

# First record of Pacific Parrotlet *Forpus coelestis* in Colombia

## *Primer registro de Forpus coelestis en Colombia*

Dušan M. Brinkhuizen<sup>1</sup> & Tuomas Seimola<sup>2</sup>

1 Camino de Orellana 161, Guápulo, Quito, Ecuador. Email: d.m.brinkhuizen@gmail.com

2 Käpyläntie 156 J, 00610 Helsinki, Finland

### Abstract

A small flock of Pacific Parrotlet *Forpus coelestis* was observed on 22 March 2014 at Mataje, on the Colombian side of the Ecuadorian border in Nariño. A northward range extension has seemingly been the result of extensive deforestation in the Pacific lowlands of Ecuador. Some other Tumbesian bird species may also be expected to occur further north into Colombian territory.

Keywords. New record, Colombia, Pacific Parrotlet, *Forpus coelestis*

### Resumen

Una pequeña bandada de Periquito del Pacífico *Forpus coelestis* fue observada el 22 de marzo de 2014 en Mataje, en el lado colombiano de la frontera con Ecuador en Nariño. La extensión de su rango hacia el norte ha sido aparentemente el resultado de la extensa deforestación de las tierras bajas del Pacífico ecuatoriano. Así mismo, es posible que otras especies de aves Tumbesinas hayan extendido sus distribuciones geográficas hacia el norte, encontrándose hoy día dentro del territorio colombiano.

**Parablas claves.** Nuevo registro, Colombia, *Forpus coelestis*

### Introduction

The Pacific Parrotlet *Forpus coelestis* is a common and widespread species of the Tumbesian region ranging from northwest Ecuador (Esmeraldas province), south to northwest Peru (Tumbes, Piura departments) and the middle Marañón valley (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001, Forshaw & Knight 2010). It is found in dry deciduous woodland, arid scrub, urban and cleared agricultural areas of the more humid lowlands and foothills of western Ecuador and Peru (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001, Schulenberg *et al.* 2007). The species' occurrence in northwesternmost Ecuador seems to be a relatively recent expansion of its range which doubtlessly went hand in hand with the ongoing deforestation of the tropical Chocó rainforests in that region (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001, Minda Batallas 2004). The species has long been predicted as hypothetical species to adjacent Colombia (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001, McMullan *et al.* 2010). Here, we report details and a discussion of the first field sighting of Pacific Parrotlet known to us in Colombia, from Nariño in southwest Colombia. A brief note of this first country record was recently published in Kirwan *et al.* (2014).

### Field observation

On 22 March 2014 we visited the settlement of Mataje which lies at the border of Ecuador and Colombia along the Rio Mataje (01°21'46.89"N, 78°42'59.76"W). This border area holds some final tracts of mature humid lowland forest, but most of it on the Ecuadorian side has

been cleared for commercial oil palm cultivation. The habitat in the village itself consists of gardens and secondary woodland on both sides of the border. In the early morning, we heard calls of *Forpus* parrotlets on the Colombian side of the river. Shortly after, we located a small flock of c. 4 Pacific Parrotlets in a treetop on the river bank in Colombia. We observed them carefully, checking for the possibility that they might be Spectacled Parrotlet *F. conspicillatus* (a species which has not been recorded in Ecuador). However, the observed field marks all pointed to Pacific Parrotlet, a species well-known to us. A male was observed for a period of 2 minutes at c. 20m. It showed a bright green face with a light blue marking behind the eye that extended towards the nape. The underparts were pale greenish and contrasted slightly with a darker, more olive-grey, mantle. Spectacled Parrotlet is more uniform and deeper green without the greyish tones in the plumage and males show a distinct blue marking around the eye (Hilty & Brown 1986, Forshaw & Knight 2010, McMullan *et al.* 2010). Later on, a few individuals (probably of the same flock) of Pacific Parrotlet were observed at close range on the Ecuadorian side of the Rio Mataje.

### Discussion

Given the relatively widespread distribution of Pacific Parrotlet in coastal northwest Ecuador, its occurrence in the adjacent lowlands of Nariño, Colombia, was to be expected. Interestingly, Hilty & Brown (1986) report

sightings of Spectacled Parrotlet from coastal Nariño near Tumaco in 1979. Now the authors suspect that the observed *Forpus* might have actually involved Pacific Parrotlet (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). Therefore, the species may have reached Nariño many years prior to our observation.

There is a single specimen of Pacific Parrotlet that has been labeled “Colombia” at the Museum of Comparative Zoology in Cambridge, MA, USA. However, the collecting date, locality and collector of this specimen are unknown. “Colombia” may be a reflection of place of purchase (MCZbase 2013) or could refer to “Gran Colombia” which included parts of Ecuador, Peru and Panama in the early 1800s. However, several species known previously in Colombia only from specimens like this, which had been presumed by some authors to relate to collections made outside of present-day Colombia, have recently been observed or confirmed in southernmost part of the country (e.g. Blue-mantled Thornbill *Chalcostigma stanleyi*: Donegan *et al.* 2010 and Band-bellied Owl *Pulsatrix melanota*: Salaman *et al.* 1999). There are also several specimens of Spectacled Parrotlet from Nariño, Colombia (ORNIS2 Portal 2012, Biomap Alliance Participants 2014), but we have no reason to believe that they have been misidentified: all were collected at localities in the Andes (Pasto, Ancuya, Pasizara) within the distributional range of Spectacled Parrotlet (Hilty & Brown 1986, McMullan *et al.* 2010).

Google Earth images show a number of large cleared agricultural areas in coastal Nariño, seemingly suitable habitat for Pacific Parrotlet, and the species might actually be more widespread in southwest Colombia. It also seems plausible that Pacific Parrotlet and Spectacled Parrotlet meet in Nariño, perhaps most likely in the foothills. Southwest Colombia seems to remain relatively poorly explored ornithologically and security concerns might explain the lack of recent records (Beckers & Flórez 2013). The species seems to have propensity to colonize new areas, with a well-established feral population in Lima, Peru being another example (Schulenberg *et al.* 2007).

In recent years, the border area of Colombia and Ecuador has proved a good source of new national records to Colombia (e.g. Luna 2011, 2012). Other Tumbesian species that might occur and should be looked for in southwest Colombia include Red-masked Parakeet *Psittacara erythrogenys*, Tumbes Pewee *Contopus punensis*, Slaty Becard *Pachyramphus spodiurus* and Elegant Crescentchest *Melanopareia elegans*. Red-masked Parakeet has been observed in western Esmeraldas (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001) but it is unclear if the species has been recorded further north in recent years. Tumbes Pewee (considered a subspecies of Tropical Pewee *C.*

*cinereus* by Remsen *et al.* 2014) has recently been found as far north as northwest Esmeraldas, where a pair was photographed and sound-recorded near Majagual (01°09'05.35"N, 79°05'57.63"W; c. 60 km from the Colombian border) on 30 September 2013 (DMB pers. obs.). More recently, on 22 March 2014 we sound-recorded a Tumbes Pewee at Mataje, but on the Ecuadorian side of the Colombian border. Biomap Alliance Participants (2014) list no *C. cinereus* specimens from Nariño. Slaty Becard has been recorded as far north as Tundaloma Lodge (01°10'43.81"N, 78°44'54.89"W), with an immature male being photographed on 2 October 2013, c.16 km from the Colombian border (DMB pers. obs.). Elegant Crescentchest seems to be spreading northward as well with recent records as far north as Cordillera Mache-Chindul, Esmeraldas, with several individuals recorded in secondary woodland near Bilsa biological station (00°21'33"N, 79°42'02"W; c. 170 km from the Colombian border) on 9 October 2011 (DMB pers. obs.). The ongoing deforestation (possibly in combination with climate change) in the coastal lowlands of northwest Ecuador seems likely to facilitate the northward spreading of some Tumbesian bird species.

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