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Fotografía portada / Cover photograph

Slender–billed Schiffornis *Schiffornis stenorhyncha*, a newly split near–endemic species for Colombia proposed in a paper in this issue. Photograph taken at Santa Cecilia, Bolivar on 7th January 2010. Photo by Blanca Huertas and Thomas Donegan.

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Conservación Colombiana es publicada gracias al apoyo de nuestros donantes:



First confirmed records of Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* for Colombia and South America

*Primeros registros confirmados del Carpintero Chupasavia Vientriamarillo
Sphyrapicus varius para Colombia y Sur América*

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Abstract

We present the first confirmed records of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* for mainland Colombia and South America. Photographic records were made at El Dorado Bird Reserve, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta from 25th November 2010 to 2nd February 2011 and from around the nearby town of Minca from 27th November 2010 to 11 February 2011.

Resumen

Se presentan los primeros registros confirmados de *Sphyrapicus varius* en Colombia continental y América del Sur. Registros fotográficos fueron realizados en la Reserva Natural de las Aves El Dorado en la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta a partir del 25 de noviembre 2010 hasta el 2 de febrero 2011, y en el pueblo de Minca desde el 27 de noviembre 2010 hasta el 11 de febrero 2011.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* is a migrant woodpecker species that breeds in the northern U.S. and Canada and winters in the southeastern U.S. down through Central America regularly as far south as Panama (Ridgely *et al.* 2003). However, there are no previous records confirmed on the South American continent (Remsen *et al.* 2011). Confirmed records in Colombia to date are based only on two old specimens from San Andrés Island (Hilty & Brown 1986; McNish 2003, McMullan *et al.* 2010). The two Colombian specimens are no. 8505 at Universidad de la Salle, Bogotá, collected in 1961 by Hno. Guevara, and specimen no. 41770 at the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago of unknown date and collector, both collected on San Andrés Island (data from www.BioMap.net). There is a note of an unconfirmed sighting reported between Mindo [*sic* – probably Minca] and San Lorenzo at ca. 1,100 m on 24 February 2000 by Jurgen Lehnert (Mazar Barnett & Kirwan 2001). The species' occurrence on the mainland of South America is expected, given that vagrants have been recorded as far away as the British Isles (BOU 2010).

On 25th November 2010, Juan Carlos Luna was leading an EcoTurs Colombia birding tour group in the ProAves owned El Dorado Bird Reserve, in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, department of Magdalena, Colombia (11°06'4.52"N 74°04'19.82"W, 1,940 m elevation). The group included participants Peter Ginsburg (who first identified the species), David Houghton, Ketil Knudsen, Niels Poul Dreyer, Tau

Rasmussen, Greg Roberts, Kath Shurcliff, Jeff Skevington and Bill Watson. At 6.45 am, the tour group located a small woodpecker beside the El Dorado Lodge and it was soon identified as a juvenile Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. The entire group observed the sapsucker clearly and Ketil Knudsen took a photograph of the individual (*e.g.* Figure 1). Several of the observers had previous experience with the species on San Andrés Island and North America.

The individual was molting into adult plumage, with the first signs of a red crown on an otherwise pale buffy crown (as opposed a uniform dark crown in a juvenile Red-naped Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus nuchalis*). The uniform pale breast with fine black chevron markings across the underparts also confirms the bird as a juvenile Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (as opposed to an overall darker breast in juvenile Red-naped).

Possibly this same individual was seen the following day by Juan Carlos Luna and thereafter on several dates by birders familiar with the species until 2nd February 2011, when was observed by EcoTurs guide Trevor Ellery.

Two days later on the 27th November 2010, Trevor Ellery was returning from a morning's birding beside Hotel Minca, in the town of Minca, department of Magdalena, Colombia (11° 8'36.09"N 74° 7'7.40"W, 630 m elevation). Around midday, he spotted a small woodpecker in a dead tree and was immediately struck by its strange head pattern. Having extensive experience of most of Colombia's woodpeckers he knew it was something different and quickly realized it was a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a species he had not seen before. He managed to obtain a record shot (Figure 2) using a compact digital camera with a 12× zoom. Although the full bird is not visible and the image is somewhat blurred, the yellowish supercilium, whitish lower underparts (compared to more yellowish breast), contrast between the black flight feathers and white shoulder (greater coverts), pale throat with complete black border can be elucidated. Trevor Ellery subsequently made a further observation at El Dorado Bird Reserve lodge on the 2nd February 2011. Given the contemporaneous nature of these records and the distance between the two sites, it seems likely that two different individuals were involved.

Following this sighting, there were multiple other sightings of Yellow-bellied Sapsucker from other birders at the same Minca locality, including Miles McMullan on two dates in December (both times on bare trees) and Peter Kaestner and

Karl Overmans on 11 February 2011 (although no other photo documentation was obtained). There was also an observation on 2 February 2011 by Avery Bartels, John & Val Nield and Paul Salaman.

These sightings likely represent at least two individuals. Further reports of the species came from another well-birded site – Rio Blanco beside the city of Manizales in Caldas department (5° 5'N 75°28' W at ca. 2,300 m elevation (reported on an internet discussion forum at: <http://listserv.arizona.edu/archives/birdband.html> by K. Burton). While the species' quiet and inconspicuous behavior may have resulted in it being overlooked, it seems likely that there were a number of over-wintering individuals of this species in Colombia during winter of 2010–2011, a phenomenon that has not previously been reported.

Acknowledgments

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Figure 1. An immature Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* in El Dorado Bird Reserve on 25th Nov 2010. Photo ©Ketil Knudsen www.ketilknudsen.com



Figure 2. An immature Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* beside Minca Hotel on 27th November 2010. The second inset image highlights the outline of the bird's head. Mostly the underparts of the bird are visible, with the edge of the white wing patch visible to the left of the body. The dark line cutting through the middle of the bird is an out-of-focus small branch between the bird and the photographer. Photo by Trevor Ellery.



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