THE SONG AND DANCE OF THE LONG-TAILED MANAKIN, *CHIROXIPHIA LINEARIS*

BY PAUL SLUD

"UPON a bare branch which overhung the trail at a distance of about four feet from the ground, two male 'Bailadors' were engaged in a 'song and dance' act that simply astounded me. The two birds were about a foot and a half apart, and were alternately jumping about two feet into the air and alighting exactly upon the spot whence they jumped. The time was as regular as clock-work, one bird jumping up the instant the other alighted, each bird accompanying himself to the tune of 'to-lé-do—to-lé-do—to-lé-do,' sounding the syllable 'to' as he crouched to spring, 'le' while in the air, and 'do' as he alighted."

Thus did Charles C. Nutting (1884: 385), in Nicaragua, create the account of this bird's behavior which has maintained a lasting popular appeal. Indeed, in Costa Rica, where this bird is known as "el toledo," I have heard people tell the same story in almost exactly the same words while alternately raising each index finger to illustrate the quaintness of the performance.

Few succeeding writers have had anything new to say about this well-known bird. With one exception, they have contributed little more than notations which neither contradict nor necessarily endorse Nutting's remarks.

Only Nutting has clearly described the teaming of two males who behave like jumping jacks in an integrated dance. Carriker (1910: 683) states that he has seen the males jumping up and down on a branch, but he does not specify how many males dance at a time. He furnishes a bit of detail about appearance and posture, and describes a cracking noise produced by a snapping of the mandibles. Dickey and van Rossem (1938: 336–337) introduce the presence of a quietly perched female in front of and over whom the males leap back and forth rapidly and without pause. Also, they record bill snappings like those mentioned by Carriker.

The only extensive published observations on the Long-tailed Manakin seem to be those made in Chiapas by Helmuth Wagner (1946). He describes the courtship, call, nesting, and habitat, and includes a sketch illustrating the movements of the courting male. The observations of Dickey and van Rossem on the one hand, and those of Nutting and Carriker on the other, are apparently combined by Wagner in his statement that the dance consists of leaps from branch to branch around and above the female, and also of vertical

leaps into the air. In addition, the males hover in the air facing the female, who remains completely passive and indifferent ("indiferente"). Several males may perform at the same time. However, Wagner indicates that their efforts are not concerted, and implies that they are purely individual and probably competitive.

The above observers all agree that the males do dance or perform acrobatically and that the *tolédo* call is a constant accompanying feature. In other respects their views are at variance with one another. My own experiences with the bird in Costa Rica agree in small part with some of them, yet disagree in greater part with all of them. Much of what I saw was obviously different from what others had seen. Much that others had seen was never observed by me.

Possibly, the inconsistencies may eventually be resolved into complementary modes of behavior stumbled upon at random by different men in different places. I think it best, therefore, to present the bird as I have known it in Costa Rica.

I spent some five years in Costa Rica where I periodically visited those parts of the country inhabited by the Long-tailed Manakin. The range of the species is almost entirely confined to the northern half of the Pacific side of the country, from sea level to at least 4,500 feet in altitude. I have seen it in the edges of mangroves beside the coast, in the lowlands on both sides of the Gulf of Nicoya, along the western base of the Guanacaste Cordillera, upon adjacent, low portions of the continental divide, and on the central plateau to the west and south of San José. The period of greatest courting activity occurs during April and May, the months marking the end of the dry season and the beginning of the rainy season.

Throughout most of its range the bird is not uncommon, while in certain localities it is almost incredibly abundant. Nevertheless, in spite of having met with it many times, for a long while I did not succeed in finding performing males. This failure I attribute largely to a reliance upon preconceived ideas formed from the few references in the literature and from purported firsthand accounts related by people native to the country. Only through a lucky accident did I learn to find dancing birds by listening for one particular sound. Sometimes I witnessed a complete performance, more often only a part. A series of observations obviated the chief difficulties attending any one meeting: that is, getting to see the birds well and trying to record rapid action while not wishing to remove my eyes from the scene of activity to a notebook.

VOICE

The Long-tailed Manakin possesses a variety of notes and calls. Some seem to be produced only during the period of courtship but, as with a number of other kinds of manakin, the gathering of males into assemblies may cover much of the year.

The call which immediately identifies the species sounds like *to-lé-do* (*toe-lay-doe*), with the accent on the second syllable and a slight pause after the first syllable. It is uttered somewhat more slowly than a human being would pronounce it during ordinary speech. Some of the qualitative variations may sound like *taw-láy-daw*, *oo-wée-oo*, *oo-láy-oh*, or a sad *choo-hée-oo*. At times the call may be altered to a four-syllabled *wayco-tláyco*, and a several-syllabled *too-lée-oo·oo·oo·oo*. Not uncommonly the first syllable is omitted, the call, *wée-oo*, then becoming hard to distinguish from that of a distant Pauraque (*Nyctidromus albicollis*). A bird may omit the accent on the middle syllable and drop the pitch of the last one, resulting in a quite different *too-lee-yòo*. Often the regular *tolédo* call possesses a peculiar echoing character. This happens when two neighboring birds call in unison, an occurrence far too frequent to be classed as accident or coincidence.

Another call, not so distinctive of this bird in particular, is an arresting *whée·er hurr*, or *chéeoo hoo*, the first part of which is slow and stretched like an elastic. It may possibly bring to mind Prevost's Cacique (*Amblycercus holosericeus*).

Frequently given are from one to three or four *coo's or cow's* (really somewhere between *co* and *coo*). When given singly, the *coo* can be confused with the heavier note of the Rufescent Tinamou (*Crypturellus cinnamomeus*). When given three times in succession, with slight pauses between the notes, the call might easily be mistaken for that of a trogon, such as the Graceful Trogon (*Trogon rufus*), for example. The *coo's* may also be given in rapid succession without measurable pauses between.

Another common note is a sort of gargled *ahhhr* (or *uh·ahhhr*, one syllable) with the *ah* emphasized, the remainder of the note weaker and fading upward like a polite interrogation. A similar, but recognizably different, note is a whining *ăăăă* (or *wăăă*, or *măăă*). These are both antbird-like.

Still another common note is a musical, high-pitched, sudden *pyeek* (or *yeeik*, or *yeep*).

Heard less often is a reedy, rapid *kur·kur·kur·kur* etc., rather halting or, at least, unsteady.

Strictly associated with the actively dancing males are two other kinds of sounds to be described in the following section.

Thus, out of a patch of undergrowth may issue at intervals any of a number of different calls or notes all belonging to thes ame bird,—*chéeoo-coo; wăăă; yeeik; to-lé-do; coo-coo-coo; uh·ahhhr.*

ANTICS

The unmistakable *tolédo* advertises the presence of birds in an area. Should the call be traced, the observer will be rewarded by the sight of a beautiful bird of exotic appearance. He will not, however, find dancing birds. Despite citations to the contrary, in Costa Rica dancing birds do not utter the *tolédo* note. The note can be followed and birds stalked all day long yet never, in my experience, will they be surprised while engaging in a performance.

The trick is to get to know one particular note, a peculiar *miaow·raow* which is easy to learn and to remember. It is guttural, dry but resonant, rather cat-like, and bears no resemblance to the mellow *tolédo*. It possesses the quality of the similar notes of the Song Wren (*Leucolepis phaeocephala*), a bird which is absent from the Long-tailed's range. The *miaow·raow* is a double note repeated many times in succession. To the listener it provides the lead to birds dancing somewhere in the vicinity. To my knowledge this note is given at no other time.

Unlike the birds encountered by Nutting, performing males never seem to choose a trail. Unexceptionally the chosen site lies within twiggy undergrowth interwoven with vines, either in scrubby, dry forest or humid woodland, where a silent approach becomes an impossible feat during the dry season. Usually one or more, sometimes as many as six, males may materialize to examine the twig-snapping, leaf-crunching intruder. Once he is discovered, the observer's chances of viewing a performance become extremely poor.

Assuming that the source of the *miaow·raow's* has been approached with sufficient caution (easiest to do while the birds are actively engaged), the observer may perhaps glimpse through the cover a bird, or some object, rising and falling rhythmically. Or, if the notes have ceased, his attention may be attracted by what seem to be one or two Blue Morpho butterflies flying back and forth through the interlaced screen with an unwonted regularity. These are not butterflies, however, but two male manakins passing slowly in straight but apparently randomly directed paths between scattered perches. They fly with the weightless bounce of a Morpho, and the fluffed blue back makes them look like a Morpho. I am at a loss to explain

the mechanics by which the slow beats somehow sustain the retarded flight. At any rate, in this way the birds frequently fill an interlude between performances. By no stretch of the imagination could this aery floating be interpreted as a leaping back and forth from branch to branch, a type of behavior I have never witnessed nor ever been given cause to suspect in this species.

The observer will not have long to wait. The birds may have stopped floating back and forth but remained perched close by, constantly twitching their wings and uttering at intervals almost any of their notes. The *chéeoo hoo* note, incidentally, rather than the *tolédo*, seems both to draw the birds to a particular spot in the woods (extra males not taking part may surround the scene), and to signal the start of the show. Soon one and then a second male alights on a horizontal vine or slender branch, free from obstructions, low above the ground. The dance is now about to begin, and it may take either of two forms.

One dance starts, at least, the way Nutting described it, except for the absence of the *tolédo* note. Perched crosswise a foot or two apart, both facing in the same direction, the two birds alternately rise straight into the air for a foot or two. Each fluttering rise is preceded by a lowering of the head, and at the top of the rise the bird hangs suspended for an appreciable pause, as though attached to a rubber band. The red crown of the bowed head appears unusually large and bright, the sky-blue back loosely fluffed, the long tail arches and hangs in a graceful curve, and the bright orange legs hang too. A guttural *miaow·raow* punctuates each rise. Gradually the duration of each rise shortens and the rate of successive rises increases. As the tempo mounts, the crest of the risings falls lower and lower and the pitch of the accelerating *miaow·raow's* rises higher and higher until the former degenerate into seemingly uncontrolled flutters and the latter into unintelligible buzzy sounds. Now the birds hardly rise at all and almost bump each other as they flop about like helpless victims of an internal disorder. As though a switch were pulled, the orgiastic frenzy ends suddenly, and the birds cock their heads innocently in calm possession of faculties restored at the instant of reassertion of self-control.

The alternate dance, which may perhaps be the commoner of the two, begins after the same preliminaries as the preceding one. This time, however, the birds stand on the vine or branch lengthwise, both facing in the same direction but with one behind the other, again spaced more than a foot apart. The first bird, uttering his *miaow·raow*, rises straight into the air, where he then hangs momen-

tarily suspended. As he reaches the top of his leap, the rear bird, crouched, his eyes fixed upon the bird in the air, with rapidly flicking wings and arched tail hitches himself forward to the accompaniment of a low ticking, *pk·pk·pk·pk·pk* etc., to a point on the branch directly below the suspended bird and identical to the one from which the first bird rose. The bird in the air now falls diagonally backward to the very spot from which the bird below began his ticking, wing-quivering creep. As he alights, the second bird, now in the forward position, rises into the air. At the same instant the first bird, fallen to the rear position, hitches himself forward in his turn. Like balls in a juggling act, the birds replace one another with cyclical regularity. The individually uttered *miaow·raow's* accent the recurrent rhythm, and the underlying ticking goes on almost without interruption. The tempo may be increased but the performance does not become disorganized as in the straight up-and-down dance. A variation in this lateral dance consists of an instantaneous about-face change of direction, for a while both birds facing to the right, for example, instead of to the left. The dance ends suddenly and the birds float "butterfly-like" to the sidelines.

IMMATURE MALES

The immature male resembles the plain olive-green female but is easily distinguished by his crown which is red, as in the adult male. Young birds change gradually into the striking plumage of the adult, and their middle tail feathers may be just as long. The blue color of the back develops last of all.

I have seen immature males dancing with each other exactly like the adults, but I never happened to find a mixed partnership between a young male and an adult male. Nor did I ever see a young male make the "butterfly-like" flights of the adult.

Whenever I watched the adult male's antics my attention was invariably attracted by his blue back. In the case of the young male, soberly colored and lacking a blue back, it was the red crown which drew my eye. It is curious that in another manakin, the White-throated (*Corapipo leucorrhoa*), in which the young male resembles the female and the adult male is strikingly clad, the young male also engages in a courtship performance, as does the Long-tailed, apparently only with other young males. In both species the young male seems to display one part of his plumage and the adult another.

THE ROLE OF THE FEMALE

During the floating flights of the males, in no instance did I happen to locate a female. It is quite possible that one may have been present but that I simply did not see her. During the dances of the males I have seen a female only occasionally, but one may have been perched close by at other times, too, without my being aware of her presence.

Every female that I did see showed an eager interest in the doings of the males. Sometimes she perched in the outskirts, sometimes on the very vine or twig where the males were performing or were going to perform. If not already there, the female would apparently get so worked up by the dance that she would fly to the courtship branch. Moving sideways back and forth, or even hopping about energetically between the two males, she would often interfere with the smoothness of the performance. Unlike the birds seen by other observers, the female did not watch the proceedings passively.

SNAPPING SOUNDS

Carriker, and Dickey and van Rossem, claim that the males snap their bills, whereas Blake (1953: 329) writes that they "apparently never snap their wings audibly." Wagner makes no mention of snapping sounds. I have never heard this manakin snap its bill, snap its wings, or make any kind of snapping sound.

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