

## Distributional records from the highlands of the Serranía de Majé, an isolated mountain range in eastern Panama

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The Darién Highlands Endemic Bird Area, consisting of the highlands of eastern Panama above 700 m, has 11 restricted-range species (total world range of less than 50,000 km<sup>2</sup>) entirely confined to it, with another five restricted-range species found both there and in other areas (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998). In addition, several of the species of the Darién Lowlands Endemic Bird Area are primarily found in foothills and are essentially restricted to the lower slopes of the same highland areas.

These highlands consist of several isolated ranges running primarily northwest-southeast, parallel to the coastlines of the isthmus (Figure 1). One continuous

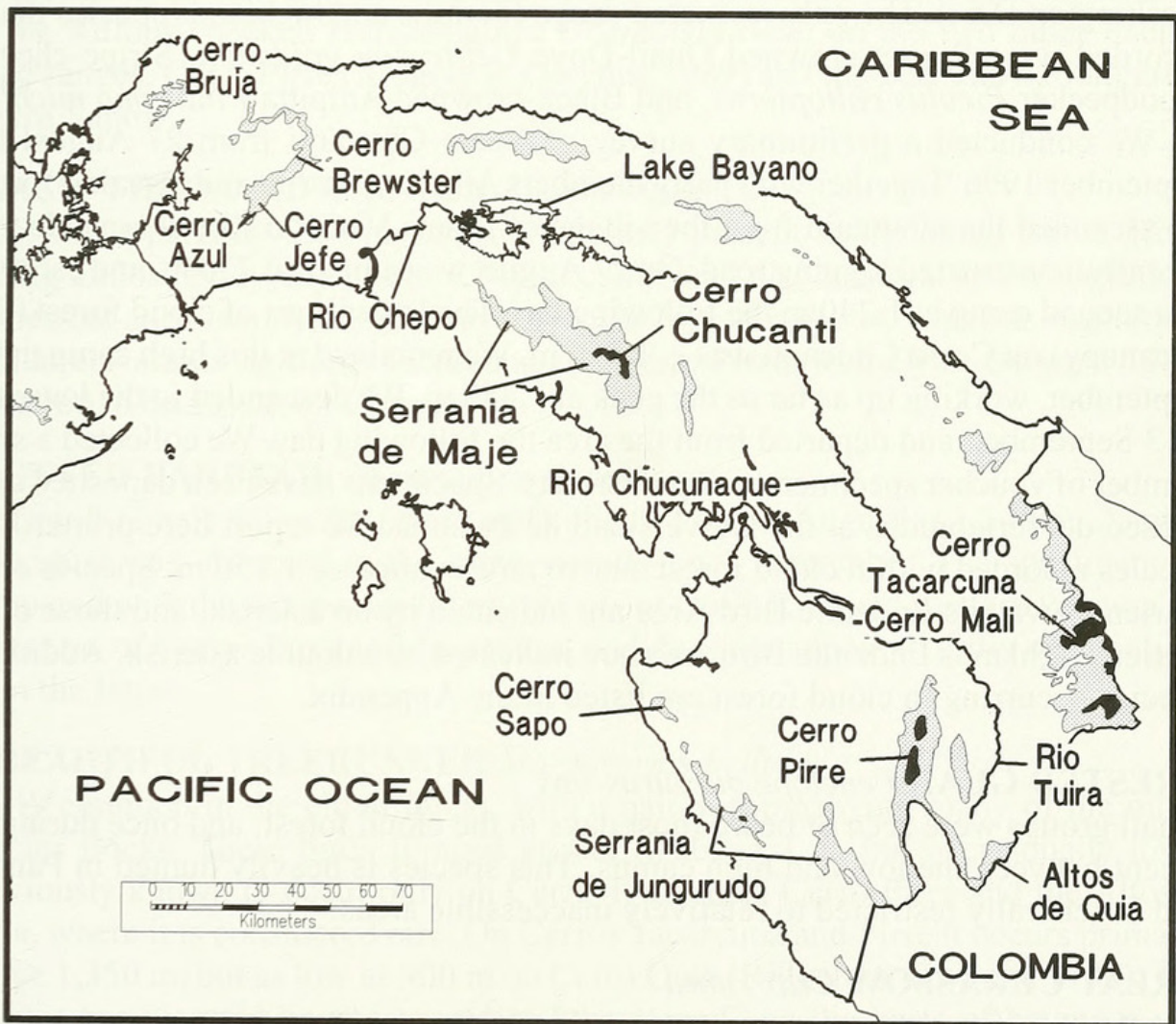


Figure 1. Mountain ranges of eastern Panama. Land above 700 m is indicated in grey and land above 1,200 m in black.



cordillera, 350 km long, runs close to the Atlantic coast from the Canal area to the Colombian border and forms the continental divide, reaching above 700 m only in its western (Cerros Bruja, Brewster, Azul, and Jefe) and eastern extremities (Cerro Tacarcuna-Cerro Malí). On the Pacific slope there are three isolated mountain ranges, which include the Serranía de Majé in the west, and Cerro Pirre (including its outlier, the Altos de Quía) and the Serranía de Jungurudó (including its outlier, Cerro Sapo) in the east.

The Serranía de Majé, c. 60 km long, is separated from the Atlantic coast cordillera by c. 30 km across the valleys of the Ríos Chepo and Chucunaque. The highest point in the range is at its eastern end, Cerro Chucantí (1,489 m, 8° 48' N, 78° 27' W), on the boundary between the provinces of Panamá and Darién. To the west, the Serranía is separated from the highlands of the Cerro Jefe (1,007 m) area by about 70 km. To the east, it is separated from the highlands of eastern Darién by about 125 km.

The highland areas of the Serranía de Majé have not previously been surveyed ornithologically. Alexander Wetmore visited the area in March 1950, ascending from Chimán on the coast via the village of Majé to approximately 630 m, according to his field notebooks (Department of Ornithology, National Museum of Natural History, Washington D.C.). The only restricted-range foothills and highlands species that he recorded were Russet-crowned Quail-Dove *Geotrygon goldmani*, Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker *Piculus callopterus*, and Black-crowned Antpitta *Pittasoma michleri*.

We conducted a preliminary survey of Cerro Chucantí from 27 August to 4 September 1996. Together with party members Alberto Castillo and Osvaldo Jordán, we ascended the mountain from the village of Buena Vista on its eastern side via a recently-constructed logging road. On 27 August we camped at 730 m, and ascended to a second camp at 1,240 m the following day. The lower limit of cloud forest (8-10 m canopy) on Cerro Chucantí was c. 1,150 m. We remained at this high camp until 2 September, working up as far as the peak at 1,489 m. We descended to the low camp on 3 September, and departed from the area the following day. We collected a small number of voucher specimens using mist-nets. Specimens have been deposited at the Museo de Vertebrados at the Universidad de Panamá. We report here primarily on species recorded within cloud forest, above an elevation of 1,150 m. Species of the Darien Lowlands Endemic Bird Area are indicated by an asterisk, and those of the Darien Highlands Endemic Bird Area are indicated by a double asterisk. Additional species occurring in cloud forest are listed in the Appendix.

### **CRESTED GUAN** *Penelope purpurascens*

Small groups were seen or heard most days in the cloud forest, and once during the ascent between the low and high camps. This species is heavily hunted in Panama and is generally restricted to relatively inaccessible areas.

### **GREAT CURASSOW** *Crax rubra*

A male and a female were seen separately by DGC at 1,300 m on 29 August. Like the previous species, the Great Curassow is a prized game species and its presence indicates relatively low hunting pressure.



**\*\*RUSSET-CROWNED QUAIL-DOVE** *Geotrygon goldmani*

One was heard calling and tape-recorded by DGC in the cloud forest at 1,240 m on 29 August. Wetmore collected one at 360 m on the south side of the range, and described it as the Majé endemic subspecies *oreas* (Wetmore 1968). Recorded from all of the other major highland areas of eastern Panama that have been surveyed, including Cerro Jefe, Cerro Brewster, (Ridgely & Gwynne 1989), Cerro Tacarcuna, and Cerro Pirre (Wetmore 1968), primarily 750-1,600 m. It is considered near-threatened (Collar *et al.* 1994).

**VIOLET-HEADED HUMMINGBIRD** *Klais guimeti*

One seen at 450 m on 3 September. The species is mentioned here because it was not recorded at higher elevations, even though it is common in foothills to 1,200 m elsewhere in Panama.

**\*\*VIOLET-CAPPED HUMMINGBIRD** *Goldmania violiceps*

Very common in cloud forest, also recorded down to 730 m. Otherwise known only from the Atlantic cordillera, including Cerro Bruja, Cerro Brewster, Cerro Jefe, and Cerro Azul in the west and Cerro Tacarcuna-Cerro Malí in the east; apparently replaced by the Rufous-cheeked Hummingbird *Goethalsia bella* on the two other Pacific-slope ranges, Cerro Pirre (Ridgely & Gwynne 1989) and the Serranía de Jungurudó (Cerro Sapo).

**BLACK-THROATED TROGON** *Trogon rufus*

This was apparently the only trogon regularly present in the cloud forest. Heard calling almost every day at the 1,240 m camp, and also heard at lower elevations. Somewhat surprisingly, the Collared Trogon *Trogon collaris*, which is common at similar elevations on Cerro Tacarcuna and Cerro Pirre (Ridgely & Gwynne 1989), appeared to be absent on Chucantí.

**SPOTTED BARBTAIL** *Premnoplex brunnescens*

One adult female was mist-netted and collected on 31 August at 1,240 m. Another individual was observed in the same vicinity on 1 September. The specimen was compared with the subspecies *brunneicauda* of Costa Rica and western Panama and *albescens* of Cerros Pirre and Tacarcuna, and does not appear to differ substantially from the latter.

**\*\*BEAUTIFUL TREERUNNER** *Margarornis bellulus*

Fairly common in the cloud forest, with a pair accompanying many of the mixed species flocks. These birds foraged primarily above 3 m, but occasionally lower. Previously known to occur only on Cerro Tacarcuna, Cerro Pirre and the Altos de Quía, where it is considered rare. On Cerros Tacarcuna and Pirre it occurs primarily above 1,350 m, but as low as 900 m on Cerro Quía (Ridgely & Gwynne 1989). This species has recently been assessed as "threatened" on the basis of having a very small range of less than 100 km<sup>2</sup> (Wege 1996).



**FASCIATED ANTSHRIKE** *Cymbilaimus lineatus*

Heard calling near the 1,240 m camp every day, and also recorded at lower elevations. This is unusually high for this species, which is normally found below 600 m, although it has been recorded to approximately 1,000 m in Darién (Ridgely & Gwynne 1989).

**\*BLACK-CROWNED ANTPITTA** *Pittasoma michleri*

Common in the cloud forest. Heard most days and one was mist-netted on 1 September at the 1,240 m camp. This is somewhat high for this species, which according to Ridgely & Gwynne (1989) occurs up to about 1,050 m.

**SCALE-CRESTED PYGMY-TYRANT** *Lophotriccus pileatus*

Recorded from the 730 m camp up to about 900 m. Surprisingly, not recorded at the 1,240 m camp.

**RUFOUS-BREASTED WREN** *Thryothorus rutilus*

Recorded at the 730 m camp and up to about 900 m. This apparently represents the easternmost record for the species in Panama, and the first record for the province of Darién. The species was previously known to occur as far east as the area of Lake Bayano in eastern Panamá province (Ridgely & Gwynne 1989).

**OCHRACEOUS WREN** *Troglodytes ochraceus*

Not uncommon in the cloud forest and recorded every day. Elsewhere in eastern Panama this species is known only from the easternmost highlands, including Cerro Tacarcuna, Cerro Pirre and the Altos de Quía. It is not known to occur on Cerros Bruja, Brewster, or Jefe to the west, but reappears in the Talamanca range in western Panama.

**\*\*VARIED SOLITAIRE** *Myadestes coloratus*

Very common in the cloud forest. Two specimens were collected on 29 August, an immature and an adult male. This species is otherwise known only from Cerros Tacarcuna, Pirre and the Altos de Quía. There are no evident differences from specimens collected from these sites.

**SLATE-THROATED REDSTART** *Myioborus miniatus*

Common in the cloud forest, with a pair accompanying most mixed species flocks. An adult male was collected on 30 August and an adult female on 31 August. The specimens were compared with the subspecies *aurantiacus* of Costa Rica and western Panama and *ballux*, which ranges from Cerros Tacarcuna and Pirre into Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, and does not appear to differ substantially from the latter. The species occurs on Cerros Jefe and Brewster but is rare there.

**ORANGE-BELLIED EUPHONIA** *Euphonia xanthogaster*

A male, seen once near the 1,240 m camp, was tape-recorded giving a call similar to that of this species (B. Whitney, pers. com.), which occurs between 400-1,500 m on Cerro Pirre, Cerro Sapo and the Altos de Quía. However, Yellow-crowned Euphonia



*E. luteicapilla*, cannot be ruled out entirely from our field observations, although this would be unusually high, and the wrong habitat, for this species (to 900 m, Ridgely & Gwynne (1989)).

**\*\*TACARCUNA BUSH-TANAGER** *Chlorospingus tacarcunae*

Fairly common in small flocks in the cloud forest. An adult female and an immature male were collected on 30 August. There is no apparent difference from specimens from Cerros Tacarcuna and Pirre. Otherwise occurs only in the Atlantic cordillera, being found on Cerros Bruja (GRA, unpublished data), Jefe, and Brewster in the west and Tacarcuna on the east. This species is replaced on Cerro Pirre and the Serranía de Junguradó (Cerro Sapo) by the Pirre Bush-Tanager *C. inornatus*.

**\*BLACK-AND-YELLOW TANAGER** *Chrysothlypis chrysomelas*

Uncommon with mixed species flocks in cloud forest. Elsewhere in eastern Panama this restricted-range species is common in foothills from 450-1,200 m (Ridgely & Gwynne 1989).

## Conclusions

The distributions of several species appear to link the Serranía de Majé more closely to the Atlantic cordillera than to the other two ranges of the Pacific slope. The Violet-capped Hummingbird *Goldmania violiceps* occurs on Majé, as well as the Atlantic ranges to the east (Cerros Bruja, Brewster, Azul and Jefe) and to the west (Cerro Tacarcuna), but not on Cerros Pirre or on Cerro Sapo, where it is apparently replaced by the Rufous-cheeked Hummingbird *Goethalsia bella*. The Tacarcuna Bush-Tanager *Chlorospingus tacarcunae* has a similar distribution, being replaced on the other Pacific slope ranges by its congener the Pirre Bush-Tanager *C. inornatus*. Majé appears to lack the Speckled Antshrike *Xenornis setifrons*, which in Panama is found only in the Atlantic cordillera.

Due to the ruggedness of the terrain, the upper elevations of the Serranía de Majé are still virtually pristine. However, as in so many other parts of the tropics, the area is under threat from logging and agriculture. Our own access to the area was made possible by a new logging road that ascended to 800 m. The basin of the Río Majé itself, which flanks the northwestern part of Serranía, is officially protected as part of the watershed for Lake Bayano, a major hydroelectric project. Cerro Chucantí and the surrounding cloud forest at present receives no official protection. Given the presence of several species of extremely limited distribution, some form of protection would be highly desirable.

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Appendix. Additional species recorded in cloud forest on Cerro Chucanti

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White Hawk *Leucopternis albicollis*, Black Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus tyrannus*, Ornate Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus ornatus*, Barred Forest-Falcon *Micrastur ruficollis*, Mottled Owl *Ciccaba virgata*, Green Hermit *Phaethornis guy*, Little Hermit *Phaethornis longuemareus*, Purple-crowned Fairy *Heliothryx barroti*, Emerald Toucanet *Aulacorhynchus prasinus*, Yellow-eared Toucanet *Selenidera spectabilis*, Olivaceous Piculet *Picumnus olivaceus*, Plain Xenops *Xenops minutus*, Spotted Woodcreeper *Xiphorhynchus erythropygius*, Brown-billed Scythebill *Campylorhamphus pusillus*, Russet Antshrike *Thamnistes anabatinus*, Plain Antvireo *Dysithamnus mentalis*, Slaty Antwren *Myrmotherula schisticolor*, Paltry Tyrannulet *Zimmerius vilissimus*, Olive-striped Flycatcher *Mionectes olivaceus*, Eye-ringed Flatbill *Rhynchocyclus brevirostris*, White-throated Spadebill *Platyrinchus mystaceus*, Eastern Wood-pewee *Contopus virens*, Bright-rumped Attila *Attila spadiceus*, White-ruffed Manakin *Corapipo leucorrhoa*, Gray-breasted Wood-wren *Henicorhina leucophrys*, Southern Nightingale-wren *Microcerculus marginatus*, Pale-vented Thrush *Turdus obsoletus*, Bananaquit *Coereba flaveola*, Silver-throated Tanager *Tangara icterocephala*, Bay-headed Tanager *Tangara gyrola*, Hepatic Tanager *Piranga flava*, Chestnut-capped Brush-finch *Buarremon brunneinucha*.

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