the road between the Mirador de los Monos and Quebrada de los Papagayos (see Map). Based on lists compiled since the creation of the reserve<sup>4,6,7,10</sup>, these most recent observations include several new species for Cerro Blanco, and provide details of poorly known, often endemic and/or threatened birds.

Perhaps the most interesting discovery was that of the threatened **Pacific Royal Flycatcher** *Onychorhynchus [coronatus] occidentalis*<sup>1</sup>. This curious and beautiful flycatcher had not been previously recorded but was seen on five different occasions during the surveys, with an active nest found in April 1993 at Quebrada Canoa. The species was seen making short, darting flights for insects (especially middle-storey lepidoptera), and was occasionally found in loose, mixed-species bird flocks. The nest was an odd structure, c.1 m long, hanging precariously from branches and vines 2-3 m above a forested creek (see also<sup>13</sup>). The nest material was collected on the wing and comprised slender twigs, tendrils, moss and fine roots, the latter taken from epiphytes and plants with roots exposed on the creek bank (see also<sup>13</sup>). The unkempt appearance of the nest seems to be a method of camouflaging, especially appropriate in wet forest where similar collections of moss and other plant matter hang from nearly every tree.

Data from two other nests (one of which



Map of the Bosque Protector Cerro Blanco (map based on original from Fundación Natura)

failed) found at Manta Real (75 km south-east of Cerro Blanco) in March-April 1993, suggests incubation of the two eggs takes 26-34 days. The eggs are brownish with ruddy streaks becoming fused at the larger end, and are placed in a small shallow chamber. The chicks are scaled or barred brown and grey, much as has been described of the Central American form *O. [coronatus] coronatus*<sup>11</sup>. According to Parker & Carr<sup>10</sup>, a healthy presence of **Pacific Royal Flycatchers** is one of the best indicators of "good" moist forest in south-west Ecuador. Cerro Blanco, Machalilla National Park and Jauneche reserve are the only Ecuadorian protected areas where this globally threatened species has been found.

Other records include a colourful female **Pygmy Kingfisher** *Chloroceryle aenea*, the first record for the reserve, was seen on two occasions perched less than 1 m from the ground at the side of a small pool near the Quebrada Canoa ridge-top. This creek, as with most in the area, is dry for half the year apart from occasional small pools that remain at certain points along the creek. These pools are the only source of water for many months, and are important to populations of mammals (and birds) needing water throughout the year<sup>10</sup>. A surprise encounter with a **Rufous-necked**

**Wood-rail** *Aramides axillaris* along the Buenavista trail was after a night of heavy rain which flooded the nearby mangroves, and may have forced this bird onto the higher ground in the reserve, although records from the Sozoranga area of Loja, and Tumbes National Forest in Peru, suggest that deciduous forests are also favoured habitats of this species (B. J. Best pers. comm.).

The **Henna-hooded Folage-gleaner** *Hylocryptus erythrocephalus*, a rare and threatened Tumbesian endemic<sup>1</sup>, was seen on three separate occasions (also recorded by N. Krabbe in 1992). The first sighting was in a thicket on a ridge-top at the source of the Quebrada de los Papagayos. The bird was apparently visiting a nest-hole in the side of the creek, which was wet but not flowing. This species is easily frightened and difficult to see, especially where the vegetation is dense. However, the call, once known, is heard continuously (*dee-dee-dee-dee... dee-dee-dee-dee*). Cerro Blanco and Machalilla National Park are the only protected areas in Ecuador where this species has been observed. Unfortunately, most of the Cerro Blanco reserve has been at least selectively logged during the present century<sup>10</sup>. Primary forest only persists along quebradas (creeks) and on steep banks where

it is rather patchy, but sufficient remains to allow an enjoyable excursion into one of the last significant tracts of Ecuadorian dry tropical forest, where in fact the avifauna is very similar to that of the more pristine Tumbes National Forest in Peru<sup>10</sup>.

The Quebrada Canoa trail is close to the guard-house and has a well maintained trail and boardwalk along which the threatened<sup>1</sup> **Pacific Royal Flycatcher**, **Grey-breasted Flycatcher** *Lathrotriccus griseipectus* and **Ochre-bellied Dove** *Leptotila ochraceiventris* can all be seen, often some distance up the creek. At least three male **Ochre-bellied Doves** called persistently from viny thickets in the undergrowth along the quebrada in January 1991, although it seems likely that this rare dove occurs here only during the wet season (December–April)<sup>10</sup>. The clear whistle of the **Grey-and-gold Warbler** *Basileuterus fraseri* is commonly heard during most walks in the forest, as they forage in the middle-storey, especially above creek banks. Through the numerous light-gaps **Grey-backed Hawks** *Leucopternis occidentalis* (also threatened<sup>1</sup>) can be seen soaring overhead, often giving a single *sshreee* call. A pair of this threatened hawk was thought to be nesting in tall trees along this quebrada in January 1991<sup>10</sup>. Other species of interest due to their restricted distributions include **Pale-browed Tinamou** *Crypturellus transfasciatus*, several of which have been heard along this quebrada (in January), and large numbers of **Grey-cheeked Parakeet** *Brotogeris pyrrhopterus* which have been seen in the tops of tall *Ficus* trees in the

quebrada bottom<sup>10</sup>. Several groups (of 18-25) of the threatened **Saffron Siskin** *Carduelis siemiradzkii*, known from only a few localities in an area of c.10,000 km<sup>2</sup> in south-west Ecuador and adjacent Tumbes, Peru, have also been found along Quebrada Canoa<sup>1,10</sup>.

The Buenavista trail begins at the base of the hillside and traverses the scrubby secondary forest, eventually arriving at the ridge-top from where one can view the forested quebrada below. The raucous grunting of the Mantled Howler Monkey *Alouatta palliata* or the powerful squawk of the **Great Green Macaw** *Ara ambigua guayaquilensis* can be heard from this point. This later species, a small group of which is present on Cerro Blanco, is present as a remnant population that barely survives here and in the Cordillera de Colonche to the north-west<sup>10</sup>. Flocks of 30-50 **Grey-cheeked Parakeets** *Brotogeris pyrrhopterus* are a common sight, as are sightings of the smaller **Pacific Parrotlet** *Forpus coelestis*. At first light, or just as the sun is setting, large flocks (50-70 pairs) of **Red-lore Amazons** *Amazona autumnalis* pass to and from Cerro Blanco and Cerro Azul (to the north) to the mangroves across the highway, where they apparently roost. Once along the ridge of the Buenavista trail, the forest becomes taller and at several points one can look directly into the upper middle-storey of the forest. Also along this trail, interesting dry forest and scrub endemics such as **Elegant Crescentchest** *Melanopareia elegans*, **Collared Antshrike** *Sakesphorus bernardi* and the threatened **Blackish-headed Spinetail** *Synallaxis tithys* and the **Henna-hooded Fo-liage-gleaner**<sup>1</sup> (see above) can be found. Raptor watching is particularly good in the reserve with some 32 species recorded, due in part to the excellent visibility afforded within a deciduous, dry tropical forest.

To access the more remote parts of the reserve (i.e. Quebrada de los Papagayos), roads do exist, but special permission is needed from the management and must be coordinated through La Cemento Nacional, the cement manufacturer that owns the reserve. Tourists wishing to visit the reserve should give prior notice to the Fundación Natura office in Guayaquil (Tel: [593]-4-201-628). Admission to the reserve is US\$5 per person, and camping sites are available. Taxis from Guayaquil will do the trip for c.US\$10, although the bus line



Collared Antshrike *Sakesphorus bernardi*  
(David D. Beadle)



Top left: Pygmy Kingfisher *Chloroceryle aenea*, male (D. Wechsler - Vireo)

Top right: Pygmy Kingfisher *Chloroceryle aenea*, female (D. Wechsler - Vireo)

Bottom left: Blackish-headed Spinetail *Synallaxis tithys* (Rob Williams)

Bottom right: Grey-and-gold Warbler *Basileuterus fraseri* (Rob Williams)

"La Chongonera" runs from Parque Victoria, in the centre of Guayaquil out past the reserve to the pueblo of Chongón, every hour for less than US\$0.50. Guayaquil, although rather inhospitable at first glance, is a modern city of nearly 2 million people (the largest city in Ecuador), and numerous interesting birding locations are within easy reach. Cerro Blanco, home to at least 39 dry forest/scrub endemic bird species and located only 15 minutes from Guayaquil, is a must for any birdwatcher in Ecuador.

### Acknowledgements

This inventory was made possible by Fundación Natura, Capitulo Guayaquil, U.S. Peace Corps - Ecuador and La Cemento Nacional. Special thanks to Niels Krabbe for helpful comments on the manuscript and especially on current taxonomic revisions; to Roberto Phillips for logistical support; and Walker Herzog for his hospitality and knowledge of trails and birds of the reserve.

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### Appendix: a list of the birds of Cerro Blanco Forest Reserve, Guayas province, south-west Ecuador.

Pale-browed Tinamou	King Vulture	Zone-tailed Hawk	Black Hawk-eagle
<i>Crypturellus transfaciatus</i> *	<i>Sarcoramphus papa</i>	<i>Buteo albonotatus</i>	<i>Spizaetus tyrannus</i>
Least Grebe	Black Vulture	Roadside Hawk	Osprey
<i>Podiceps dominicus</i>	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>	<i>Buteo magnirostris</i>	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Pied-billed Grebe	Turkey Vulture	Short-tailed Hawk	Laughing Falcon
<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	<i>Buteo brachyurus</i>	<i>Herpetotheres cachinnans</i>
Neotropic Cormorant	Pearl Kite	Grey Hawk	Collared Forest-falcon
<i>Phalacrocorax olivaceus</i>	<i>Gampsonyx swainsonii</i>	<i>Buteo nitidus</i>	<i>Micrastur semitorquatus</i>
Magnificent Frigatebird	Hook-billed Kite	Harris' Hawk	Barred Forest-falcon
<i>Fregata magnificens</i>	<i>Chondrohierax uncinatus</i>	<i>Parabuteo unicinctus</i>	<i>Micrastur ruficollis</i>
Great Egret	Swallow-tailed Kite	<b>Grey-backed Hawk</b>	Red-throated Caracara
<i>Egretta albus</i>	<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>	<b><i>Leucopternis occidentalis</i>*</b>	<i>Daptrius americanus</i>
Snowy Egret	Double-toothed Kite	Plumbeous Hawk	Crested Caracara
<i>Egretta thula</i>	<i>Harpagus bidentatus</i>	<i>Leucopternis plumbea</i>	<i>Polyborus plancus</i>
Striated Heron	Plumbeous Kite	Mangrove Black Hawk	Bat Falcon
<i>Butorides striatus</i>	<i>Ictinia plumbea</i>	<i>Buteogallus subtilis</i>	<i>Falco rufigularis</i>
Cattle Egret	Snail Kite	Great Black Hawk	Peregrine Falcon
<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis</i>	<i>Buteogallus urubitinga</i>	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Wood Stork	Bicoloured Hawk	Savanna Hawk	American Kestrel
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	<i>Accipiter bicolor</i>	<i>Buteogallus meridionalis</i>	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
Black-bellied Whistling-duck	Red-backed Hawk	Crane Hawk	Rufous-headed Chachalaca
<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>	<i>Buteo polyosoma</i>	<i>Geranospiza caerulescens</i>	<i>Ortalis erythroptera</i> *

- Crested Guan  
*Penelope purpurascens*  
 Rufous-fronted Wood-quail  
*Odontophorus erythrorus*  
 Rufous-necked Wood-rail  
*Aramides axillaris*  
 Common Gallinule  
*Gallinula chloropus*  
 Sungrebe  
*Heliornis fulica*  
 Killdeer  
*Charadrius vociferus*  
 Greater Yellowlegs  
*Tringa melanoleuca*  
 Spotted Sandpiper  
*Actitis macularia*  
 Rock Dove  
*Columba livia*  
 Pale-vented Pigeon  
*Columba cayennensis*  
 White-winged Dove  
*Zenaida asiatica*  
 Ecuadorian Ground-dove  
*Columbina buckleyi*\*  
 Croaking Ground-dove  
*Columbina cruziana*  
 Blue Ground-dove  
*Claravis pretiosa*  
**Ochre-bellied Dove**  
***Leptotila ochraceiventris*\***  
 White-tipped Dove  
*Leptotila verreauxi*  
 Pallid Dove  
*Leptotila pallida*  
 Great Green Macaw  
*Ara ambiguus*  
 Red-masked Parakeet  
*Aratinga erythrogenys*\*  
 Pacific Parrotlet  
*Forpus coelestis*\*  
 Grey-cheeked Parakeet  
*Brotogeris pyrrhopterus*\*  
 Bronze-winged Parrot  
*Pionus chalcopterus*  
 Red-lore Amazon  
*Amazona autumnalis*  
 Grey-capped Cuckoo  
*Coccyzus lansbergi*  
 Squirrel Cuckoo  
*Piaya cayana*  
 Smooth-billed Ani  
*Crotophaga ani*  
 Groove-billed Ani  
*Crotophaga sulcirostris*  
 Striped Cuckoo  
*Tapera naevia*  
 Barn Owl  
*Tyto alba*  
 Spectacled Owl  
*Pulsatrix perspicillata*  
 Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl  
*Glaucidium brasilianum*  
 Common Potoo  
*Nyctibius griseus*  
 Lesser Nighthawk  
*Chordeiles acutipennis*  
 Pauraque  
*Nyctidromus albicollis*  
 Anthony's Nightjar  
*Caprimulgus anthonyi*\*  
 White-collared Swift  
*Streptoprocne zonaris*  
 Grey-rumped Swift  
*Chaetura cinereiventris*  
 Short-tailed Swift  
*Chaetura brachyura*  
 Long-tailed Hermit  
*Phaethornis superciliosus*  
 Little Hermit  
*Phaethornis longuemareus*  
 Blue-tailed Emerald  
*Chlorostilbon mellisugus*  
 Violet-bellied Hummingbird  
*Damophila julie*  
 Amazilia Hummingbird  
*Amazilia amazilia*  
 Rufous-tailed Hummingbird  
*Amazilia taczali*  
 Long-billed Starthroat  
*Heliomaster longirostris*  
 Short-tailed Woodstar  
*Myrmia micrura*\*  
 Black-tailed Trogon  
*Trogon melanurus*  
 Violaceous Trogon  
*Trogon violaceus*  
 Ringed Kingfisher  
*Ceryle torquata*  
 Green Kingfisher  
*Chloroceryle americana*  
 Pygmy Kingfisher  
*Chloroceryle aenea*  
 Blue-crowned Motmot  
*Momotus momota*  
 White-necked Puffbird  
*Notharchus macrorhynchus*  
 Ecuadorian Piculet  
*Picumnus sclateri*\*  
 Black-cheeked Woodpecker  
*Melanerpes pucherani*  
 Golden-olive Woodpecker  
*Piculus rubiginosus*  
 Lineated Woodpecker  
*Dryocopus lineatus*  
 Scarlet-backed Woodpecker  
*Veniliornis callonotus*  
 Red-rumped Woodpecker  
*Veniliornis kirikii*  
 Guayaquil Woodpecker  
*Campephilus guayaquilensis*  
 Olivaceous Woodcreeper  
*Sittasomus griseicapillus*  
 Streak-headed Woodcreeper  
*Lepidocolaptes souleyetii*  
 Red-billed Scythebill  
*Campylorhamphus trochilirostris*  
 Pacific Hornero  
*Furnarius [leucopus] cinnamomeus*  
**Blackish-headed Spinetail**  
***Synallaxis tithys*\***  
**Henna-hooded Foliage-gleaner**  
***Hylocryptus erythrocephalus*\***  
 Streaked Xenops  
*Xenops rutilans*  
 Great Antshrike  
*Taraba major*  
 Collared Antshrike  
*Sakesphorus bernardi*\*  
 Plain Antvireo  
*Dysithamnus mentalis*  
 Pacific Fire-eye  
*Pyriglena pacifica*  
 Elegant Crescentchest  
*Melanopareia elegans*\*  
 Short-tailed Field-tyrant  
*Muscigralla brevicauda*  
 Masked Water-tyrant  
*Fluvicola nengeta*  
 Vermillion Flycatcher  
*Pyrocephalus rubinus*  
 Fork-tailed Flycatcher  
*Tyrannus savana*  
 Tropical Kingbird  
*Tyrannus melancholicus*  
 Snowy-throated Kingbird  
*Tyrannus niveigularis*  
 White-ringed Flycatcher  
*Conopias parva*  
 Boat-tailed Flycatcher  
*Megarhynchus pitangua*  
 Baird's Flycatcher  
*Myiodynastes bairdii*\*  
 Streaked Flycatcher  
*Myiodynastes maculatus*  
 Rusty-margined Flycatcher  
*Myiozetetes cayanensis*  
 Social Flycatcher  
*Myiozetetes similis*  
 Dusky-capped Flycatcher  
*Myiarchus tuberculifer*  
 Sooty-crowned Flycatcher  
*Myiarchus phaeocephalus*\*  
 Tropical Pewee  
*Contopus cinereus*  
**Grey-breasted Flycatcher**  
***Lathrotriccus griseipectus*\***  
 Black-tailed Flycatcher  
*Myiobius atricaudus*  
 Bran-coloured Flycatcher  
*Myiophobus fasciatus*  
**Pacific Royal Flycatcher**  
***Onychorhynchus occidentalis*\***  
 Yellow-olive Flycatcher  
*Tolmomyias sulphurescens*  
 Common Tody-flycatcher  
*Todirostrum cinereum*  
 Scale-crested Pygmy-tyrant  
*Lophotriccus pileatus*  
 Tawny-crowned Pygmy-tyrant  
*Euscarthmus meloryphus*  
 Yellow-bellied Elaenia  
*Elaenia flavogaster*  
 Pacific Elaenia  
*Myiopagis subplacens*\*  
 Mouse-coloured Tyrannulet  
*Phaeomyias murina*  
 Southern Beardless Tyrannulet  
*Campostoma obsoletum*  
 Slaty-capped Flycatcher  
*Leptopogon superciliaris*  
 Ochre-bellied Flycatcher  
*Mionectes oleaginea*  
**Slaty Becard**  
***Pachyramphus spodiurus*\***  
 Cinnamon Becard  
*Pachyramphus cinnamomeus*  
 Black-and-white Becard  
*Pachyramphus albogriseus*  
 One-coloured Becard  
*Pachyramphus homochrous*  
 Grey-breasted Martin  
*Progne chalybea*  
 Blue-and-white Swallow  
*Notiochelidon cyanoleuca*  
 Southern Rough-winged Swallow  
*Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*  
 White-tailed Jay  
*Cyanocorax mystacalis*\*  
 Fasciated Wren  
*Campylorhynchus fasciatus*  
 Speckled-breasted Wren  
*Tyrrothorus sclateri*  
 Superciliated Wren  
*Tyrrothorus superciliaris*\*  
 House Wren  
*Troglodytes aedon*  
 Long-tailed Mockingbird  
*Mimus longicaudatus*  
 Swainson's Thrush  
*Catharus ustulatus*  
 Plumbeous-backed Thrush  
*Turdus reevei*\*  
 Ecuadorian Thrush  
*Turdus maculirostris*\*  
 Long-billed Gnatwren  
*Ramphocaenus melanurus*  
 Tropical Gnatcatcher  
*Poliotilta plumbea*  
 Rufous-browed Peppershrike  
*Cyclarhis gujanensis*  
 Red-eyed Vireo  
*Vireo olivaceus*  
 Lesser Greenlet  
*Hylophilus minor*  
 Shiny Cowbird  
*Molothrus bonariensis*  
 Giant Cowbird  
*Scaphidura oryzivora*  
 Russet-backed Oropendola  
*Psarocolius angustifrons*  
 Yellow-rumped Cacique  
*Cacicus cela*  
 Yellow-billed Cacique  
*Amblycercus holosericeus*  
 Scrub Blackbird  
*Dives warszewiczi*  
 White-edged Oriole  
*Icterus graccannae*\*  
 Yellow-tailed Oriole  
*Icterus mesomelas*  
 Peruvian Meadowlark  
*Sturnella bellicosa*  
 Tropical Parula  
*Parula pitayumi*  
 American Redstart  
*Sertophaga ruticilla*  
 Northern Waterthrush  
*Seiurus noveboracensis*  
 Masked Yellowthroat  
*Geothlypis aequinoctialis*  
 Grey-and-gold Warbler  
*Basileuterus fraseri*\*  
 Bananaquit  
*Coereba flaveola*  
 Orange-crowned Euphonia  
*Euphonia saturata*  
 Thick-billed Euphonia  
*Euphonia lanirostris*  
 Blue-grey Tanager  
*Thraupis episcopus*  
 Hepatic Tanager  
*Piranga flava*  
 Summer Tanager  
*Piranga rubra*  
 White-shouldered Tanager  
*Tachyphonus luctuosus*  
 Guira Tanager  
*Hemithraupis guira*  
 Black-and-white Tanager  
*Conothraupis speculigera*  
 Streaked Saltator  
*Saltator albicollis*  
 Buff-throated Saltator  
*Saltator maximus*  
 Southern Yellow Grosbeak  
*Phaeucticus chrysogaster*  
 Blue-black Grassquit  
*Volatinia jacarina*  
 White-tailed Seedeater  
*Sporophila americana*  
 Parrot-billed Seedeater  
*Sporophila peruviana*  
 Chestnut-throated Seedeater  
*Sporophila telasco*  
 Saffron Finch  
*Sicalis flaveola*  
 Crimson Finch  
*Rhodospingus cruentus*  
 Black-capped Sparrow  
*Arremon abeillei*\*  
**Saffron Siskin**  
***Carduelis siermiradzhii*\***  
 Species highlighted in bold are threatened<sup>1</sup> (these total eight), and those marked with an asterisk (\*) are endemic to the Tumbesian endemic bird area<sup>11</sup> (totalling 29 species).

List compiled by Karl S. Berg, based on Farquhar<sup>4</sup>, Jones *et al.*<sup>6</sup>, Krabbe<sup>7</sup>, Parker & Carr<sup>10</sup> and personal observations (1992-1993).