

Wilson Bulletin 117(1):103–105, 2005

The Nest and Nestlings of the Wing-banded Antbird (*Myrmornis torquata*) from Southern Guyana

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ABSTRACT.—The Wing-banded Antbird (*Myrmornis torquata*) is a poorly known suboscine passerine found in lowland Amazonian forests. Here, we present new information about the nest and nestlings of this enigmatic species. Our findings differ from previous observations and notes on clutch size. *Received 2 July 2004, accepted 9 December 2004.*

The Wing-banded Antbird (*Myrmornis torquata*) has long mystified avian systematists as to its taxonomic affinities. Prior to discovery of the first Wing-banded Antbird nest by Tostain and Dujardin (1988), some authors (Peters 1951, Meyer de Schauensee 1966) aligned this species with the ground antbirds (Formicariidae). The nest discovered by Tostain and Dujardin (1988) was placed off the

ground in the fork of a small tree, providing additional natural history evidence that the Wing-banded Antbird should be classified as a member of the typical antbird (Thamnophilidae) assemblage. The natural history and population centers for this species, however, remain poorly known (Zimmer and Isler 2003: 671). Zimmer and Isler (2003) also suggest that the Guianan region may be a productive region for the study of Wing-banded Antbirds. Here, we present additional information on the nest of the Wing-banded Antbird with the first description of nestlings and additional behavioral notes from Guyana.

During an avifaunal and botanical survey of the Acari Mountains in extreme southern Guyana (1° 20' N, 58° 56' W, 250 m in elevation, 3 September 1998), we photographed the nest and collected the nestlings and adults of Wing-banded Antbirds. Birds and the nest were found in *terra firme* forest approximately 5 km south of the Sipu River. The nest was found on the slope of a small hill about 0.5 km from a small stream in tall humid forest (30–50 m in height) with a moderately dense understory.

Adult birds were observed foraging on the

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FIG. 1. Nest and nestlings of the Wing-banded Antbird, 3 September 1998, southern Guyana (photo by C. M. Milensky).

ground and giving soft “chip” contact calls. As we approached the birds, we noticed they were foraging around a nest. The nest was located in the fork of a sapling that was 1 m tall and 1 cm in diameter (Fig. 1). Nest measurements were outside diameter = 15–17 cm, inside diameter = 4–10 cm, inner cup depth = 2–3 cm, outer cup height = 4–5 cm. The nest was constructed of loosely woven twigs with a lining of rootlets.

The two nestlings were featherless, but small feather sheaths were beginning to emerge (Fig. 1). Pinfeathers of most typical antbird nestlings begin to erupt 2–3 days after hatching, so we suspected that these birds had hatched recently (Zimmer and Isler 2003). Both adults were collected and made into study skins; specimens are stored at the University of Kansas in Lawrence (male: KU 90355, 50 g, testes 6×3 mm; female: KU 89793, 45 g, ovary 8×4 mm, largest ova 2 mm, oviduct convoluted 2 mm). The nestlings were collected and preserved in formaldehyde (KU 89671, 89672). Both adults had insects

in their stomachs. The nestlings weighed 9.6 and 9.8 g, and the colors of their soft parts were: brown irides, brown tarsi, gray foot pads, brown maxilla, and orange mandible with a brown tip.

Tostain and Dujardin (1988) reported finding Wing-banded Antbird nests and families near the equator with only one egg or fledgling, respectively, and pointed out that this is unique among typical antbirds, which normally lay two eggs per clutch. They suggest that this may have been due to a positive relationship between clutch size and latitude, with reduced clutches near the equator, similar to that reported for Black-spotted Bare-eyes (*Phlegopsis nigromaculata*; Willis 1979). Our observation contradicts this idea and suggests that factors other than latitude influence clutch size in Wing-banded Antbirds. Tostain and Dujardin (1988) also reported finding nests and fledglings from July–October, and our September record is congruent with this putative breeding season.

When foraging, Wing-banded Antbirds

have been observed using their bills to probe through leaf litter, and using jumping motions to move leaves (Tostain and Dujardin 1988, Zimmer and Isler 2003). The male and female we observed appeared to be scratching through the leaf litter with their feet, throwing leaves up to 20 cm in the air, similar to that reported in Zimmer and Isler (2003). The species' foraging behavior has been described as "deliberate and inconspicuous" (Zimmer and Isler 2003), but our observation varies a bit from this account. Although the birds were deliberate in their movements, our attention was drawn to the birds because of the loud and conspicuous manner in which they scratched through the understory. Such detectability, however, may vary with local environmental conditions (i.e., the relative dryness of the leaf litter).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the Smithsonian Institution's Biodiversity of the Guianas Program and Laboratory of Molecular Systematics, and the University of Kansas Bird Interest Group, for providing financial support for this expedition. The Guyanese Government kindly

provided permits for our research in the Acari Mountains. M. Tamessar helped expedite the permit and export process. K. J. Zimmer and K. Zyskowski provided helpful comments on an earlier version of this manuscript. This is manuscript number 90 in the Smithsonian Institution Biological Diversity of the Guiana Shield Program publication series.

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