

**Cerulean Warbler survey in Central Peru January-February 2006
Gunnar Engblom, Kolibri Expeditions.**

Summary. During 6 weeks in January-March field work was carried out to detect Cerulean Warblers in Central Peru. Unfortunately, no Cerulean Warblers were seen during the study. Reported here as well, however is a series of sightings at Hacienda del Carmen, Villa Rica in January by Frank Rheindt. These are the only sightings from Peru during the period Oct 2005-March 2006.

Field team for most of the period was: Gunnar Engblom (project leader), Alex Duran (data collector), Antonio Coral (data collector),.

Activity report.

Searches for Cerulean Warbler were carried out in Central Peru during January-February, 2006.

The following areas were visited during the study.

- Cerros de Sira, accessed from Puerto Inca, Huanuco department. 500-1200m. January 11-21. Good intact habitat, but difficult to get overview of the canopy. Also it took longer to get to around 1000 meters than we had anticipated so we were left with very little time in the right habitat. Also the weather conditions did not help.
- Cerro San Matias January 25-29 on the road between Villa Rica and Puerto Bermudaz. Good roadside habitat at the right altitude with good access to view the canopy. Difficult with transport as we could not bring our own vehicle due to the very poor road conditions.
- Parque Nacional Yanachaga-Chemillen. January 30-February 2. Lowland forest. Included since it was nearby and a check to whether the *Dendroica cerulea* would inhabit this habitat.
- Villa Rica coffee plantations. February 7-20 and 27. Hardly any rustic coffee plantations left. Most with very young shade trees of *Inga sp* and *Albizia sp*. Some better plantations and natural habitat in the higher areas near Hacienda El Carmen.
- Yanachaga-Chemiillen National Park, Huampal area. Feb 21-26. On road between Oxapampa and Pozuzo. Good habitat on steep slopes with good overview of the canopy.

Cerros de Sira. 9°25 S 74°46 W.

Participants: Gunnar Engblom (project leader), Alex Duran (data collector), Antonio Coral (data collector), Wilson Diaz (practicant), Santos Montenegro (practicant), Julio Benitez (driver and practican).

January 11. Travel with our own vehicle. Lima-Huanuco.

January 12. Travel day Huanuco-Pucallpa. Some limited birding along road at i.e. Las Vegas (after Tingo Maria) at 11.30 AM. 9°11.520 S 75°54.800 W.

January 13. Pucallpa-Puerto Inca. Difficult to obtain porters. We ended up staying overnight in the town.

January 14. The porters arrived, but not enough. It took until noon until we had collected the other three porters we needed. Walked and birded the lowland forest patches en route. Camp at c250m 9°24 S 74°52 W.

January 15. Birded all day along way. Camp at 450 meters. Foot of Sira mountains. Good day, but slow progress. Frustrated over not being higher.

Jan 16. Rainy morning. Only able to start birding around noon. Only reached 780 meters which was used as basecamp for day trips the following two days..

January 17. Full day birding on trail to 1150m. 9°25 S 74°46 W. Could not go further as trail was overgrown.

January 18. Morning again at 1150m. and returned to the lowlands.

January 19. Trailed back to Puerto Inca.

January 20. Drove back to Huanuco.

January 21. Huanuco-Lima

San Matias Ridge 10° 30' S, 75° 03' W.

January 25. PM. Bus from Lima to San Ramon.

January 26. Travel day to San Matias ridge.

January 27. San Matias Ridge. Pasco department. 10° 30' S, 75° 03' W. Fair day.

January 28. San Matias Ridge. Good morning. Very rain afternoon.

Yanachaga-Chemillen National Park. Sector Paujil. Lowland rainforest. 350m.

January 29. AM San Matias ridge. PM Travel to Iscozacín. Problems getting transport.

January 30. Parque Nacional Yanachaga-Chemillen. Travelling between Iscozacín (10° 11' S, 75° 09' W.) and el Paujil (10° 19' S, 75° 16' W.) in the park. (4 hours). Cloudy in the morning and sunny afternoon. Altitude: c. 350m.

January 31. Parque Nacional Yanachaga-Chemillen. El Paujil. Cloudy to 9.00 AM. Rain while on trail between 9-11. Birding rest of day with good weather in the afternoon.

February 1. Parque Nacional Yanachaga-Chemillen. El Paujil. Good morning with lots of activity. Visit to mammal clay lick along river with 2 tapirs and two brocket deer. Good day with lots of sun until the afternoon.

February 2. Return to Iscozacín. Cloudy in morning with drizzle rain for 40 minutes. Rest of afternoon sunny.

Villa Rica 10° 44' S, 75° 16' W. **and Yanachaga Chemillen – sector Huampal** (c. 10° 12' S, 75° 36' W – no topomap over this area.). Most of this work was carried out by Antonio Coral and Alex Duran. They have still to report in detail about their sightings. The below is a brief summery of the activity.

February 7. Gunnar Engblom with client at Oconal 10°45' S, 75°16' W and Yurinaki road 10°45' S, 75°11' W. in the afternoon.

February 8. Yurunaki road most of day. 1200 m and 600m

February 9. Antonio Coral and Alex Duran with driver Luis Adriano set off Lima-La Merced. Driving. Some birding near la Merced in the afternoon.

February 10. La Merced-Villa Rica. Cloudy morning and rain from around 10 until 1 PM. In Pm Lago Oconal and nearby coffee plantations. In good weather.

February 11. Hacienda el Carmen near Villa Rica. Heavy rain until 2 pm. In the afternoon birding. Trails very muddy, but good activity with good flocks.

February 12. Hacienda el Carmen all day. Gray cloudy morning and very muddy trails. No rain. Sun out at 10 AM for the rest of the day.

February 13. Hacienda el Carmen and ridge. Cloudy morning but no rain. Sun out at 9 AM for the rest of the day. Good activity.

February 14. Villa Rica: Cumbre road. 10°41.4' S, 75°12.7' W. Light rain until 8 AM. Later better weather and the activity picked up.

February 15. Villa Rica area: Yurinaki road. In AM some rain but it got better in the pm and lots of birds along the road.

February 16. Villa Rica area: Fondo San Jerónimo. Good weather without rain and good activity. Sun in pm.

February 17. Villa Rica area: Fondo Colchibe Marín. Good day birding all day.

February 18 Villa Rica area: Hacienda el Carmen. Cloudy morning with sun coming out at 8.30 at which activity picked up. Good birding for the rest of the day.

February 19. Rain all day. Totally lost. No birding

February 20 Villa Rica area: Lomas del Diabolo near Hacienda el Carmen. Good habitat above the coffee plantations. Rainy morning until 8. Birding from then as weather improved. Sun in the afternoon.

February 21. Driving to Oxapampa. Rain until 7 AM Birding mostly above the coffee plantations.

February 22. Oxapampa-Villa Rica Road AM and then drive to Pozuzo. Rainy morning but weather improved through the day.

February 23. Tried to reach Cock of the Rock-lek near Pozuzo. But track was very slippery. Huampal ranger station of Yanachaga-Chemillen NP rest of the morning. Half decent weather.

February 24. Huampal most of the day. Rain first hour of morning, but weather improved through the day.

February 25. Huampal and Cock-of the Rock lek at the Guacamayos ridge. No rain. Cloudy morning. Good activity.

February 26. Huampal. AM and then along road to Oxapampa. Cloudy morning and fair afternoon. No rain. In Pm returned to Villa Rica.

February 27 Villa Rica area: Hacienda el Carmen. Rain until 8 AM. Afterwards birding trails. Overcast to 11.45 and later sun for the rest of the day.

Other activities in Central Peru with negative results. Birdwatching trips November and December, 2006.

Gunnar Engblom guided birdwatching trips in Central Peru.

Nov 15-19. Pampa Hermosa, San Ramon 1000-1400m second growth, fruit orchards, rustic coffee plantations and natural habitat.

Nov 20. Oxapampa road 10°44'S, 75°21'W. in pm. 1300m. Second growth.

Nov 21. pm Satipo road lower part. 950-1200m c.11°20'S, 74°45'W.

Nov 22. Satipo road all day around 1400-2200m.

Nov 23. Satipo road 1300m in AM.

Nov 31-Dec 3. Pampa Hermosa Lodge, San Ramon.

Dec 7. AM. Satipo road 1450m.

Dec 8. Villa Rica

Dec 9-11. Yanachaga Chemillen. Oxapampa-Pozuzo road. Lots of rain – but some birding done.

Results

During the main study we failed to find Cerulean Warbler. The conditions of study were not very good during the Cerros de Sira part, where both rain and difficult terrain made good observation opportunities unavailable. At Cordillera San Matias we were locked at one spot because of lack of transport. Conditions were fairly good, though time was also lost to rain. At Villa Rica much of the good rustic coffee plantations below 1800m had been converted to highly productive shade-plantations for organic coffee. However, many of the shade trees were young and with very few or non existent epiphytes.

Weather conditions as well as muddy tracks for access made observations difficult. At Yanachaga-Chemillen, Huampal sector habitat was very good and intact, but slopes very steep. At the Paujil sector it was lowland rainforest but birding was made one morning from a mirador where one could see the canopy.

Other results collected from Central Peru by Gunnar Engblom in November and early December during birdwatching trips was also negative. (See activity report above for details).

Frank Rheindt (in litt) tells me he saw at two locations Cerulean Warbler at Hacienda el Carmen in mid January. These birds were moving with larger flocks containing Blackburnian and Canada Warblers and Guira Tanagers always in the top of the largest more developed shade trees.

John Sterling, Smithsonian Institutes writes regarding the coffee plantation bird survey of 1998-1999 the following: "Cerulean Warblers are fairly regular components of mixed-species flocks in the Villa Rica area below 1800 m. elevation. I have only seen 1-2 per flock and although they are most often found in the large flocks, I have seen them in small flocks of ~12 birds of 3-4 species. Most of these flocks are in the better looking shade coffee plantations in the remnant forests in the region. I have only been there in November, December and January and assume that they are present throughout the winter. As far as specific locations for them.....I don't have a map of the area, but am not sure if you would really need those specific locations as my impression of the species is that it is found throughout that area 1000-1800 m elevation."

Discussion:

During the 1998-1999 study Sterling et al found the Cerulean Warbler only in "rustic" coffee plantations. These are coffee grown in shade made by indigenous trees that were present here before the understory was cleared for coffee. We hardly found any such habitat. Most that was there 6-8 years ago has been replaced with fast growing *Inga* and *Albizia* as shade trees species that carry no epiphytes and less leaf cover. In spite of not having exact reference points, both of what we could observe physically and the lack of positive results is a strong indication that the coffee boom of shade-grown coffee does not promote the more bird friendly "song bird coffee" plantations (rustic), but rather promotes more monocultures with *Inga* and *Albizia*. It seems that both yield and quality is higher in such conditions and that the market (ultimately the consumers) does not know how to separate between terms such as organic, song bird coffee, shade-grown coffee, etc.

We interviewed people at the farms and it is clear that many of those area considered rustic has converted to being mono-cultures today. Maybe this is also the case with other areas north of Villa Rica.

From historical data of presence of Cerulean Warbler in Peru most if not all are from altitudes between 900-1800m. In our study area very little natural habitat remains covering this elevation near roads. The best areas for reference with natural primary intact forest cover are Yanachaga-Chemillen NP along the Oxapampa – Pozuzo road (1000-1500m) and the San Mattias ridge (900-1100m). The Sira mountains could have been a good reference point, but considering its isolation towards the east, it is possible that the Cerulean Warblers would not follow this route. This latter area is also very difficult to reach and there are few spots where one can see the canopy well.

The lack of observations of Cerulean Warbler during the field work has four possible explanations.

1. Genuinely rare and thus very hard to detect.
2. Survey too late. The Cerulean Warbler may have left the area in mid February
3. Poor weather.
4. Field workers not sufficiently experienced.

As for the latter the accumulative time in the field and the skills of picking out other warblers should be sufficient to invalidate the explanation 4. Also, the relatively long time that was spent in the Villa Rica area indicates that the Cerulean warbler is very rare or that it had already left the area.

Suggested follow-up.

To test the hypothesis that current coffee growing practices are instead reducing habitat for Cerulean Warbler one need to follow up this study with a study in December-January when field conditions are easier and from a period when the Cerulean Warbler has proved present in regions both in recent past as well as this year. The study should concentrate on various coffee plantations in Villa Rica area, as well as intact forests of Yanachaga-Chemillen (Huampal area) and Serrania San Matias as controls. With more detailed information from John Sterling regarding more exact location of the Cerulean Warbler observations in 1998-1999, it shall be possible to see how many of the exact sites of observations then have been converted to less “bird friendly” coffee units.