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Occurrence of the Andean Condor in the Perijá Mountains of Venezuela.—The occurrence of the Andean Condor (*Vultur gryphus*) in Venezuela was first documented by two specimens now in the British Museum which were collected near the city of Mérida (Fig. 1); the most recent was a juvenile taken ca 1912 by Briceño Gabaldón (Swann 1921; Phelps and Phelps, Jr. 1958). Since then, this rare species was thought to be extinct in Venezuela (Phelps, Jr. and Meyer de Schauensee 1979), and Alden (1975) recommended excluding it as occurring in the country. However, on 7 July 1976, Zonfrillo (1977) observed three condors along the road from Mérida to Jají: one near the waterfall at La Chorrera, 30 km from Mérida, and two adults (one male) three km nearer Jají. The area appeared to be good nesting habitat, but no signs of nesting were seen. The birds were considered visitors from the Santa Marta or Andes mountains of Colombia, the nearest known condor breeding localities (Hilty and Brown 1986).

Since 1976, there have been no more sightings near Mérida, and the status of the condor still remains uncertain in Venezuela and in other countries of the Andes Mountains where it is considered in danger of extinction (USFWS 1986). Indeed, in Venezuela and Colombia, few regions seem to remain appropriate for this species due to human intervention, except the high Perijá Mountains that form the frontier between the two countries. It was here, on 27 August 1985 that Leonel Lanier, a mountain climber, ascended to the Páramo of Tetari and observed a condor flying above Torote-jopa Peak (in Venezuela) at an elevation of 3225 m, between 11:00 and 15:00 h. Again in 1986, Lanier conducted an expedition to the Páramo

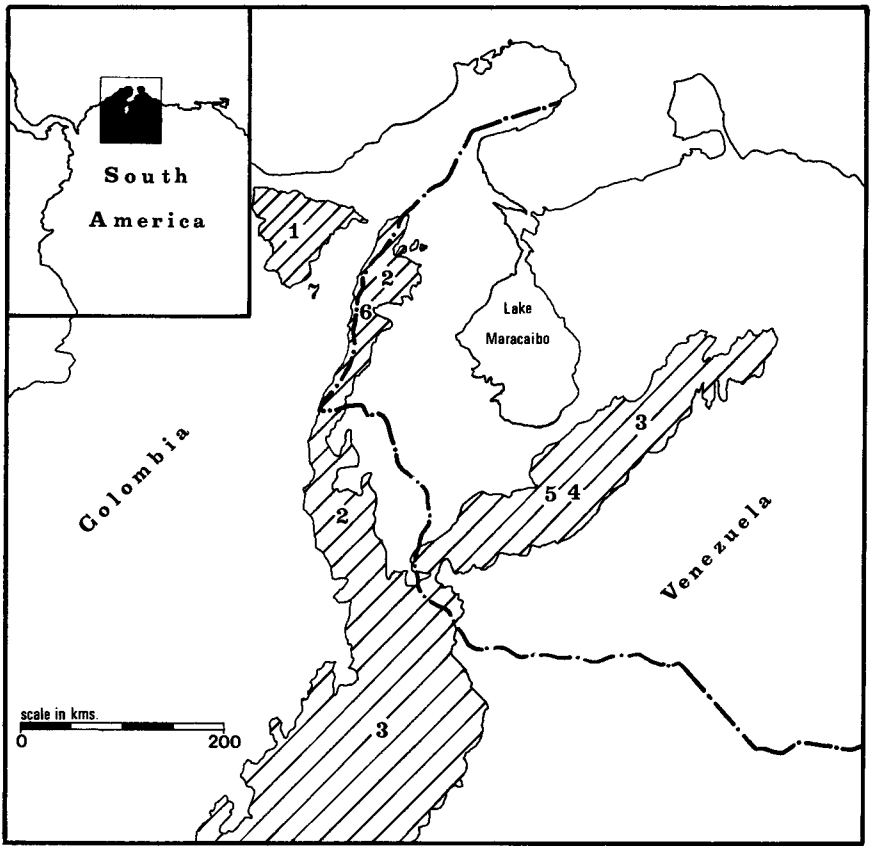

FIG. 1. Map of western Venezuela and adjacent Colombia showing the position of the (1) Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta, (2) Perijá Mountains, (3) Eastern Andes Mountains of Colombia and Venezuela, (4) Mérida, (5) Jají, (6) Páramo of Tetari and Cerro Pintado, and (7) Valledupar. Only mountains above 1000 m are shown.

of Tetari to 3600 m, where he saw a condor resting on a cliff ledge of Torote-jopa Peak on 23 July. Another condor (same bird?) flew over the Páramo on 24 July.

To verify Lanier's sightings, one of the authors (Viloria) ascended to this little known Páramo on 30 Oct. 1989 and at ca 15:30 h observed two adult condors gliding in a circle over the campsite at the base of Rafael Urdaneta Peak (in Venezuela) at 3440 m. Afterwards, the birds flew northward until out of sight. Again, at 18:00 h, a condor passed over the campsite flying southward. On 31 October the weather was foggy, but one condor was observed flying over Tetari Peak, ca 10:00 h.

The high Perijá Mountains, especially the Páramo of Tetari, are appropriate habitat for the condor. There are steep rocky cliffs, deep canyons, and even rocky shelters and caves preferred by this species for nesting and roosting. Human intervention is minimal. Deer

(*Mazama* sp.), rabbits (*Sylvilagus* sp.), and pacas (*Agouti taczanowskii*) are present and could serve as food. There are no domestic animals present such as cattle or goats. A visit was made to the Páramo of Cerro Pintado (ca 3200 m) for three days in March 1989, but no condors were seen. The habitat appeared appropriate, but there was much agricultural activity such as cattle grazing and vegetation burning. However the authors believe Cerro Pintado is within the condor's territory because it is only 22 km north of Tetari Peak, an insignificant distance for a large soaring bird. Also, since condors have been reported from the nearby locality of Valledupar, Colombia (Hilty and Brown 1986), birds in Perijá may fly to and from the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta only 60 km away (Hilty and Brown 1986, Norton 1975).

Perhaps these birds are recent arrivals from Santa Marta, where human disturbance has been increasing, or have always been present in this unexplored area. Successive sightings of Andean Condors in 1985, 1986, and 1989 in the Páramo of Tetari indicate they may be resident. It is noteworthy that no more than three condors have been seen in any one place. Fortunately, the Páramo of Tetari (mostly within Venezuela) is part of the Perijá National Park decreed by the Venezuelan government in 1978.

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