

FIRST DESCRIPTION OF THE NEST FOR THE BICOLORED ANTVIREO (*DYSITHAMNUS OCCIDENTALIS*), WITH NOTES ON ITS BEHAVIOR IN EASTERN ECUADOR

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Primera descripción del nido del Batarito Bicolor (*Dysithamnus occidentalis*), con notas sobre su comportamiento en el este del Ecuador.

Key words: *Dysithamnus occidentalis*, Ecuador, nesting biology, behavior.

Extremely little is known about the Bicolored Antvireo (*Dysithamnus occidentalis*) and, due to extensive habitat loss, it has been categorized as 'globally threatened and vulnerable' by Collier *et al.* (1994). Until its recent rediscovery in eastern Ecuador, this bird was virtually unknown outside of museum specimens (Whitney 1992). In fact, Whitney's comments remain the only recent data for this species.

The Bicolored Antvireo, like many formicariids, is shy and infrequently observed. In our area, it prefers the dark, understory tangles created by tree falls, landslides, and human disturbance (Whitney 1992). It is known only from a few localities in western Colombia and from a few sites on both slopes of the Andes in Ecuador (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). One of the best areas to encounter this species is in the Quijos Valley near the birding lodge, Hacienda San Isidro. San Isidro lies just outside the small town of Cosanga in the Napo Province at an elevation of around 2000 m. In this area, much of the forest along major travel routes has been disturbed or cleared, but large tracts of primary forest remain, including the Sumaco and Antisana National Parks and the private reserve of Hacienda San Isidro and the Yanayacu Bio-

logical Station and Center for Creative Studies.

On 22 December 2000, a nest was discovered approximately 5 km east of the town of Cosanga. It was located in a large tract of undisturbed forest, 20 m from the edge of a small river. At the bottom of a small drainage, the area around the nest was dominated by small herbs and understory trees typical of swampy areas at that elevation. The canopy cover above the nest was undisturbed, composed mostly of *Vismia* (Guttiferae), *Solanum* (Solanaceae), *Myrica* (Myricaceae), and *Nectandra* (Lauraceae) trees typical of the area. Due in part to its location in a north-south oriented depression, I estimate the nest was well shaded throughout the day.

The nest was located in the horizontal fork of a small *Piper* (Piperaceae) plant 1.6 m above the ground (Fig. 1). The simple, cup-shaped nest was constructed entirely of small, black rootlets and attached to the plant by only a small margin along the rim so that it hung down between the fork. It was roughly circular and had an outside diameter of 9.4 cm and an inside diameter of 7.7 cm. The cup was 3.9 cm deep and the nest was 6.5 cm tall overall. A single nestling was present.



FIG. 1. Bicolored Antvireo (*Dysithamnus occidentalis*) on its nest.

The activity of adults around the nest was observed on two separate occasions (Fig. 1). On the first, at around 12:00 h (EST) on the day of discovery, both parents visited the nest. Both adults approached the nest simultaneously from opposite sides, skulking low in the vegetation. The male went directly to the nest while the female circled around and remained quietly out of sight. The male remained brooding on the nest for approximately 10 min, at which point the female approached, the male flew off, and the female entered. She remained brooding for about 10 min until flushed by my approach. The nest was again visited at around 07:00 h on 27 December 2000. The nest was observed for nearly one hour during which time both adults visited the nest four times each. This time the birds did not enter the nest but

remained perched on the rim for several minutes while feeding the nestling. Both birds seemed aware of the observers' presence and called repeatedly while approaching the nest. On all four visits to the nest, the male approached first. Both adults approached from below the nest. On two occasions the female was observed to remove a fecal sack from the nest when she flew away. Begging calls were extremely muted and not audible from more than ten meters away.

In our area M. Lysinger (unpubl. data) reports this species as rare to uncommon, but easily overlooked. Pairs are often quite vocal as they travel and, while these calls are soft and muted, this is usually the best way to locate the species. Bicolored Antvireos forage in thick undergrowth where they glean insects from the foliage. Both the male and female

have been seen giving two call types. The most commonly heard is a gravelly three to five note “*cher-cher-cher...*” that is most punctuated at the beginning and then drops off in pitch and forcefulness. The other is a bubbly, whistled, short series of three to four notes that slur up in pitch. There does not seem to be any recording of a true song. Previously, the only known breeding data for this species in the area were two unpublished observations by M. Lysinger. One was of a dependent juvenile being actively fed by a pair of adults in November 1995 and the other was of a young male traveling with a pair in early March of 1997.

The generic placement of the Bicolored Antvireo, formerly known as Western Antshrike and Western Antvireo, has been a source of some confusion. Placed in *Dysithamnus* by Meyer de Schauensee (1964), later switched to *Thamnomanes* (Meyer de Schauensee 1966), it is now considered a *Dysithamnus* (Ridgely & Tudor 1989). Due to similarities in nest construction (Skutch 1969, Skutch *et al.* 1996, Wetmore 1972) and behavior (Whitney 1992) to other *Dysithamnus*, I agree that this species has in fact been properly placed.

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