

# A NEW RACE OF SUMICHRAST'S WREN FROM CHIAPAS, MÉXICO

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Sumichrast's Wren (*Hylorchilus sumichrasti*) is a rare, endemic Mexican species known from a cluster of localities in central western Veracruz and possibly adjacent, extreme northern Oaxaca. Lawrence described the species in 1871 from a single tail-less specimen, placing it in the genus *Catherpes*. In 1894, Nelson and Goldman collected two "perfect" specimens at Motzorongro, Veracruz, the same general area of Lawrence's type, and Nelson (1897) placed the species in a newly erected genus, *Hylorchilus*. At a later period (1925), W. W. Brown collected a large series at Presidio, Veracruz. Apparently the last specimens recorded were taken by Chester Lamb and his assistants from the same area in Veracruz in the years 1942-45. One specimen, collected by Mario del Toro Aviles, was supposedly taken in adjacent Oaxaca. However, localities given by del Toro are questionable because of his haphazard method of labeling specimens.

In December 1969, Santos Farfán B. noted an unusual wren in a limestone area 26 km north of Ocozocoautla on the Caribbean slope of western Chiapas. Allan R. Phillips, who was present at the time, suspected that it was Sumichrast's Wren which had, however, never been recorded from Chiapas or adjacent Oaxaca. In December 1970 and January 1971, six Sumichrast's Wrens were collected at the 1969 locality, which is approximately 250 air miles from previous collecting sites. All specimens were taken from a single locality in heavy, as yet relatively untouched, humid evergreen forest along the Mal Paso road. Upon comparison, the Chiapas birds prove to be quite different from the old Veracruz specimens. Although the Veracruz specimens have foxed considerably in the years since their collection, they nevertheless still resemble the description published by Ridgway (1904)

more closely than do recent specimens from Chiapas. (In the diagnosis below the colors of *H. s. sumichrasti* are from Ridgway's description rather than from the specimens examined as they now appear). Even with postmortem changes taken into account, the Chiapas birds clearly represent a distinctly different form, lighter-colored below, with distinct wing and tail barring, which may be known as:

## *Hylorchilus sumichrasti navai*, new subspecies

*Type.* Adult female Neotropical Ornithological Foundation No. 3581, taken 26 km N of Ocozocoautla (elevation 2500 ft), state of Chiapas, México, 4 January 1971. Collected by Juan Nava Solario, R. S. Crossin number 4025. Weight 29.3 g, ovary 6 × 3 mm, granular, oviduct used previously.

*Diagnosis.* Differs from nominate *H. sumichrasti* in having the entire throat and upper breast whitish instead of pale Wood Brown or Isabella Color gradually deepening to Raw Umber brown or light Vandyke Brown on chest (capitalized color terms are from Ridgway 1912). The whitish color, faintly tinged with Dresden Brown or grayish on the breast, extends posteriorly to merge with the white spotting of the Raw Umber abdomen. This is in sharp contrast to the nominate form in which the color of the breast gradually deepens to deep Mummy Brown on the lower portion and abdomen. Two of nine specimens have a faint bar of Dresden Brown across the upper breast. The white spots of the lower breast and abdomen are minute (1-1.5 mm) and distinct in *H. s. sumichrasti*, but are relatively large (2-3 mm) and somewhat blurred in *navai*. Distinct black barring is present on the rectrices of *navai* in contrast to the uni-

←  
*Hylorchilus sumichrasti navai*, a new subspecies of Sumichrast's Wren. From a painting by John P. O'Neill.



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TABLE 1. Measurements<sup>a</sup> in millimeters of adult *Hylorchilus sumichrasti*.

		Wing (chord)		Tail		Exposed culmen		Tarsus	
<i>H. s.</i>									
<i>sumichrasti</i>									
Veracruz									
	♂ ♂	(8)	64.0 - 70.6		39.0 - 47.5		25.0 - 26.9		28.5 - 30.2
			66.9 ± 1.94		44.4 ± 2.33		26.2 ± 0.64		29.1 ± 0.53
	♀ ♀	(8)	62.2 - 70.5		39.0 - 47.8		25.2 - 27.4		27.5 - 29.1
			65.5 ± 2.19		42.1 ± 2.26		26.1 ± 0.59		28.1 ± 0.54
<i>H. s. navai</i>									
Chiapas									
	♂ ♂	(6)	67.1 - 68.0	(5)	39.2 - 43.4	(5)	27.2 - 28.0	(6)	29.7 - 31.5
			68.4 ± 1.18		41.2 ± 1.89		27.6 ± 0.44		30.6 ± 0.67
	♀ ♀	(2)	64.0 - 65.7		39.5 - 40.6		26.2 - 26.7		27.5 - 30.0
			64.9 ± 10.80		40.5 ± 6.99		26.5 ± 3.18		28.8 ± 15.88

<sup>a</sup> Range and means (with 95% confidence limits).

form sooty brown tail of *sumichrasti*. The black barring of the remiges is considerably more pronounced in *navai*. The feet and legs are charcoal brown, the irides are dark brown, and the bill is black, except for the basal half of the lower mandible, which is ivory.

*Distribution.* Presently known only from the type locality.

*Measurements.* Measurements of the type are: wing (chord) 65.7 mm; tail 40.6 mm; exposed culmen 26.7 mm; tarsus 27.5 mm. Measurements of all adult specimens examined, including seven paratypes of *navai*, are given above (table 1). Two immatures and a juvenile of the nominate race in the Moore Collection, Occidental College, and an immature *navai* are not included.

Measurements of the small series of *navai* suggest that it may average slightly larger than the nominate form in Veracruz, but there is a broad overlap of all measurements. Males of *H. sumichrasti* average slightly larger than females in most characters.

*Remarks.* We are pleased to name this subspecies for Juan Nava Solario, who, through his devotion to learning the birds of his native México, has earned the admiration and respect of numerous American ornithologists.

The monotypic genus *Hylorchilus* has been placed by most authors (Ridgway 1904; Mayr and Greenway 1960; Miller et al. 1957) between the genera *Catherpes* and *Microcerculus*. We are not familiar with living *Microcerculus*, which Slud (1964) describes as a "very peculiar" wren with the habit of teetering its hind quarters like the Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleuca*). This we did not see in *Hylorchilus*. Both are similar in being shy, solitary birds of the forest floor, more often heard than seen, but their habitat preferences are apparently quite different. Re-

cently, a *Microcerculus* was netted in thick undergrowth at the edge of a forest clearing and adjoining occupied *Hylorchilus* habitat (Max C. Thompson, pers. comm.).

In habits and call, Sumichrast's Wren shows close affinities to the Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*). It differs significantly from the Canyon Wren, however, in having a short rounded tail (outermost rectrices average ca. 10 mm shorter than the long middle rectrices) with spike-like feathers, and in having only 10 rectrices as opposed to 12 in the Canyon Wren. Ridgway (1904) was unable to describe the tail of *H. sumichrasti* from Nelson's two specimens since only one had any surviving rectrices and these numbered only five.

Very little is known of the habits of *H. sumichrasti*. Nelson (1897) credits them with inhabiting "the gloomiest recesses of the heavy tropical forest, keeping about jutting rocks on steep hillsides, where the forest is so dense that the undergrowth is sparse and the sun scarcely penetrates to the ground." W. W. Brown (Bangs and Peters 1927) with a special effort took a series of 38 from March through May 1925 near Presidio, Veracruz. Birds were found in heavy, humid forest on broken slopes strewn with huge rocks and deep pits. Between May 6 and 20 he found three nests, each with three white eggs at various stages of incubation, in crevices of rocks and caves.

The Chiapas locality is similar; wrens were restricted exclusively to patches of limestone outcroppings, where they appeared to spend the majority of their time foraging in and about the small caves formed by the rocks and vegetation. They are true "troglodytes" in the original sense of the word. The call is a loud metallic "peenk," which the birds utter at intervals while moving about. As the

call is uttered, the birds perform a bouncing crouch, similar to that of Canyon Wrens. Without knowledge of the call note, a field worker would very likely never suspect the birds' presence. This probably accounts for the late discovery in the Chiapas locality where several competent field workers have collected in recent years. The method employed in collecting most of the present series was to hear a bird call and then wait among the limestone rocks in its "territory." The birds would typically call in an alarmed manner at regular intervals, demonstrating their awareness of the observer, but a wait of 25–30 min before a bird showed itself was not uncommon. Until a bird appeared at close range, it could not be seen in the dense foliage and rocks. On other occasions, a bird would stop calling and apparently quietly leave the area. The birds were not wary, but in most cases seemed reluctant to leave the dense cover.

Single birds were heard regularly at several localities within the forest during late December and early January 1970–71. However, none was seen or heard during 6 days of work by Crossin during mid-August 1971. In mid-winter 1971–72, at least 10 individuals were heard but only a few were actually sighted.

The type locality of *navai* is a relatively small patch of uncut humid evergreen forest of not more than a few square miles on the Mal Paso Road leading from Ocozocoautla to Lago Mal Paso. Other interesting species found in the tract were Black Hawk-Eagle (*Spizaetus tyrannus*), Black Chachalaca (*Penelopina nigra*), Stripe-tailed Hummingbird (*Eupherusa eximia*), Ruddy Woodcreeper (*Dendrocincla homochroa*), Scaly-throated Leafscrapper (*Sclerurus guatemalensis*), and Slaty-headed Tody Flycatcher (*Todirostrum sylvia*). The vast majority of forest between Ocozocoautla and the lake has been cut and converted to grazing or agriculture. The presence of abundant, large, craggy limestone outcroppings in the uncut tract is apparently the reason the forest still exists, although some cutting for *cafetales* along the edge is presently occurring.

*H. s. navai* probably occurs in favorable habitat at moderate elevations in other parts of western Chiapas and possibly in eastern Oaxaca. The rapidly occurring destruction of

its forest habitat, however, will severely limit its future distribution. Certainly all suitable habitat has been destroyed along the *trans-istmo* highway across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec which separates the range of the Veracruz-Oaxaca form from the Chiapas form.

*Specimens examined.* *Hylorchilus sumichrasti sumichrasti*; Veracruz, 21: La Gloria, 10 miles SW Presidio, 3000 ft, 3; Rancho Caracol, 30 miles S Tezonapa, 900 ft, 1; Presidio, 17. Oaxaca, 1: Soyaltepec, 600 m.

*Hylorchilus sumichrasti navai*; Chiapas, 9: 26 km N Ocozocoautla, ca. 2500 ft.

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