

Unusual records of *Cochlearius cochlearius* (Linnaeus, 1766) (Aves: Ardeidae) in the Andes of Ecuador

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ABSTRACT: We report two high altitude sightings of Boat-billed Heron in the Andes of Ecuador. Based on identification and the localities where the sightings were reported, we suggest that both individuals belong to the Amazonian population of this species.

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The Boat-billed Heron *Cochlearius cochlearius* (Linnaeus, 1766), has a widespread geographic distribution from southern Mexico to southern Brazil and northeastern Argentina (Martínez-Vilalta and Motis 1999). However, its distribution west of the Andes is not well understood. In Venezuela and Colombia, it is found in the northern lowlands (Hilty and Brown 1986; Hilty 2003) and along the lowlands of the Pacific coast (Salaman et al. 2009), with no records from the southern Colombian Chocó (Hilty and Brown 1986).

In Ecuador, there are three historical records west of the Andes: one from Salidero, Esmeraldas province (specimen deposited at the American Museum of Natural History, AMNH-469471, collected in 1901); two from Isla Silva, on the Babahoyo river, Los Ríos province (specimens deposited at the Field Museum, FMNH-77354 and 77355, collected in 1931); and two young birds collected at “Río Blanco, below Mindo”, one in 1908 and another in 1909 (Lönnerberg and Rendahl 1922). However, modern records from these areas are inexistent (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001). There is one additional specimen at the museum of Universidad Politécnica Nacional (EPN894), which locality information is “Occidente”, with no further detail. In Peru, there is a record from the northwest, probably a wanderer from the Amazon basin (Salazar et al. 2006), as well as occasional observations in the coast south of Lima, during the non-breeding season (Martínez-Vilalta and Motis 1999).

Within its known distributional range, *Cochlearius cochlearius* is associated with water bodies of the lowlands (Martínez-Vilalta and Motis 1999). In Ecuador, its altitudinal distribution goes mainly up to 400 m in the Amazon basin (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001). In Colombia, the species occurs up to 800 m in the Pacific Coast; however, vagrants have been recorded at 2600 m at Sabana de Bogotá (Hilty and Brown 1986). The highest record along the entire species range is a skull found at 3600 m in the Andes of Venezuela (Hilty 2003). Here, we

present the first records of this species from the Andean region of Ecuador.

On 12 July 2004, CCB observed an adult of *Cochlearius cochlearius* in the small island of Colay, at Laguna de Atillo, in the west slope of the eastern Andes of Ecuador (02°12' S, 78°31' W), Chimborazo province, at 3400 m. Although this bird could not be identified at the level of subspecies, it might belong to the Amazonian population (*C. c. cochlearius*). This individual may have reached Lagunas de Atillo from the nearby Pastaza river depression, in the Amazon basin.

Five years later, on 13 April 2009 (at 10:26 h), at Bosque de Miraflores, in the east slope of Pichincha volcano, west of Quito (00°12'13.4" S, 78°30'43.1" W), at 2973 m above sea level, DBV and HCO photographed an individual of *Cochlearius cochlearius* perched at an *Eucaliptus* sp. tree (Figure 1). Bosque Miraflores is part of “Bosque Protector Flanco Oriental de Pichincha y Cinturón Verde de Quito”, an area formed by several forests that surround the city of Quito, in the inter-Andean valley of Ecuador. The presence of *C. cochlearius* in this site seemed odd, given that the area is covered by introduced *Eucaliptus* sp. trees, with only small streams nearby. Further observation efforts were conducted during the next week (24 April), when three mist-nets were opened (3 h/net) in the area, but no visual or vocal records were obtained. DBV and HCO kept returning to the area every two weeks for 2 months, but no additional records were obtained.

Based on published information (Martínez-Vilalta and Motis 1999; McMullan and Navarrete 2013), this individual was identified as an immature of the nominal subspecies *Cochlearius cochlearius cochlearius*. Based on this identification, it may have come from drainages in the Amazon basin. However, as a wanderer from the closest Amazonian populations of the Napo and Aguarico drainages (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001), it must have flown over significant extent of highlands (>100 km), before reaching the valley of Quito.



FIGURE 1. Immature of *Cochlearius cochlearius* recorded at Miraflores, Pichincha province, Ecuador.

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