



## A PARAGUAYAN YELLOW-HOODED BLACKBIRD *CHRYSOMUS ICTEROCEPHALUS*? AND A PARAGUAYAN BLACKBIRD WITH A YELLOW HOOD!

### ¿UN VARILLERO CAPUCHON AMARILLO *CHRYSOMUS ICTEROCEPHALUS* DE PARAGUAY? ;Y UN VARILLERO PARAGUAYO CON UN CAPUCHON AMARILLO!

PAUL SMITH<sup>1\*</sup>, PIER CACCIALI<sup>2</sup> & CARLOS CARMAGNOLA<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup> FAUNA Paraguay, Encarnación, Paraguay, www.faunaparaguay.com, and Para La Tierra, Centro IDEAL, Mariscal Estigarribia 321 c/ Tte. Capurro, Pilar, Dpto. Ñeembucú, Paraguay. faunaparaguay@gmail.com.

<sup>2</sup> Instituto de Investigación Biológica del Paraguay, Del Escudo 1607, Asunción, Paraguay and Senckenberg Forschungsinstitut und Naturmuseum, Senckenberganlage 25, 60325 Frankfurt, Germany.

<sup>3</sup> Asunción, Paraguay.

\*Corresponding author

**Abstract.-** A supposed female specimen of Yellow-hooded Blackbird *Chrysomus icterocephalus* from the Paraguayan Chaco is reviewed, illustrated and reidentified as a female Chestnut-capped Blackbird *Chrysomus ruficapillus*. An interesting record of a male *Chrysomus ruficapillus* with a plumage anomaly exhibiting a bright yellow head is described from Asunción, Paraguay.

**Keywords.-** Chestnut-capped Blackbird; *Chrysomus ruficapillus*; Yellow-hooded Blackbird

**Resumen.-** Un supuesto ejemplar de sexo femenino de *Chrysomus icterocephalus* del Chaco Paraguayo fue revisado, ilustrado y reidentificado como una hembra de *Chrysomus ruficapillus*. Un registro interesante de un *Chrysomus ruficapillus* de sexo masculino con una anomalía de plumaje exhibiendo una cabeza amarilla es descrito de Asunción, Paraguay.

**Palabras claves.-** *Chrysomus ruficapillus*; Varillero congo; Tordo negro capuchón amarillo

Reviews of the Paraguayan avifauna by Hayes (1995) and Guyra Paraguay (2004) contain an extraordinarily high number of hypothetical species, many of which were categorised by these authors as “possible” or “doubtful”. Some of these have been dealt with in previous publications resulting in a reassigning of their status (Smith & Ríos Díaz, 2014a,b, 2015; Smith *et al.*, 2014, 2015; Smith, 2016) but the sources of a number of puzzling records still remain to be elucidated.

Amongst the species listed as doubtful by Hayes (1995) and Guyra Paraguay (2004) is a somewhat mysterious specimen record of Yellow-hooded Blackbird *Chrysomus icterocephalus* (Icteridae), published by Steinbacher (1968). In this paper we re-evaluate the status of this specimen, and report a new record of a Paraguayan blackbird with a yellow hood.

#### Steinbacher’s yellow-hooded blackbird

Steinbacher (1968) listed *Agelaius icterocephalus icterocephalus* amongst a collection of birds from the Paraguayan Chaco. This was based on a female specimen SMF 38312 (field number N656) in the Natur-museum Senckenburg in Frankfurt Germany, collected close to the Argentine border at Algarobo (sic), Boquerón department on 28 March 1962 by Jakob Unger. The specimen was stated to show a yellowish hue on the chest and throat, though the yellow was slightly less intense than that of female Yellow-hooded Blackbirds with which it was compared, but it was also noted that it showed obvious signs of immaturity. However Steinbacher (pers. comm. in Hayes, 1995) later suggested that the identification was questionable and the specimen may be “an odd Unicoloured

Blackbird (*A. cyanopus*)". Hayes (1995), who did not examine the specimen, noted that the measurements provided appeared to be too small for that species, and suggested that if correctly identified it could perhaps have referred to an escaped cagebird.

Yellow-hooded Blackbird is a common wetland blackbird along the Caribbean coast of South America and in much of the Amazon Basin, but is absent from southern Colombia, southern Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, northern Amazonas and west Roraima (Brazil) (Jaramillo & Burke, 1999). The species has been considered largely sedentary (Jaramillo & Burke, 1999), though local vagrancy has been reported from Bonaire and Curaçao (Voous, 1983). A population of up to 50 cage birds brought from Iquitos or Pucallpa either escaped or were released just south of Lima (Laguna de Villa), Peru during the 1960s but died out some time



Figures 2-3. Lateral (2) and ventral (3) view of specimen SMF 38312. Bar = 1 cm.

in the mid-1970s (Long, 1981). However this species is not popularly traded in Paraguay and the escape of a single immature female in Paraguay would seem to be a very unlikely explanation, especially given the remoteness of the locality deep in the sparsely inhabited Paraguayan Chaco.

Hayes (1995) was correct that Steinbacher's (1968) measurements are too small for Unicoloured Blackbird (Table 1), but they are consistent with the genus *Chrysomus*, which includes two species, Chestnut-capped Blackbird *Chrysomus ruficapillus* (Vieillot) and Yellow-hooded Blackbird *C. icterocephalus* (Linnaeus).

During January 2016 we were able to examine the specimen (Figs. 2-4), retake measurements and confirm its identity as Chestnut-capped Blackbird *Chrysomus ruficapillus* based primarily on its shorter culmen (upper bill) compared with *A. cyanopus* (this correction to the identification had also been made in Steinbacher's own writing on the specimen label). Thus, Yellow-hooded Blackbird should remain on the list of erroneous cited species. Comparative measurements for the specimen



Figure 1. Map of Paraguay showing localities mentioned in the text. Triangle: Fortín Conchitas (Algarobo [sic] in Steinbacher, 1968), Boquerón. Circle: Parque de la Solidaridad, Asunción.

	<i>Chrysomus icterocephalus</i>	<i>Chrysomus ruficapillus</i>	<i>Agelaius cyanopus</i>	SMF 38312
Wing	72.1 (68-77)	83 (82-84)	85 (80-90.5)	78 (79.5)
Tail	56.4 (51-62)	61.7 (58-65)	73.7 (70-79)	56 (58)
Culmen	17 (15-18)	16.3 (16-17)	22.5 (21.5-23.5)	NA (15.2)
Tarsus	23.2 (22-25)	23.7 (22-25)	23.2 (23-29)	25 (23.65)

Table 1: Measurements (in mm) for females of *Chrysomus icterocephalus*, *Chrysomus ruficapillus* and *Agelaius cyanopus* taken from Jaramillo and Burke (1999). Measurements of specimen SMF 38312 taken from Steinbacher (1968). Those in parentheses are measurements taken during our examination of the specimen

and females of confusion species are provided in Table 1.

### New record of a paraguayan “blackbird” with a yellow hood

On 23 August 2015 Carlos Carmagnola photographed an adult male *Chrysomus ruficapillus* with a near pure yellow head and some flecks of yellow plumage on the thighs (Fig. 5) at Parque de la Solidaridad, Asunción, Central department, Paraguay, having first seen the same individual at the same locality on 15 August 2015. The rest of the plumage was black, consistent with an adult male, and the individual was in the company of other birds showing the typical plumage of the species. The bird was photographed again on 17 October 2015. The initial impression was that the bird recalled a male Yellow-hooded Blackbird *C. icterocephalus*,



Figure 4. Lateral view of the head of specimen SMF 38312.



Figure 5. Adult male *Chrysomus ruficapillus* showing a plumage anomaly on the head and thighs. Parque de la Solidaridad, Asunción (Carlos Carmagnola).

but the yellow plumage is less extensive on the head and upper breast and the bird lacks the black lores, exhibiting instead a few scattered black feathers above the eye. The individual in fact probably exhibits melano-carotenoid schizochroism (Harrison, 1963; van Grouw, 2006) an uncommon plumage anomaly in which the loss of eumelanin pigments responsible for the black and chestnut plumage of the head (*pteryla capitalis*) has, in this case, revealed an underlying yellow carotenoid pigment. The result is an anomalous plumage that is remarkably reminiscent of the species closest living relative.

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