

A NEST OF THE RUFIOUS-VENTED GROUND-CUCKOO (*NEOMORPHUS GEOFFROYI*)

PAUL ROTH

Although the eggs of the Rufous-winged Ground-Cuckoo (*Neomorphus rufipennis*) are known (Schönwetter, *Handbuch der Oologie*, Vol. 1, 1964), to my knowledge no nest of *Neomorphus* has been described. In fact, until 1942 when Sick (p. 229–239 in *Ornithologie als biologische Wissenschaft*, Stresemann-Festschrift, Winter/Unitätsverlag, Heidelberg, 1949) observed a pair of Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoos (*N. geoffroyi*) accompanied by their young, it was uncertain whether ground-cuckoos incubated their eggs or were brood parasites.

On 1 September 1977, during my work at the Núcleo Pioneiro Humboldt (10°19'S, 59°12'W) on the Aripuanã River in the northern part of Mato Grosso, Brazil, I discovered the nest of a ground-cuckoo 2.5 m above the ground, well hidden in the foliage over a narrow jungle path. This path followed a small tributary of the river through swampy woodland ("igapó") consisting of dense second growth, which was about 10 m in height and appeared to have been cut within the last 20 years.

The nest was situated in an upright fork of a "cin-



FIGURE 1. The nest and egg of the Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo (*Neomorphus geoffroyi*). The yellowish-white egg is conspicuous in the midst of fresh, green leaves.

teiro" shrub (*Miconia* cf. *regelii*) approximately 5 m high. It was loosely constructed of large twigs and had a flat cup, the bottom of which was lined with dry foliage covered with fresh, green leaves. The nest's diameter was 25 cm; the diameter of the cup, 12 cm. On all later visits the nest contained fresh, green leaves. The periodic addition of leaves to the nest lining is also reported for Smooth-billed Anis (*Crotophaga ani*; Köster, *Bonn. Zool. Beitr.* 22:4–27, 1971). The nest was similar in structure, but smaller and flatter, than that of the closely related Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*; Sutton, in Bent, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 176:36–51, 1940).

The nest contained a single yellowish-white egg which measured 32 × 40 mm. These dimensions are within the range given by Schönwetter (1964) for the Rufous-winged Ground-Cuckoo (8 eggs, range = [29.2 to 32.0] × [37.1 to 41.5] mm, mean = 30.8 × 40.1 mm).

On subsequent visits, I observed a bird sitting quietly on the egg. I identified it as a Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo by its yellowish-green bill. (This characteristic and a blue-green bare face distinguish this species from *N. pucheranii*, which has an orange or red bill and red markings on the face.)

On 3 September I photographed the nest, egg, and the site (Fig. 1). However, the dense foliage around the nest prevented me from photographing the incubating bird. The cuckoo normally sat motionless, crouched so deeply in the nest that it was just possible to see its eye and beak. When approached cautiously, it crouched more, but remained sitting. It left the nest only if I made an awkward movement or noise. In departing, it always slipped over the edge of the nest, dropped to the ground, and hurried away without taking flight. I presume that two important considerations for nest site selection in this species are space beneath the nest for easy departure and dense surrounding vegetation to provide concealment.

At 10:00 on 9 September the nest was empty, and eggshell and a number of feathers of the adult bird were on the ground beneath it. The nest was dry, although there had been a heavy rainfall during the preceding night. I surmise that the bird was surprised by a predator while incubating during the early morning.

I am indebted to Helmut Sick for critically reading the manuscript. I thank the Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazônia and its director at that time, Warwick E. Kerr, for supporting my work at the Núcleo Pioneiro Humboldt.

Zoologisches Museum, Wissenschaftliche Abteilung, Universität Zürich-Irchel, Winterthurerstrasse 190, CH-8057 Zürich, Switzerland. Accepted for publication 23 February 1981.