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Donacobius atricapilla
Foto: Antonio García-Bravo

New records on the feeding niche for the White-cheeked Cotinga (*Zaratornis stresemanni*) in the high Andes

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Bird species are one of the major dispersers of Loranthaceae in the southern hemisphere (Ladley & Kelly 1996, Amico *et al.* 2007). The dispersion of Loranthaceae species in the Andes is mainly carried out by cotingas (Family Cotingidae) such as the White-cheeked Cotinga (*Zaratornis stresemanni*) and Red-crested Cotinga (*Ampelion rubrocristata*) (Castañeda 2010). Additionally, some Loranthaceae species were found to be the center of the *Z. stresemanni* feeding niche, as well as some *Miconia* species were determined as the main feeding niche for some species of *Tangara* birds (Isler & Isler 1999). The White-cheeked Cotinga has a symbiosis and dependence on the fructification of several species of Loranthaceae of the genera *Tristerix* and *Ligaria* (Parker 1981, Amico *et al.* 2007). The flowering and fructification of species of those genera seem to be the main reason why *Z. stresemanni* does altitudinal migrations searching for forest patches where there would be available food (Lüthi 1970).

We made a short visit to a forest patch dominated by several *Polylepis* spp. trees, near Querococha Lake (9°31'41.16"S / 77°21'27.72"O, 4410 m) at Huascaran National Park, Ancash, Peru, on August 9, 2013. There, we found a *Z. stresemanni* individual very low in *Solanum nitidum* bushes (Figure 1), close to the ground. The plant was being shaken intensely, and the cotinga (Figure 2) was found eating the fruits. Fruits that were ripe were selected and eaten by the individual (Figure 3).

There are at least 16 species of the genus *Solanum* in Huascaran NP (Kolff & Kolff 1997), while only 4-5 species in the family Loranthaceae (Amico *et al.* 2007) are found throughout the *Z. stresemani* entire distribution range, which is restricted to the Central Andes (Birdlife International 2015). If *Solanum* species are an important part of the diet, then, the localities based on feeding offer that might currently be used by *Z. stresemanni* are more numerous than what we know. The species has previously been found by JB in an almost denuded cultivated area with few bushes in Ayash, Ancash, Peru, where no signs of *Polylepis*-associated Loranthaceae were found.

Given that no previous records exist on *Z. stresemanni* feeding on non-Loranthaceae species, despite Huascaran National Park and other forests with patches with Loranthaceae hemiparasites are regularly visited, there is a possibility that the species' diet is being adapted to new bush / forest conditions, based on forest patches decrease in extension. Some *Solanum* species might be the target for these conditions.

Figure 1: *Solanum nitidum.* Photo by J. Barrio.

Figure 2: *Zaratornis stresemanni* next to *Solanum nitidum* bushes with fruits just eaten. Photo by Diego García Olaechea.

Figure 3: Fruits eaten by *Zaratornis stresemanni*. Photo by J. Barrio.

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