

First record of Scaled Antpitta *Grallaria guatemalensis* in Belize

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Received 26 April 2024; final revision accepted 17 January 2025

Cotinga 47 (2025): 6–8

published online 5 May 2025

El Hormiguero Cholino Escamoso *Grallaria guatemalensis* es una especie ampliamente distribuida en Centroamérica y Sudamérica, desde el sur de México hasta el centro de Bolivia, con una población aislada en el sur de Venezuela, norte de Brasil y oeste de Guyana. Aquí presentamos el primer registro de esta especie en Belice, confirmado mediante observación directa, captura en red de niebla y en cámara trampa, en marzo de 2024, en la Estación de Investigación Las Cuevas, Reserva Forestal Chiquibul, Cayo, en el oeste de las montañas Mayas. Analizamos brevemente las posibles razones de este descubrimiento y la distribución potencial más amplia y el estatus de la especie en Belice.

Scaled Antpitta *Grallaria guatemalensis* is a ground-dwelling invertivore that inhabits a range of forest types from 200 to 2,800 m elevation in Central and South America^{6,15}. Listed as globally Least Concern², it has a large geographic range, recorded from southern Mexico to Bolivia, with a disjunct population in southern Venezuela, northern Brazil and western Guyana⁸. Until now, it has not been reported from Belize^{3,10,13}, with the previous nearest record being c.140 km south at Cerro San Gil, Izabal department, Guatemala^{3,9}. In this note we present the first record for Belize and briefly discuss possible reasons for this discovery and the species' potential wider distribution and status in Belize.

Study area and methods

In March 2024, we led a University of South Wales student field expedition at Las Cuevas Research Station (LCRS; 16°43'59.2"N, 88°59'9.3"W; 590 m elevation) in the Chiquibul Forest Reserve (CFR) of the western Maya Mountains, Cayo, Belize. The CFR is designated for the sustainable extraction of timber and comprises 59,882 ha of lowland, hill and submontane evergreen tropical forest on calcareous soils¹⁸. It receives 2,500–4,000 mm annual rainfall, and its dry season runs from February to May¹⁶.

The overarching purpose of the expedition was to introduce our students to a range of field research skills in a tropical forest. We employed a nested sampling design within which we used different field methods appropriate for a rapid assessment survey of a range of biodiversity. For birds, we set two 12-m mist-nets at ground level at six separate locations around LCRS. We surveyed each location for one day with nets open from 05h30–c.11h00 and 15h00–17h00. In these same locations we positioned 1–2 unpaired camera traps c.40 cm from the ground to survey terrestrial

mammals and birds. All cameras were situated on forest trails and left in place for 4–6 days.

Results

On 14 March 2024, between 06h30 and 08h00, we observed intermittently a single Scaled Antpitta hopping and foraging in the leaf litter, tossing and flicking leaves, along a forest trail at 610 m elevation (16°43'55.4"N 88°58'57.9"W). At 09h20 we captured a Scaled Antpitta in a mist-net set c.60 m from the initial observation (Fig. 1). The bird weighed 75 g, which appears at the lower end of its recorded weights (69.5–98 g)¹⁵. Unfortunately, the bird escaped during processing, so no further morphological data were collected. On 20 March 2024, at 07h52, a single bird was captured on a camera trap (Fig. 2) positioned c.400 m from the original visual observation and along the same forest trail.



Figure 1. Scaled Antpitta *Grallaria guatemalensis* caught in mist-net, Las Cuevas Research Station, Chiquibul Forest Reserve, Belize, 14 March 2024 (Anne Høydal).