

3

BOLETIN
DE LA
SOCIEDAD VENEZOLANA
DE
CIENCIAS NATURALES



TOMO V

No. 36



CARACAS
LIT. Y TIP. DEL COMERCIO
1939

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL STATUS OF THE BIRDS
COLLECTED AT MOUNT RORAIMA**

**(Paper read before the IX International Ornithological Congress,
at Rouen, May 13, 1938).**

by

WILLIAM H. PHELPS

Delegate, Ad-honorem, of the Venezuelan Government to the
IX International Ornithological Congress.

Roraima, the best known and highest of that group of sandstone table-top mountains which lie in the southeastern corner of Venezuela, that region which possesses such an interesting and characteristic fauna and flora, marks the intersection of the boundary lines between Venezuela, British Guiana and Brazil. The other mountains of this group extend to the westward nearly three hundred miles to Mount Duida and to the northwest perhaps one hundred miles to Auyan-tepui, that unknown mountain, largest of them all, recently visited by an expedition from the American Museum of Natural History.

I wish to rectify ranges given by Charles Chubb, in his "Birds of British Guiana", by Drs. C. B. Cory and Chas. E. Hellmayr, in their "Catalogue of the Birds of the Americas", and by James Lee Peters in his "Check List of the Birds of the World". They ascribe a British Guiana range instead of a Venezuelan one to all the birds collected at Mount Roraima which had not been recorded from other localities in Venezuela. All birds ever collected at Mt. Roraima were taken in Venezuela territory, and none of them in British Guiana, with the possible

exception of the one species which is resident on the summit. This might also have been collected on the British Guiana section of the summit plateau. Inasmuch as these forms number sixty-seven it is well that their correct Venezuelan range be proven and recognized as otherwise any check-list of Venezuelan birds which might be published would be very incomplete.

Charles Chubb (*Birds of British Guiana*, Vol. 1, 1916; Vol. 2, 1921) cites the references and collection localities of all the known specimens taken in British Guiana, and also gives their extralimital ranges. The Roraima birds enumerated by Chubb were collected by Richard Schomburgk in 1842, by Henry Whitely on two expeditions in 1881 and 1883, and by Frederick V. McConnell and John J. Quelch on two expeditions in 1894 and 1898.

The authoritative "Catalogue of the Birds of the Americas" (Part II, Chas. B. Cory, 1918 and 1919; Parts III to X, Dr. Chas. E. Hellmayr, 1924 to 1937) not only cites the occurrence localities in British Guiana, as Chubb does, but also gives the references and localities in which specimens had been collected in Venezuela (as in the rest of the Americas). Naturally, the later volumes included references to part of the birds collected by the American Museum of Natural History, Lee Garnett Day expedition to Mt. Roraima in 1927, as enumerated in Dr. Frank M. Chapman's "Descriptions of New Birds from Mt. Roraima" (*American Museum Novitates*. N^o 341. Feb. 2, 1929) and "The Upper Zonal Bird-Life of Mts. Roraima and Duida" (*Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History*. Vol. LXIII, 1931).

Notwithstanding the fact that Dr. Chapman gave exact collection points for every bird taken, and that every one of these stations, including the one on the summit plateau of Roraima, was definitely situated in Venezuela, both Hellmayr and Peters followed Chubb in giving British Guiana, instead of Venezuela, as the range of the Mount Roraima birds.

Dr. G. H. H. Tate, leader of the American Museum of Natural History expedition to Roraima, did not indicate the international boundaries on his manuscript map which Dr. Chapman used to indicate the collecting stations (The Upper Zonal Bird-Life of Mts. Roraima and Duida, p. 4). If he had done so, Dr. Hellmayr might have given a correct Venezuelan range at least to the forms collected by this expedition. Dr. Tate does give the international lines on the map of the Roraima region (see map "A") which he published in his article "Notes on the Mount Roraima Region" (The Geographical Review, Jan., 1930, facing p. 68). This map clearly shows that all the collecting stations, with the exception of the summit camp, were unquestionably in Venezuela and distant from both British Guiana and Brazil.

Dr. Chapman, in his "Descriptions of New Birds from Mt. Roraima" describes seven new forms from Mt. Roraima. In each case he states that the type specimens were collected at Mt. Roraima, *Venezuela*. He also gives *Venezuela* as the situation of every one of the collection localities where all the other specimens of this expedition were taken.

Before enumerating the sixty-seven forms collected at Roraima, in Venezuela, whose Venezuelan range has been denied in "The Catalogue of the Birds of the Americas" (Cory and Hellmayr), in "The Birds of British Guiana" (Chubb) in the instances where the species were not included in the former work, or in "Check List of the Birds of the World" (Peters), it will be shown that the birds were collected on Venezuelan soil, without question.

THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY LINES

Map "A" is that published by Dr. Tate in his "Notes on the Mt. Roraima Region". I have corrected the boundary line from the sources of the Venamo River, at Mt. Venamo, to the top of of Raraima because, posterior to the publication of this map, a joint Venezuelan-British-Brazilian boundary commission built a monument in the

centre of the summit plateau to mark the point of junction of the boundaries of the three nations. A copy of the "Act of Inauguration" of this monument (and of a second one on the rim of the summit plateau to the east of the first one, to mark the jumping-off place of the Venezuelan-Brazilian frontier) was published in the "Boletín del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores" of Venezuela, on July 24, 1932. The acceptance of this boundary monument was formally ratified by the British and Venezuelan governments in notes passed between the British legation in Caracas and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on October 17th and November 3rd, 1932. The reason that the Venamo-Roraima boundary line on Dr. Tate's map was drawn to the western rim of the summit plateau is because in 1902 the Venezuela-British Boundary Commission, which ascended Roraima for the purpose of establishing the boundary point, in fulfillment of the arbitration award of 1890 only penetrated to the point where the ledge trail to the top arrives at the summit plateau. There they are supposed to have built a cairn at the point indicated by Dr. Tate.

Inasmuch as the Venezuela-British Guiana boundary runs northwest from the centre of the plateau, the British Guiana-Brazil boundary north-east from the same point, and the Venezuela-Brazil boundary east, we see that of the summit plateau of Roraima five-eighths belongs to Venezuela, one-fourth to British Guiana and one-eighth to Brazil. The only known access to the summit is on the southwest side, far away from either British Guiana or Brazilian territory.

The Venezuela-Brazil boundary, as shown on this map "A", is approximately correct. At the present time a Venezuelan-Brazilian boundary commission is rectifying the line. The engineers started from Roraima and have already made considerable progress. It is the watershed between the Orinoco and Amazon river systems. As can be seen from the map, the British Guiana-Brazil

boundary runs almost east from the summit for a long distance. At no time has England ever laid claim to the Venezuelan territory to the west of the Mt. Venamo-Roraima line, or to the southern slopes of Roraima, nor has Brazil ever laid claim to the southern approaches to the mountain. This is important because it shows that there never was any justification for denying to Roraima birds a Venezuelan range inasmuch as they were all collected to the west of the Venamo-Roraima boundary line, or on the southern slopes or approaches to the mountain, as will be shown.

THE BRITISH GUIANA SLOPES OF RORAIMA HAVE NOT BEEN PENETRATED

The reason why all Roraima birds have been collected in Venezuela is because the northern slopes of the mountain, for a great distance, are covered by forest which has not been penetrated by any expedition. Dr. Tate says (Notes on the Mount Roraima Region. p. 61): "About the land to the north of Roraima, there is less information. Only some thirty miles away, the Kako and Mazuruni, and their affluents, capture the entire northern run-off of the Roraima Mountains. Accounts agree that no savannas exist to the north. Observations from the summit of Mt. Roraima bear out this statement. No trace of savanna interrupts the sea of forest stretching northward from the foot of the cliffs". On the contrary, the approaches to Roraima from the south through Venezuela, used by all of the bird collecting expeditions except Whitely's, and from the north-west,—also in Venezuela,—used by Whitely, is mostly savanna country. I again quote from Dr. Tate (p. 58): "Roraima is approached from the south south-west across some forty miles of broken, hilly savanna land. Woods are confined to deep valleys whose meanders cut the rolling savanna in every direction. Country of this type is representative for the entire region of the Arabupu, Kukenam, and part of the Caroni and Cotinga drainage".

ROUTES AND COLLECTING STATIONS OF THE
VARIOUS EXPEDITIONS

On map "A" is indicated the route of each one of the bird collecting expeditions already referred to. I will comment on them in chronological order.

Richard Schomburgk. 1842. — Map "B" is an enlarged copy from Schomburgk's "Reisen in British-Guiana in den Jaren 1840-1844", showing his route. I have drawn in the approximate boundary lines, based on Dr. Tate's map "A". Here, and on map "A", it can be seen that he approached Roraima from the south, from the Cotin-ga River in Brazil. He crossed the frontier into Vene-zuela more than fifty miles from Roraima, returning in a similar direction. Manifestly he could not have col-lected any Roraima birds in British Guiana.

Henry Whitely. 1881-2 and 1883. — Map "C" is a copy of the one in Whitely's narrative (Explorations in the Neighborhood of Mts. Roraima and Kukenam in British Guiana. Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society. Vol. VI, 1884, pp. 452-462). The boundary line has been drawn in by me approximately, from Dr. Tate's map "A", on which Whitely's route is also traced. It is seen that Whitely (on both expeditions) approached Roraima from the north-west through the Venezuelan savanna region and returned by the same route. His base camp, on both expeditions, was eight miles south-west from Roraima, apparently "Paulo" on the Tate map. He says (p. 459): "I determined to make my headquarters on the same spot in the neighborhood of which my first collection was formed. . . . ; this is distant from Roraima about eight miles in a bee line". Describing his trip from this camp to the mountain he says: "We travelled in an easterly di-rection towards Roraima". His narrative shows that he spent at least four months at this camp in 1883 and also that he spent at least a week at a second camp nearer the base of the mountain. The access to the summit had not as yet been discovered. It is seen that Whitely en-

tered Venezuela from British Guiana forty miles to the north-west of Roraima and that he never was in British Guiana territory again until he crossed the frontier at the same spot on his return. He could not have collected any Roraima birds in British Guiana.

McConnell and *Quelch*. 1894 and 1898. — Map “D” is from Chubb’s “Birds of British Guiana” and shows the itineraries of both of these expeditions. I have corrected the boundary line from Mt. Venamo to Mt. Roraima. The itineraries have also been traced on map “A”.

The first McConnell-Quelch expedition entered Venezuela from Brazilian territory to the south-west of Mt. Weitipu, and left it also by the southern route to the south-west of Mt. Sabang. During this time the expedition was never out of Venezuelan territory. The second expedition, in 1898, did not use the orthodox southern route to reach Roraima but crossed into Brazil from the north, fifteen miles to the east of Roraima and east of Mt. Maringma. Venezuela was entered ten miles south-east of Roraima. From there the route was west to Paulo (Map “A”) in the vicinity of which the base camp was made, probably near the camp sites of the Schomburgk and Whitely expeditions, eight miles to the south-west of Roraima, deep in Venezuelan territory. The return was made by the same route.

In Quelch’s “Itinerary” of McConnell’s second trip to Roraima (Chubb’s *Birds of British Guiana*. Vol. II. pp. lvii, lviii and lxiii) he says that he ranged over nearly the whole area of the summit plateau, except the extreme northern side, and that the only bird collected or noticed was a *Zonotrichia*. It is possible that this bird, *Zonotrichia capensis macconnelli* (Sharpe), was taken by McConnell on the small British Guiana segment of the summit plateau. Inasmuch as nobody had previously collected birds on the summit, and as the American Museum of Natural History Expedition of 1927 collected only at the Venezuelan end of the top, it follows that this is the only one of the twenty-two forms recorded by

Hellmayr, or by Chubb, as collected only at Roraima in British Guiana, which might have been collected on British Guiana soil.

American Museum of Natural History Expedition. Dr. Tate. 1927. — Map "E" is reproduced from Dr. Chapman's "The Upper Zonal Bird-Life of Mts. Roraima and Duida (p. 4)". The international boundaries have been drawn in by me from map "A". It shows that Dr. Tate approached Roraima from the south-west, through Brazil, entering Venezuela fifty miles from the mountain. He left Venezuela to the south of Mt. Weitipu and never entered British Guiana until he arrived at the Ireng River. His collecting stations are all indicated on map "E". These are well within Venezuelan territory. He collected no Roraima birds in British Guiana.

CONCLUSION

1. — Notwithstanding that no maps have ever shown the southern and western slopes of Mt. Roraima, and its approaches, to be in British Guiana territory, and notwithstanding that the British Government has never even laid claim to that region, Charles Chubb, in his "Birds of British Guiana", Dr. C. B. Cory and Chas. E. Hellmayr in their authoritative "Catalogue of the Birds of the Americas", and James Lee Peters, in his new standard work "Check List of the Birds of the World", have given a British Guiana range to the birds collected at Mt. Roraima, thus denying a Venezuelan range to those not recorded elsewhere in Venezuela. They have considered the Roraima region exclusively British.

2. — No birds collected at Mt. Roraima have been taken on British Guiana soil, with the possible exception of *Zonotrichia capensis macconnelli*. They have been collected in Venezuela.

3. — Therefore a Venezuelan range should be given to all these forms, regardless as to whether or not the British Guiana ranges, already given by the above authorities, are conserved or not.

4. — Mt. Kukenam, adjoining Mt. Roraima to the west, lies entirely within Venezuelan territory, as can be seen on map "E". Two subspecies have been described by Chubb, one of which is only known from Mt. Kukenam and the other from Mt. Kukenam and more recently from Mt. Roraima (Chapman, Upper Zonal Bird Life of Mts. Roraima and Duida, p. 87). The birds are: *Lochmias nematura castanonota* Chubb, and *Grallaricula nana kukenamensis* Chubb. Dr. Hellmayr has followed Chubb in ascribing to them an exclusively British Guiana range (See Catalogue of the Birds of the Americas, Part IV, p. 257, and Part III, p. 329). The ranges should be corrected to read: Mt. Kukenam, Venezuela, for the first, and Mts. Kukenam and Roraima, Venezuela, for the second.

5. — List of the birds collected at Mt. Roraima (but at no other locality in Venezuela) whose Venezuelan range has been denied by Drs. Cory and Hellmayr in "Catalogue of the Birds of the Americas", by Peters in "Check List of the Birds of the World" in the cases where the species belong to families not yet treated in Hellmayr's work, and by Chubb in the "Birds of British Guiana" in the case of the Fringillidae which have not as yet been treated either by Hellmayr or by Peters. These number sixty seven and should be given a Venezuelan range. Under each species, in parenthesis, is given the authority for the Roraima record, in the cases where this is not given by Cory, Hellmayr or Peters in their works:

Tinamus major major (Gmel.) (Chubb I-4)	Peters	I-13
Laterallus viridis viridis (P. L. S. Müller) (Chubb I-74)	"	II-192
Capella undulata undulata (Bodd.) (Chapm. p. 63).	"	II-277
Aratinga solstitialis (Linn.) (Chubb I-307)	"	III-188
Pyrrhura egregia (Sclater)	"	III-197
Touit purpurata purpurata (Gmelin) (Chubb I-337)	"	III-208
Ciccaba superciliaris macconnelli Chubb (Chubb I-290)	Cory	II-35
Tyto perlata perlata (Licht.) (Chubb I-295)	"	II-48
Nyctipolus whitelyi (Salvin) (Chapm. p. 68)	"	II-136

<i>Phaethornis bourcierii</i> (Lesson) (Chubb I-385) ..	Cory	II-160
<i>Campylopterus hiperythrus</i> Cab. (Chapm. p. 71) ..	"	II-169
<i>Saucerottia cupreicauda</i> (Salv. & God.)	"	II-186
<i>Avocettula recurvirostris</i> (Swainson) (Chubb I-408)	"	II-221
<i>Topaza pella</i> (Linn.) (Chubb I-417)	"	II-230
<i>Lophornis pavoninus</i> Salv. & God.	"	II-311
<i>Aulacorhynchus whitelyanus</i> (Salv. & God.) (Chubb I-462)	"	II-376
<i>Notharchus macrorhynchus</i> (Gmelin) (Chubb I-473)	"	II-391
<i>Myrmotherula gutturalis</i> Salv. & God. (Chubb II-29)	Hellm.	III-142
<i>Myrmotherula behni inornata</i> Sclater	"	III-333
<i>Cercomacra tyrannina saturator</i> Chubb	"	III-218
<i>Hypocnemias cantator cantator</i> (Bodd.) (Chubb II-63)	"	III-239
<i>Sclateria schistacea saturata</i> (Salvin)	"	III-257
<i>Formicarius analis crissalis</i> (Cabanis)	"	III-283
<i>Chamaeza brevicauda fulvescens</i> Salv. & God. . .	"	III-293
<i>Myrmothera simplex</i> (Salv. & God.)	"	III-160
<i>Grallaria guatemalensis roraimae</i> Chubb	"	III-338
<i>Synallaxis poliophrys</i> (Cabanis)	"	IV-76
<i>Synallaxis cabanisi macconnelli</i> Chubb	"	IV-84
<i>Synallaxis clinnamomea adusta</i> Salv. & God. . . .	"	IV-105
<i>Sittasomus griseicapillus amazonus</i> Lafres	"	IV-358
<i>Dendrocicla fuliginosa</i> (Vieillot)	"	IV-375
<i>Myiozetetes cayanensis cayanensis</i> (Linn.)	"	V-138
<i>Euscarthmornis russatus</i> (Salv. & God.)	"	V-317
<i>Elaenia ruficeps</i> (Pelzeln)	"	V-424
<i>Elaenia gaimardii guianensis</i> Berlepsch	"	V-430
<i>Tyranniscus acer</i> Salv. & God.	"	V-476
<i>Leptopogon amaurocephalus peruvianus</i> Scl. & Salv.	"	V-488
<i>Oxyrunchus cristatus hypoglaucus</i> (Salv. & God.) ..	"	VI-2
<i>Piprites chloris chlorion</i> (Cabanis)	"	VI-4
<i>Chloropipo uniformis</i> Salv. & God.	"	VI-45
<i>Xenopipo atronitens</i> Cabanis	"	VI-47
<i>Corapipo gutturalis</i> (Linn.)	"	VI-61
<i>Euchlornis whitelyi</i> (Salv. & God.)	"	VI-123
<i>Lipaugus atreptophorus</i> (Salv. & God.)	"	VI-160

<i>Pachyramphus viridis griseigularis</i> Salv. & God.	Hellm.	VI-166
<i>Perissocephalus tricolor</i> (Müller)	"	VI-234
<i>Procnias alba</i> (Hermann)	"	VI-237
<i>Microcerculus ustulatus ustulatus</i> Salv. & God.	"	VII-286
<i>Turdus lawrencii</i> Coues	"	VII-389
<i>Turdus olivater roraimae</i> Salv. & God.	"	VII-407
<i>Platychiela flavipes polionota</i> (Sharpe)	"	VII-428
<i>Cichlopsis leucogenys gularis</i> Salv. & God.	"	VII-432
<i>Hylophilus ochraceiceps luteifrons</i> Sclater	"	VIII-181
<i>Cyclarhis gujanensis gujanensis</i> (Gmelin)	"	VIII-200
<i>Sporophila longipennis</i> Chubb	Chubb	II-429
<i>Sporophila gutturalis roraimae</i> Chubb	"	II-435
<i>Tiaris phaeoptila</i> (Salv. & God.)	"	II-442
<i>Periporphyrus erythromelas</i> (Gmelin)	"	II-446
<i>Zonotrichia capensis macconnelli</i> (Sharpe)	"	II-461
<i>Atlapetes personatus</i> (Cabanis)	"	II-471
<i>Tanagra plumbea</i> (Du Bus)	Hellm.	IX-67
<i>Tanagrella velia velia</i> (Linn.)	"	IX-70
<i>Calospiza gyrola gyrola</i> (Linn.)	"	IX-142
<i>Thraupis episcopus episcopus</i> (Linn.)	"	IX-205
<i>Mitrospingus oleagineus</i> (Salvin)	"	IX-354
<i>Hemithraupis guira roraimae</i> (Hellm.)	"	IX-377
<i>Sturnella magna monticola</i> Chubb	"	X-28

6. — List of birds collected at Mt. Roraima, in Venezuela, but at no locality in British Guiana, and given a British Guiana range by Chubb, Cory or Hellmayr. Authorities should decide whether or not this range should be conserved, in view of the evidence presented in this paper to the effect that all the specimens were collected on Venezuelan soil. The forest inhabiting species may also occur on the untrodden British Guiana slopes of Roraima, while the savanna forms probably do not, as we have seen that there is no savanna country in that direction.

These forms number twenty-two. *Zonotrichia capensis macconnelli* is not included in this list because, as has already been shown, it may have been collected on the British Guiana part of the summit plateau and unquestionably will be found there. The twelve marked by a

asterisk (*) do not seem to have been taken anywhere except at Mount Roraima. The page references to Chapman are from his "Upper Zonal Bird Life of Mts. Roraima and Duida":

Columba albilinea Bonap.	Chubb	I-39
(Columba a. roraimae Chapm. , Chapman p. 63).		
*Nyctipolus whitelyi (Salvin)	Cory	II-136
*Campylopterus hyperythrus Cabanis	"	II-169
Colibri germana (Salvin and Godman)	"	II-221
Thamnophilus insignis (Salvin and Godman)	Hellm.	III-100
*Scelateria schistacea saturata (Salvin)	"	III-257
*Myrmothera simplex (Salvin and Godman)	"	III-333
*Grallaria guatimalensis roraimae Chubb	"	III-338
*Synallaxis cabanisi macconnelli Chubb	"	IV-84
Automolus roraimae Hellmayr	"	IV-219
Cnemotriccus poecilurus salvini (Sclater)	"	V-227
*Euscarthmornis russatus (Salvin and Godman)	"	V-311
Mecocerculus leucophrys roraimae Hellm.	"	V-396
Leptopogon nigrifrons Salvin and Godman	"	V-487
(Mecocerculus nigrifrons (Salv. and God), Chapm. p. 94).		
*Pachyrampus viridis griseigularis Salv. & God.	"	VI-166
*Trogodytes rufulus rufulus Cab.	"	VII-251
Turdus lawrencii Coues	"	VII-389
*Sporophila longipennis Chubb	Chubb	II-429
Duncanula duncani Chubb	"	II-440
(Idiospiza homochroa duncani (Chubb) Chapm. p. 119).		
*Tiaris phaeoptila (Salv. and God.)	"	II-442
*Atlapetes personatus (Cab.)	"	II-471
Sturnella magna monticolor Chubb	Hellm.	X-28

ADDENDA

Subsequent to reading the above paper at the International Ornithological Congress at Rouen, I have obtained the hitherto unpublished map (see Map "F") of the Venezuelan Boundary Commission. This shows the international boundaries and the Boundary posts placed by

the Mixed Venezuelan British-Brazilian Commission, to which I have already referred, on the summit plateau of Mount Roraima.

This map shows that one half of the small British part of the summit is inaccessible and that the Venezuelan boundary line should have been drawn still farther to the West than has been done on Maps A, B, C, D, and E. The boundaries correspond to the watersheds of the Orinoco, Essequibo and Amazon Rivers.