

**FIRST RECORDS OF MASKED MOUNTAIN-TANAGER  
 (*BUTHRAUPIS WETMOREI*) AND BLACK-BACKED BUSH-  
 TANAGER (*UROTHRAUPIS STOLZMANNI*) (THRAUPINAE) FOR  
 NARIÑO, SOUTHWESTERN COLOMBIA**

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the first distributional records of Masked Mountain-Tanager (*Buthraupis wetmorei*) and Black-backed Bush-Tanager (*Urothraupis stolzmanni*) for Nariño, southwestern Colombia. The records contribute to the knowledge of the distribution and ecology of these two Andean tanager species, which are both in decline and, in case of the Masked Mountain-Tanager, considered rare and vulnerable (Collar *et al.* 1992, 1994).

The observations were made during a study of the biogeography and altitudinal migration of *Thraupinae* tanagers conducted in 1996–1998 on the pacific slope of the Andes in Nariño.

*Masked Mountain-Tanager.* The new distributional record for the vulnerable (Collar *et al.* 1994) Masked Mountain-Tanager is from the southeast slope of the Volcán Galeras in extreme southwestern Colombia. Situated 8 km west of Pasto, capital of the department of Nariño, the observation site (01°12'89"N,

77°20'93"W) lies at an altitude of 3450 m.

Including the new record, the Masked Mountain-Tanager is known from seven areas in southern Colombia, Ecuador and northernmost Peru (Collar *et al.* 1992). Previous Colombian records are from the southern end of the Central Andes in Cauca and Huila departments in or near Puracé National Park (02°24'N, 76°23'W). The northernmost Ecuadorian record is from the west slope of Cerro Mongus (3400–3500 m) in southeastern Carchi province (00°22'N, 77°52'W) (Hilty & Silliman 1983, Hilty & Brown 1986, Collar *et al.* 1992, Wege & Long 1995).

The Masked Mountain-Tanager inhabits very humid páramo-forest ecotone, especially mossy stunted elfin and treeline forest (Collar *et al.* 1992) at elevations of 2900 to 3650 m (Isler & Isler 1987). Formerly, the species may have occurred at higher elevations, but human activities, particularly burning of páramo grasslands, have in places lowered the treeline several hundred meters and narrowed the species' ecotonal habitat (Collar *et al.* 1992, 1994).

Our observation of this species was made near the transition from elfin forest to páramo at the edge of a dry lake bed. From this 3450 m level, elfin forest extends vertically c. another 200 m to a point where treeline again meets páramo habitat.

The southeast slope of the Volcán Galeras was visited on 8 November 1997. Weather conditions were misty and rainy. At 14:10 h, a pair of Masked Mountain-Tanagers was observed at a distance of 30 m following a mixed flock with Black-backed Bush-Tanagers (see below), Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanagers (*Anisognathus igniventris*), Slaty Brush-Finches (*Atlapetes schistaceus*), and Black-capped Tyrannulets (*Phyllomyias nigrocapillus*). The two Masked Mountain-Tanagers foraged in the tops of dense bushes and in open canopy along branches thickly covered with moss. Their movements appeared rather slow and heavy. After 3 min of observation, both birds crossed a 20-m wide gap in the vegetation. Unfortunately, it was not possible to follow the mixed flock because of the dense vegetation. It was our second visit to this area. During our first visit, on 1 March 1997, the species was not recorded.

*Black-backed Bush-Tanager.* The species was newly recorded for the department of Nariño on 1 March 1997 on the southeast slope of the Volcán Galeras (01°12'N, 77°20'W). On the authors' second visit to this locality on 8 November 1997, the species was again observed.

Previously, the Black-backed Bush-Tanager was reported from a few sites in eastern Ecuador and from the Colombian Central Andes in the departments of Caldas (Leonera), Quindío (Santa Isabel) and Cauca (Puracé National Park), at altitudes of 3000–3600 m (Fjeldsa & Krabbe 1990). The species had been expected for Nariño (Hilty & Brown 1986, Ridgely & Tudor 1989), but until now no records existed.

The Black-backed Bush-Tanager is fairly common in the Galeras area. On both visits, it was found with mixed flocks. Groups of 5–8 individuals accompanied flocks with Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanagers, Cinereous Conebills (*Conirostrum cinereum*), Blue-backed Conebills (*C. sitticolor*), Black Flower-Piercers (*Diglossa humeralis*), Slaty Brush-Finches, Golden-fronted Redstarts (*Myioborus ornatus*), Black-capped Tyrannulets, and Tawny-rumped Tyrannulets (*P. uropygialis*). On 8 November 1997, 8 individuals were observed at 3450 m in a flock including Masked Mountain-Tanagers (see above). They feed at low heights (1–3 m) in thick bushes and small trees. The species was found in elfin forest close to the treeline (3500 m), but also at lower altitudes (3200 m) in overgrown pastures with dense hedges and bushes.

Collar *et al.* (1992) note that the habitat requirements of the species are similar to those of the Masked Mountain-Tanager and that, therefore, the former has also been seriously affected by destruction of habitat in the páramo-forest ecotone.

## DISCUSSION

The intermontane plateaus around Pasto have been cleared extensively for agriculture (cattle-ranching, potato farming). Some areas, especially the northwest slope of Volcán Galeras, have been reforested with exotic pine (*Pinus*) species. Only on the most inaccessible slopes above 3200 m do some small fragments of temperate forest remain.

Part of the Volcán Galeras area above 3200 m has been well protected since 1985 by inclusion in the 17600 ha Galeras Fauna and Flora Sanctuary (01°13'N, 77°17'W). Another vulnerable species (Collar *et al.* 1994), the Golden-plumed Parakeet (*Leptosittaca branickii*), is recorded for this reserve (Wege & Long 1995).

The observation site of the Masked

Mountain-Tanager lies close to the reserve boundary on the volcano's southeastern slope. Some tourism takes place in the vicinity especially around Laguna Negra, which attracts sport-fishermen and hikers. Entrance to the reserve requires special permission of the office for National Parks in Pasto.

On 21 November 1997, from a point of embarkation near the main entrance of the sanctuary, the east slope of the Volcán Galeras was checked for habitats which meet the requirements of the Masked Mountain-Tanager. In two small valleys lying between 3400–3600 m, forest patches were found which closely resemble the habitat type on the southeast slope where the species was recorded. There are also apparently little-disturbed areas of páramo-forest ecotone on the west slope.

Repeated burning of páramo-forest ecotone like in other parts of the range of the Masked Mountain-Tanager seems not to take place in the Volcán Galeras area currently, so the remaining habitats appear to be unthreatened.

An extensive investigation of the avifauna of the Galeras Fauna and Flora Sanctuary is in preparation.

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