

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

General Biology

ORNITOLOGIA NEOTROPICAL 9: 205–207, 1998
© The Neotropical Ornithological Society

FIRST DESCRIPTION OF THE NEST AND EGG OF THE TANAGER FINCH (*OREOTHRAUPIS ARREMONOPS* SCLATER 1855), WITH ADDITIONAL NOTES ON BEHAVIOR

Harold F. Greeney¹, Mitch Lysinger², Tom Walla³ & John Clark⁴

¹Department of Entomology, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721, U.S.A.

²Cabañas San Isidro, Carrión 555–C y Juan Leon Mera, Quito, Ecuador.

³Department of Biology, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403, U.S.A.

⁴Fundación Jatun Sacha, Rio Coca 1734, Casilla 17–12–867, Quito, Ecuador.

Key words: *Oreothraupis arremonops*, Ecuador, egg, nesting biology.

The Tanager Finch (*Oreothraupis arremonops* Sclater 1855) has only recently been rediscovered in western Ecuador after a 25 year absence of confirmed sightings from this part of its range. Its breeding behavior has been described only from Colombia and involves a dependent juvenile following two adult birds in June, and a male captured in breeding condition at the same time of year (Hilty & Brown 1986). Here, we provide the first description of the nest and egg, and notes on adult behavior.

O. arremonops is a usually secretive bird that forages among low shrubs and leaf litter in wet mossy forests between 1700–2500 m. In Colombia, populations are extremely local, but individuals can be seen regularly in several areas (Hilty & Brown 1986, Ridgely & Tudor 1989). Since its recent rediscovery in Ecuador, this species has only rarely been reported at few localities. One of these, the pass west and above Tandyapa in west-central Ecuador,

is an area of fairly disturbed montane cloud forest between 2000–2300 m. At this location, a nest was found approximately 1 m above the level of the infrequently traveled dirt road on a nearly vertical hillside covered in moss and second growth. The flora of the bank at this location was dominated by typical disturbance colonizers such as *Blenchnum* spp. (Pteridophyta), *Gonzalagunia dependens* (Rubiaceae) and *Coriaria ruscifolia* (Coriariaceae), which provided the majority of the shade for the nest. Other plants in the immediate vicinity of the nest included; *Heppiella ulmifolia* (Gesneriaceae), *Tibouchina longifolia* (Melastomataceae), *Erato polymnioides* (Asteraceae), and *Scutellaria* sp. (Lamiaceae). The lip of the nest faced a compass bearing of 118°. We estimate the nest received sun from just before 07:00 h until about 14:30 h on clear days, but at this site clouds often form about mid-morning. Using a Garmin GPS 45 unit with software version 2.43, the location of the nest

was recorded at 00°01'52.0"S and 078°41'27.4"W.

The cup-shaped nest was constructed almost entirely of moss with a partial roof covering the back half and a mossy lip at the front. An orchid (*Elleanthus tetragaiton*) was incorporated into the structure of the nest. The roof consisted of dead leaves that rested on sticks and small branches that protruded from the bank. It is not known whether the leaves were placed there or if they collected there as they fell down the bank, although the latter seems likely as there were many small patches of dead leaves resting nearby in a similar manner. The inside of the nest was circular with a diameter of 8.5 cm. The outside width of the nest was 14.7 cm. As the nest backed against the side of the bank, the front-to-back dimension was difficult to determine, but was measured at 19.6 cm from the back of the nest to the front (outside) of the mossy lip. The lip measured 8.3 cm from the inside to the outside edge. The nest contained one bluish-white egg. The egg measured 27.8 mm by 20.0 mm.

We discovered the nest on 28 November 1996 at around 10:00 h, at which time an adult bird was flushed from the nest only after it had been approached to within a meter. At this point, the bird immediately dropped to the ground and scurried up the bank away from the nest. The only vocalization (M. Lysinger, tape recording) was a sharp, bush-tanager like "tseet" as it moved away from the nest site. Despite the fact that we left the area for half an hour, the bird did not return to the nest. We visited the nest again on 3 December at 07:00 h, and there was no adult on the nest, but the egg was still present. Two or three individuals were seen and heard foraging in the undergrowth on the hill and across the road, and the "tseet" vocalizations were again recorded. After detecting our presence, the birds moved slowly away through the brush, calling repeatedly. The vocaliza-

tion described from Colombia, a whistled, frog-like "wert," (Hilty & Brown 1986, Ridgely & Tudor 1989) was not heard and has not yet been reported from this species in Ecuador.

The taxonomic placement of *O. arreonops* is uncertain. It was originally described in the genus *Saltator* (Sclater 1885), and to date it has been placed in the Thraupinae by some authors (Hellmayr 1936) and is sometimes thought to be a member of the genus *Atlapetes* (Emberizinae). The construction of the nest is unlike the globular balls of *Chlorophonia* and *Euphonia*, and while it shows affinities to the cup-like nests of *Tangara*, *Thraupis* and *Chlorochrysa*, the placement of nests in trees by species in these genera is different from the low-level bank nest seen in this case. Within *Habia*, *Tachyphonus*, *Mitrospingus*, *Eucometis* and *Rhodinocichla*, cup-like nests are constructed low to the ground, but only *Chlorospingus* species have been found to construct nests on the sides of banks. For the majority of described nests within *Atlapetes*, the construction is described as a bulky cup; and the majority of these are built in low brush or weeds. While many nests remain undescribed, and those known are represented by few records, the Tanager Finch nest appears to show affinities to those constructed by *Atlapetes* brush finches. Eggs of the Thraupinae are generally heavily spotted or streaked. Within *Atlapetes*, the majority of species have unmarked eggs.

Based on similarities in behavior, nest construction and location, and eggs, we agree that the Tanager Finch has been appropriately placed closer to *Atlapetes* brush-finches (Emberizinae) following Storer (1958), than within the thraupine tanagers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank David Lysinger for his companionship and help in locating the nest.

We are also grateful to C. Dodson and B. Ollgaard for help in identifying plant specimens and to S. Russell and C. Gordon for comments on the manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Hellmayr, C. E. 1936. Catalogue of the birds of the Americas. Field Mus. Nat. Hist. Zool. Ser. Vol. XIII, Part 9.
- Hilty, S. L. & W. L. Brown 1986. A guide to the birds of Colombia. Princeton, New Jersey.
- Ridgely, R. S. & G. Tudor 1989. Birds of South America. Univ. of Texas Press, Austin, Texas.
- Slater, P. L. 1855. Descriptions of four new or little known tanagers. Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond. 23: 84-5.
- Storer, R. W. 1958. The affinities of *Oreothraupis arremonops*. Auk 75: 352-354

Accepted 18 December 1997.