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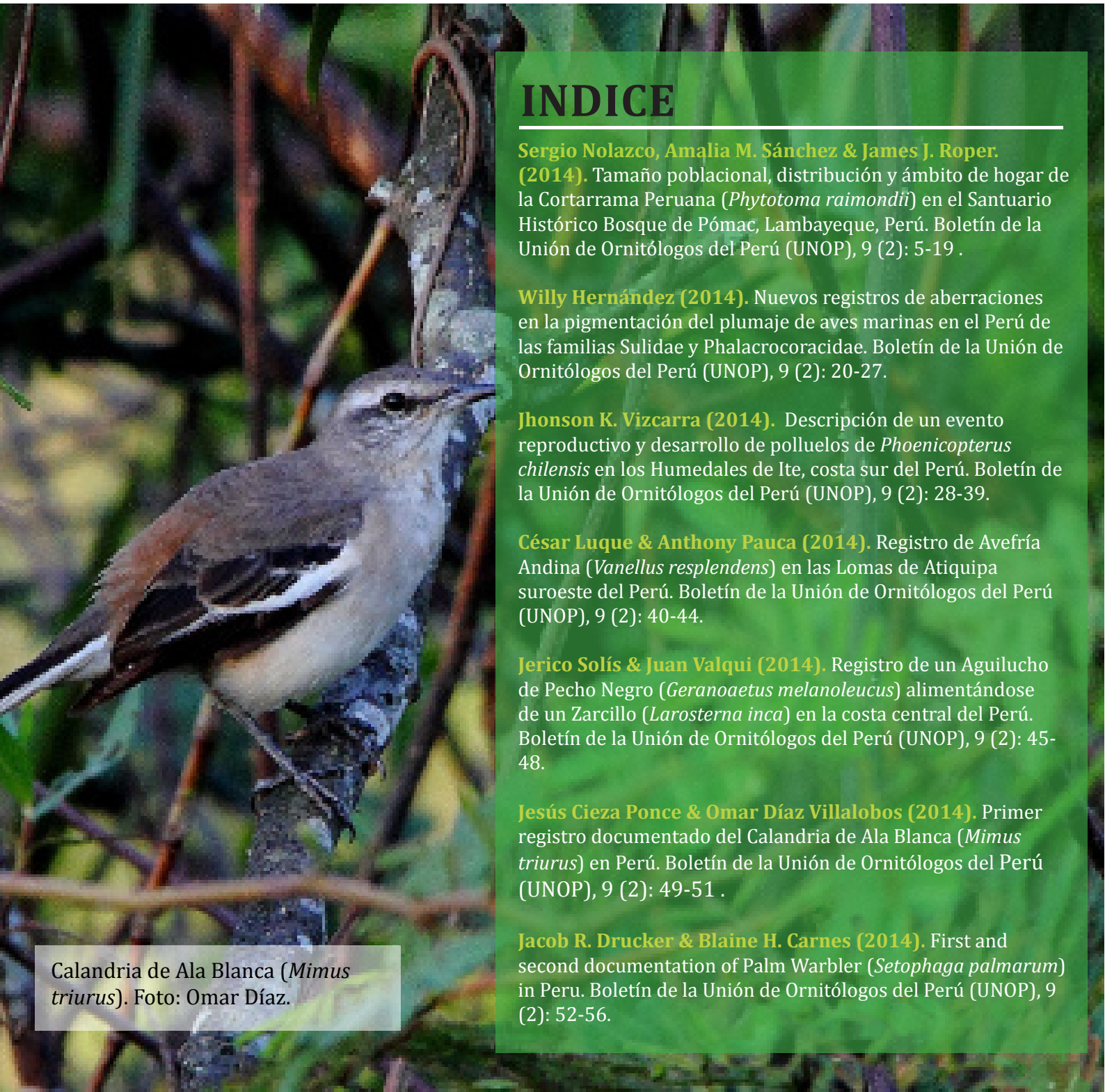

Calandria de Ala Blanca (*Mimus triurus*). Foto: Omar Díaz.

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First and second documentation of Palm Warbler (*Setophaga palmarum*) in Peru

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ABSTRACT

This paper reported the first and second documented Peruvian records of Palm Warbler (*Setophaga palmarum*) in Peru, found on September 5th and September 18th 2013 at Wayqecha Cloud Forest Biological Station (Cuzco) and Pantiacolla Lodge (Madre de Dios), respectively. We summarize field identification of this species as well as discuss its context as a vagrant in Peru.

Key words: Palm Warbler (*Setophaga palmarum*), Reverse Migrant, Vagrancy, Manu

RESUMEN

Reportamos el primer y segundo registro documentado de *Setophaga palmarum* para el Perú, encontrados en 5 y el 18 de septiembre de 2013 en la estación biológica Wayqecha (Cuzco) y en el Pantiacolla Lodge (Madre de Dios) respectivamente. Resumimos las características para identificación en campo de la especie y discutimos el contexto para considerarlo divagante en el Perú.

Palabras clave: *Setophaga palmarum*, migración inversa, divagante, Manu

FIELD ENCOUNTERS

On 5th of September 2013 at approximately seven hours, JRD and two other observers were walking up the Manu Road, approximately 130 meters uphill from Wayqecha Biological Station, Cuzco, (13°10'34.12"S / 71°35'12.29"W, 2927 m) when JRD noticed a small passerine (slightly more petite than Masked Flowerpiercer (*Diglossa cyanea*) and Rufous-collared Sparrow (*Zonotrichia capensis*) in the same mixed-species flock) with fine, insectivorous bill, medium primary-projection, and bobbing its relatively long tail. The bird was immediately identified as a Palm Warbler (*Setophaga palmarum*), a species the authors are familiar with from eastern North America.

Distinctive features include a rufous cap covering top of head from base of bill to crown, with a thin yellow supercilium, and a thin, dark line through a dark eye, as well as faded brown auriculars, with a thin whitish crescent below the eye. Throat, underparts, and undertail coverts were washed faint yellow, strongest in the throat and undertail, with a good amount of brown streaking, forming a necklace around the throat, identifying this individual as the eastern subspecies *S. p. hypochrysea*. The mantle, tail, and wings were brown, with darker brown streaking on back, transitioning into

a more olive color on its rump. Legs and feet were black. The plumage was worn overall, indicating that the bird had not yet undergone its post-breeding pre-basic molt.

We continued to watch the bird forage, where it actively gleaned and hover-gleaned (presumably in search of arthropods) in the foliage on the north side of the road, usually at eye-level height or below, spending some periods hopping along the road itself. Following it up the road for approximately 30 m, JRD obtained photos before it moved with the small flock to the northeast out of sight of the road. Further efforts to relocate it in the area for the next several hours and days proved futile.

The habitat at this location can be categorized as open elfin forest, characterized by relatively small *Clusia sp*. trees, with low density *Mericaceae* scrubs, and grasses as ground cover. This area is also somewhat disturbed, given its proximity to the relatively busy Manu Road and Wayqecha Biological Station. The weather was clear, with no cloud cover, light winds, and approximately 13 degrees Celsius.

A few weeks after this observation, on September 18th, JRD and three other observers were walking downstream along the river from Pantiacolla Lodge, Madre de Dios, (12°35'23.80"S / 71°13'26.92"W, 380 m), and came across a solo, small, flitty, relatively long-tailed passerine. Visual confirmation through binoculars showed it to be a Palm Warbler, seeming almost identical to the one seen at Wayqecha—a very worn *S. p. hypochrysea*, with an abnormal molt pattern. The bird foraged mostly on the ground, looking for prey along the edge of *Tessaria* scrub and the stony beach of a small seasonal river-island. Rather confiding, we watched it for ten minutes or so, obtaining photos before returning to camp. Interestingly enough, a "friaje" had passed through overnight, bringing cooler temperatures and strong winds from the south earlier in the day. Other unusual birds sighted at Pantiacolla following the "friaje" include Puna Ibis (*Plegadis ridgwayi*), Cinnamon Flycatcher (*Pyrrhomyias cinnamomeus*), and a large number of Blue-and-white Swallows (*Pygochelidon cyanoleuca*), all typical of higher elevations.

We alerted others at Pantiacolla to its presence, and the bird went unfound until September 22nd when relocated by BC in the same location with a mixed-species flock consisting mainly of *Sporophila* seedeaters. The following day the river rose rapidly, temporarily flooding the island, and the bird was not re-located again.

IDENTIFICATION

Palm Warbler is relatively distinct from other members of the Peruvian avifauna. Its small size, slim bill, and tail-pumping behavior are stereotypical of the Parulidae genus *Setophaga*, though it does have a superficial resemblance to *Thlypopsis* tanagers. Though *T. sordida* occurs in *Tessaria* scrub, they usually have a more compact, round-headed appearance then Palm Warblers, and have a very different plumage pattern. *Basileuterus* warblers are also stockier, and generally skulkier than *Setophaga* warblers.

Buff-rumped Warbler (*Myiothlypis fulvicauda*) also occurs in lower strata around riverine habitat, and also possesses a dark line through the eye and a pale supercilium, but is notably bicolored, with greyish upperparts and tan-colored underparts. Though this species pumps its spread tail (in a similar manner to a Palm Warbler, though these don't spread their tails) the characteristic bright buff coloration on the rump and base of tail, combined with a black tip to the tail, render this species unique.

Within the genus *Setophaga,* Palm Warbler is set apart from all other regularly occurring species in Peru. Its preferred habitat in the understory of relatively low, open vegetation sets it apart ecologically from Cerulean (*S. caerulea*) and Blackburnian (*S. fusca*) Warblers. Though Yellow Warbler (*S. petechia*) may occur in similar river-edge habitat, it more heavily built than Palm Warbler, with a different foraging strategy, and much more uniform coloration, with notably more overall yellow plumage than Palm Warbler. The American Redstart (*S. ruticilla*) has a similar shape to Palm Warbler, but a completely different plumage pattern and different foraging strategy and is extremely rare in southern Amazonia.

With regards to North American migrant *Setophaga*, Prairie Warbler (*S. discolor*) is perhaps the most similar species, but lacks the chestnut cap. It also has almost uniformly yellow underparts, and little rump contrast (Dunn & Garrett 1997). 'Myrtle' Yellow-rumped Warblers (*S. coronata*) are larger and more heavily structured with a completely different facial pattern and do not bob their tails.

In sum, Palm Warbler is a relatively distinctive species, identifiable by its chestnut cap, yellowish supercilium and dark line through the eye (creating a unique pattern of contrast), contrasting olive-yellow rump, bright yellow undertail coverts in all plumages, and tail-bobbing behavior. The individuals in question were both 'yellow' Palm Warblers (*S. p. hypochrysea*), the eastern of the two subspecies, based on the distinct, albeit faded, presence of yellow on the belly, and extensive chestnut cap. Were these birds the western taxa (*S. p. palmarum*), their underparts would show very little yellow except in the rump.

DISCUSSION

Given how much ornithological coverage Manu Road and the surrounding areas receive, it came as quite a surprise to encounter a species that had never before been documented in Peru twice in a month!. Though comparison of photos in the field on a camera's LCD screen led us to believe that the encounters described above were with two different birds, later side-by side comparison of the photos on a computer (see Fig.1 by Ian Davies below), highlighted a very similar, if not identical malar streaking on the rightside of the bird's head (a), fading of yellow to white towards the back of the supercilium (b), pattern of streaking on the flanks (c), patches of gray and yellow on the birds underparts (d), and a broken malar mark on the left side of the bird's head (e). Some of these similarities and variations can be explained by differences in posture and angle, so though we find it likely that our sightings were of the same individual bird we cannot say so with full confidence.

Typically, Palm Warblers breed in boreal forest in North America, and winter in the Caribbean (Dunn & Garrett 1997, Curson *et al*. 1994). The bulk of 'western' birds end up in southern Florida, Cuba, the Bahamas, and Jamaica, but also regularly occur in lower numbers from the Yucatan peninsula to Costa Rica. The majority of 'eastern' birds spend December to February between northern Florida and Louisiana, extending into coastal eastern Texas and the Bahamas (Dunn & Garrett 1997).

All published vagrancies fall within the Caribbean region (i.e. Curacao, northern Venezuela, Colombia), but pertain to 'western' birds, making it extremely surprising that the birds found in the Manu area—a good 2700 km farther south than the previous southernmost record—were 'eastern' ones. (Hilty & Brown 1986, Dunn & Garrett 1997, Salaman *et al*. 2009).

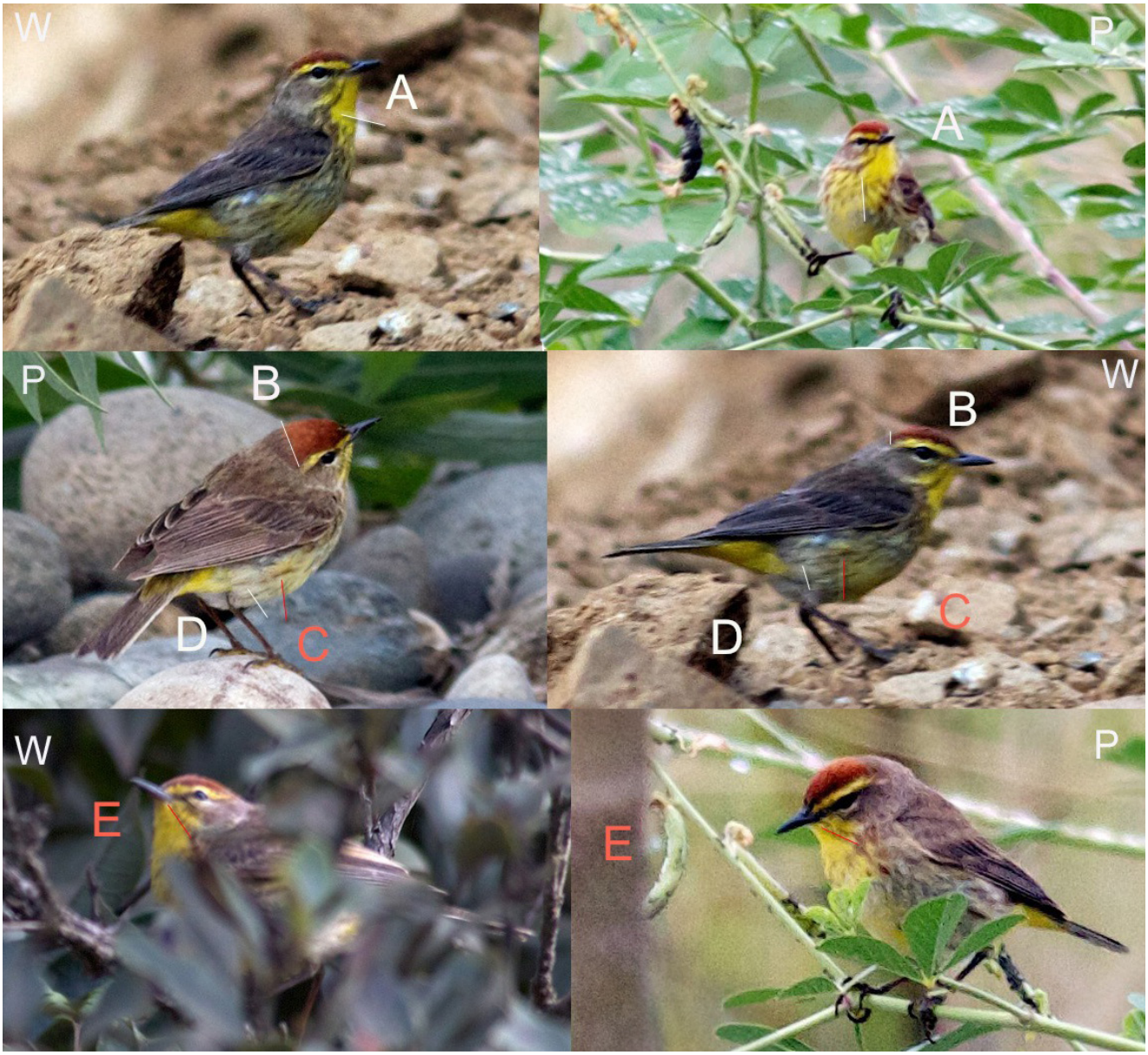

Figura 1. Photo composite of Palm Warbler(s) seen at Wayqecha Cloud Forest Biological Station (captioned with "W") and Pantiacolla Lodge (captioned with "P"), illustrating similar features that may identify these birds as the same individual. (A) Shows malar on right side of head, (B) highlights supercilium, (C) the pattern of flank streaking, (D) the patches of gray and yellow on the underparts, and (E) broken malar marks on the left side of the head. Red lines point to strong indicators that our sightings were of the same individual, white lines point to weaker indicators. Composite by Ian Davies, photos by Jacob R. Drucker.

There are unpublished or undocumented vagrancies as well. By far the most relevant of these was a sighting by John O'Neill at Machu Picchu in late April 1965, however no documentation was obtained (Tom Schulenberg and John O'Neill, pers. comm.). Thus though our sightings are the first documented in Peru, they are not the first records.

This further reinforces the question of why these bird(s) ended up in southeastern Peru. One explanation is that while migrating south for the winter they overshot their destination on the northern Gulf of Mexico and kept going for a very, very long way. However, in September, Palm Warblers are only starting to reach the northeastern U.S. on their southward migration, limiting this idea's merit.

Perhaps a better hypothesis is that our bird(s) were an example of misoriented reverse-migrants (see review by Howell

et al. 2014). In this phenomenon, birds' internal compasses are faulty, telling them to migrate the wrong (usually opposite) way. In this case, Palm Warblers wintering on the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico would depart to the southeast instead of the northeast. If this is the case, it means that the birds we found departed their wintering grounds the previous March, and had spent the next five-six months moving around South America! Here they would be subject to displacement or drift patterns such as "friajes" like the one that preceded our Pantiacolla sighting. The bird seen by John O'Neill in April 1965 was likely fresh off the wintering grounds, and another record (albeit a *S. p. palmarum*) from Isla del Coco, some 500 km southwest of Costa Rica, from late April (eBird 2014) are likely examples of a Palm Warblers early in the misorientation process.

The molt pattern of both birds supports the reverse-migrant possibility, as both birds showed a high degree of wear and retained the full chestnut cap, which is found only in alternate plumage. Given that Palm Warblers carry out their pre-basic molt on the breeding grounds (Pyle 1997), it is likely that these birds had been in the area for some time.

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