

Birds of El Triunfo Cloud Forest, Mexico, with notes on the Horned Guan and other species

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Fig. 1. Rugged terrain near El Triunfo. View to NE from above settlement. Photo/S. Hilty.

As the cloud forests of Mexico and Central America rapidly disappear, the need for preserving remaining areas and documenting the abundance and ecology of resident species becomes increasingly important. The Sierra Madre de Chiapas of southern Mexico should be of particular interest to conservationists because of the extensive humid montane woodlands that remain there, particularly on the Pacific slope between 1500 and 2500 meters (Subtropical Zone). The endangered Horned Guan and little known Azure-rumped Tanager dwell exclusively here and in the highlands of adjacent Guatemala. In 1973 and 1974 we backpacked to one locality in this infrequently visited region, and present in the following paper a list of the bird species we found there, along with some indication of their relative abundance, habitat preferences and breeding status. In addition, our observations of the Horned Guan supplement previous work by R. Andrle (1966. Horned Guan in Mexico and Guatemala. *Condor* 69: 93-109).

El Triunfo (1800 m) is a small settlement on the trail across the Sierra Madre between Mapastepec and Finca Prusia, Chiapas, Mexico. Situated near the crest of the Sierra some fifty kilometers northeast of the Pacific Ocean, the cloud forest here is remote and, at present, relatively undisturbed (Figure 1). Unusually tall, epiphyte-laden trees grow in profusion on the slopes and in the valleys. This primary forest alternates with an

elfin woodland that characterizes the exposed ridge crests above 1900 meters. While the understory of the forest is rather sparse in most places, dense thickets of secondary growth border the settlement clearing and make hiking along the ridges difficult. During the mild dry season which extends from December to early May dense fog settles in over the area on most afternoons, leaving the shaded recesses of the forest cool and quite damp. For a more detailed description of the habitats in the El Triunfo area see Andrle (op. cit.). We should also mention that mixed broadleaf and coniferous woodlands (and pure stands of pine) occur locally near here, but usually lower on the western and eastern slopes. Species inhabiting the coniferous zone are not dealt with in this paper.

Twenty-eight of the sixty resident species that we observed at El Triunfo are restricted to the forested highlands (mainly cloud forest) from southern Mexico to Nicaragua. Considering the rapid rate of habitat destruction in this portion of Middle America it is likely that many of these "endemics" (indicated by boldface type in the systematic list) will ultimately become endangered if steps are not

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taken to permanently preserve suitable forest like that of El Triunfo.

The dates of our visits were as follows: April 18-22, 1973 (T. Parker, M. Robbins, J. Greenberg, D. Hayward) and May 30 to June 2, 1974 (S. Hilty, M. Robbins, M. Barnhill, D. Cook, A. Mack, H. Morrin).

During the April sojourn fifteen species of North American migrants were noted including an interesting mixture of eastern and western wood warblers. Also, one bird of the coniferous forests nearby (Red-tailed Hawk) and three species of tropical birds that probably do not breed in the immediate area were seen flying over the settlement clearing (Figure 2). These are listed as visitants. All of the birds in the lists that follow were seen within one mile of the clearing between 1700 and 2000 meters.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF BIRD SPECIES

Key to observed relative abundance: C—Common, seen or heard frequently every day; FC—Fairly Common, seen or heard every day but not in numbers; U—Uncommon, not recorded every day; R—Rare, encountered less than three times.

Indication of habitat preference: f—primary forest; sg—secondary growth at the forest edge around the clearing.

Indication of breeding (nests or stub-tailed young found): *- in April; **- in June.

RESIDENTS⁴

White-breasted Hawk, *Accipiter striatus chionogaster* R, f

Black Penelopina or **Highland Guan**, *Penelopina nigra* FC, f

Horned Guan, *Oreophasis derbianus* R, f,*

Singing Quail, *Dactylortyx thoracicus* FC, f

Band-tailed Pigeon, *Columba fasciata* FC, f

White-faced Quail-Dove, *Geotrygon albifacies* C,f

Barred Parakeet, *Bolborhynchus lineola* U (April), f

Fulvous Owl, *Strix fulvescens* FC, f

Violet Sabrewing, *Campylopterus hemileucurus* FC, f

Green Violet-ear, *Colibri thalassinus* C, sg

Amethyst-throated Hummingbird, *Lampornis amethystinus* FC, sg

Green-throated Mountain-gem, *Lampornis viridipallens* FC, f-sg

Garnet-throated Hummingbird, *Lamprolaima rhami* FC, f (ridges)



Fig. 2. Forest bordering the settlement. Photo/T. Parker

Magnificent Hummingbird, *Eugenes fulgens* U, f
Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird, *Tilmatura dupon-tii* R, sg

Wine-throated Hummingbird, *Atthis ellioti* U, sg

Resplendent Quetzal, *Pharomachrus mocinno* U, f

Mountain Trogon, *Trogon mexicanus* C, f

Elegant Trogon, *Trogon elegans* R, f (resident ?)

Blue-throated Motmot, *Aspatha gularis* FC, f, **

Emerald Toucanet, *Aulacorhynchus prasinus* FC, f

Acorn Woodpecker, *Melanerpes formicivorus* U, f (edge)

Hairy Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos villosus* U, f

Spotted Woodcreeper, *Xiphorhynchus erythropygius* R, f (ridges)

Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, *Lepidocolaptes affinis* C,f, *(figure 3)

Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner, *Anabacerthia variegaticeps* FC, f

Ruddy Foliage-gleaner, *Automolus rubiginosus* R, f

Tawny-throated Leafscraper, *Sclerurus mexicanus* FC, f, **

Scaled Antpitta, *Grallaria guatemalensis* R, f

Rose-throated Becard, *Platypsaris aglaiae* FC, f (edge), *,**

Yellowish Flycatcher, *Empidonax flavescens* FC, f, *, **

Tufted Flycatcher, *Mitrephanes phaeocercus* C, f, sg, *,**

Paltry Tyrannulet, *Tyranniscus vilissimus* FC, f (edge), sg,*,**

Black-capped Swallow, *Notiochelidon pileata* FC (aerial)

Unicolored Jay, *Aphelocoma unicolor* R, f

Black-throated Jay, *Cyanolyca pumilo* U, f

Rufous-browed Wren, *Troglodytes rufociliatus* C, f, sg

Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, *Henicorhina leucophrys* C, f

⁴ Names conform largely to Eisenmann, E. 1955. The Species of Middle American Birds. *Trans. Linn. Soc. N. Y.* 7:1-128.

Blue-and-white Mockingbird, *Melanotis hypoleucus* U, sg
 Clay-colored Robin, *Turdus grayi* U (April), C (June), sg (resident ?)
 Mountain Robin, *Turdus plebejus* U, f (ridges)
Black Robin *Turdus infuscatus* C, f, sg,*
Brown-backed Solitaire, *Myadestes obscurus* C, f,*
 Spotted Nightingale-Thrush, *Catharus dryas* FC, f (ravines)
 Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, *Catharus frantzii* FC, f
Gray Silky-flycatcher, *Ptilogonys cinereus* C, f
Cinnamon-bellied Flower-piercer, *Diglossa baritula* U, sg
Crescent-chested Warbler, *Vermivora superciliosa* U, f (ridges)
 Slate-throated Redstart, *Myioborus miniatus* C, f, sg, **
Golden-browed Warbler, *Basileuterus belli* C, f, *, **
Blue-crowned Chlorophonia, *Chlorophonia occipitalis* U, f, **
 Hepatic Tanager, *Piranga flava* U, f
 Flame-colored Tanager, *Piranga bidentata* FC, f
 Common Bush-Tanager, *Chlorospingus ophthalmicus* C, f, **
 Yellow Grosbeak, *Pheucticus chrysopleps* C, sg, *
Hooded Grosbeak, *Hesperiphona abeillei* FC, f (edge)
Black-headed Siskin, *Spinus notatus* C (April), sg, f
 Yellow-throated Brush-Finch, *Atlapetes gutturalis* U, sg
 Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, *Atlapetes brunneinucha* FC, f, **
 Rufous-collared Sparrow, *Zonotrichia capensis* C, sg



Fig. 3. *Spot-crowned Woodcreeper* (*Lepidocolaptes affinis*). Photo/S. Hilty.

(Note: In the humid forest below El Triunfo (1000-1500m) to the west, along the trail to Mapastepec, we encountered a number of additional species that apparently do not occur (at least regularly) above 1600 meters. Most of these are characteristic of the Upper Tropical Zone woodlands here. A partial list includes Crested Guan (*Penelope purpurascens*), Rufous Sabrewing (*Campylopterus rufus*), Emerald-chinned Hummingbird (*Abeillia abeillei*), Gray-collared Becard (*Pachyramphus major*), Rufous-and-white Wren (*Thryothorus rufalbus*), White-throated Robin (*Turdus assimilis*), Azure-rumped Tanager (*Tangara cabanisi*), White-winged Tanager (*Piranga leucoptera*) and White-eared Ground-Sparrow (*Melospiza leucotis*). Some of these may occur at El Triunfo from time to time.)

MIGRANTS (All observed in April; most seen in second growth)

Olive-sided Flycatcher, *Contopus borealis* U
Contopus spp. (Wood Pewee) U
Empidonax spp. (probably Least Flycatcher) R
 Hermit Thrush, *Catharus guttatus* U
 Swainson's Thrush, *Catharus ustulatus* C
 Cedar Waxwing, *Bombocilla cedrorum* C
 Tennessee Warbler, *Vermivora peregrina* C
 Nashville Warbler, *Vermivora ruficapilla* FC
 Townsend's Warbler, *Dendroica townsendi* C
 Black-throated Green Warbler, *Dendroica virens* R
 Blackburnian Warbler, *Dendroica fusca* (one male, April 22)
 Northern Waterthrush, *Seiurus noveboracensis* U
 MacGillivray's Warbler, *Oporornis tolmiei* R
 Wilson's Warbler, *Wilsonia pusilla* C
 Dickcissel, *Spiza americana* (one male, April 18)

VISITANTS

Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*
 Green Parakeet, *Aratinga holochlora*
 White-collared Swift, *Streptoprocne zonaris*
 Vaux's Swift, *Chaetura vauxi*

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Black Penelopina or **Highland Guan**, *Penelopina nigra*. This species is still relatively common in the forest within a few hundred yards of the settlement (see Andrieu, op. cit.). We encountered groups of three to five individuals in both April and June, but their characteristic ascending whistled call was heard only in April

Further, single excited females were observed in April, strengthening the belief that breeding takes place here at that time. Its presence in numbers suggests that hunting pressure and destruction of the forest understory have not yet markedly diminished the population here.

Horned Guan, *Oreophasis derbianus*. On April 20, 1973, we observed one adult along a stream in a narrow, deep ravine south of the settlement. Generally our observations of this individual closely parallel those of Andrlé (op. cit.). For nearly thirty minutes the bird flew about us excitedly, sometimes approaching to within thirty-five feet. At first it was very active, running and hopping along the limbs of slender saplings bordering the stream. Then, after much head lowering, tail spreading and calling, the guan flew up into a tall tree where it perched calmly on a massive limb about twenty meters above the ground. While confronting us, this guan uttered two distinct vocalizations in addition to the previously reported mandible clacking. Before approaching closely, it gave the *Crax*-like deep humming notes (in a series: 'um-uuuum-um') reported by Andrlé. As it flew back and forth in front of us, a loud, low-pitched 'raaaw' was uttered several times. In quality this call reminds Parker of the primary call of the Wattled Guan (*Aburria aburri*). Periods of calling were interrupted by five to ten seconds of mandible clacking. Its behavior suggested the presence of a nearby nest or young.

On April 21 while we camped about ten miles west of and below the settlement, some men brought us two downy young Horned Guans (figure 4) which they said were found on the ground in the forest near El Triunfo. These downy chicks appeared to be less than two weeks old and, although flightless, were capable of escaping us by running swiftly on the ground and crouching in the leaf litter. Since the downy plumage of this species has not been described in the literature, we give the following color notes: overall body color (natal down) dark chestnut-brown; wings and tail (feathers all unsheathed) glossy black, wing coverts edged narrowly with and outer web of secondaries spotted with chestnut (wing pattern very similar to that of *Crax globulosa* chick pictured on p. 17 of *Curassows and Related Birds* by Delacour and Amadon, New York, American Museum of Natural History, 1973); iris dull gray; bill yellow with blackish base; legs raspberry red.

Both individuals were taken to Tuxtla Gutierrez and presented to Miguel Alvarez del Toro, Director of the Instituto de Historia Natural and



Fig. 4. Downy young of Horned Guan (*Oreophasis derbianus*). Photo/T. Parker.

the Parque Zoologico. One of these birds survives there today, a living symbol of the growing conservation sentiment in Mexico.

The survival of the Horned Guan in the immediate vicinity of El Triunfo may be threatened less by hunters than by the introduction and rapid increase of cattle which trample the forest undergrowth. Unfortunately we do not know how much time this species spends on the ground, but a total conservation effort should at least require the elimination of cattle from this area.

Resplendent Quetzal, *Pharomachrus mocinno*
In April we estimated a population of no fewer than four pairs within one mile of the settlement. On April mornings at least two males were calling within earshot of the clearing. In June the species was silent and very difficult to find, although we observed what we thought to be family groups. Presumably nesting takes place in March-April. Fortunately the local residents seem to hold this diminishing species in high esteem and do not kill the quetzal.

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