
Two nests of Brown-capped Vireo *Vireo leucophrys* from north-west Ecuador

The genus *Vireo* includes 31 species restricted to the New World. Nests of most tropical vireos remain undescribed. One such is Brown-capped Vireo *V. leucophrys*. Formerly considered conspecific with Warbling Vireo *V. gilvus* but now treated specifically¹, Brown-capped Vireo occurs in highlands from southern Mexico to north-west Bolivia, in the canopy to mid-levels of forest, borders, secondary woodland and clearings with scattered trees at 500–2,600 m³. Here we describe two nests of Brown-capped Vireo from north-west Ecuador.

The nests were discovered between 31 May and 3 July 2008 on the private property of RG, adjacent to Mindo Loma Reserve, elevation 1,850 m, near km 72 on the main Quito–Los Bancos highway, prov. Pichincha, Ecuador. They were c.40 m from each other in a mosaic of pasture, young second growth and 15–20 m-tall alders (*Alnus*, Betulaceae). Older second-growth subtropical forest was 50–100 m from the nest sites. We found the first nest 8 m above ground in a 17-m alder on 31 May 2008. On 1 June 2008 a bird was on the nest, possibly incubating. We saw two chicks being fed at the nest on 14 June and 17 June. We collected and photographed the empty nest (Fig. 1) on 6 July 2008



Figure 2. Adult Brown-capped Vireo *Vireo leucophrys*, with two chicks in nest, prov. Pichincha, Ecuador, 7 August 2008 (Rudy Gelis)

and subsequently carefully took it apart to determine its composition.

The outer layer consisted mostly of 2–5 cm-long strands of green moss, plus a spider egg sac and six black strands of long human hair. Fine spider silk and these hairs held the outer materials together. The inner layer was a compact cup of 15–25-cm strips of thin, pale brown, dead plant fibre, woven in concentric circles. A few strands of lichen were loosely woven between the inner and outer layers.

We found the second nest, also 8 m above ground, in an 11 m-tall ortiguilla (cf. *Myriocarpa*, Urticaceae) on 3 July. An adult was lining the inside of the nest. The last time the nest was observed under construction was 7 July. We saw two adults arriving to feed two nestlings on 7 August 2008 (Fig. 2). The second nest was collected when empty on 23 August 2008. We did not determine specific nest components but it closely resembled the first in construction materials.

Both cup-shaped nests were suspended from a fork near the end of a long, live, mostly

horizontal yet arching lateral branch of a tree. Rims of each nest were firmly attached to the two twigs of the fork using 2-cm strands of green moss and spider silk. Respectively, the two nests measured 7.6 and 7.8 cm in outer diameter, 7.7 and 5.8 mm outer height, 4.4 and 4.3 inner diameter, and 4.6 and 3.6 cm inner depth.

The Brown-capped Vireo nest, a cup suspended from the fork of a branch, is similar in form to many known vireo nests². Vireos that adorn the outer layer with moss or lichen, e.g., Hutton's Vireo *V. huttoni*, Yellow-throated Vireo *V. flavifrons*, Solitary Vireo *V. solitarius*, Philadelphia Vireo *V. philadelphicus* and Warbling Vireo *V. gilvus*², probably augment the camouflaging of their nest to conceal their offspring. Indeed, we found it difficult to relocate our nests even after finding and observing them on several occasions.

References

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Rudy A. Gelis and Rolando García

Yanayacu Biological Station & Center for Creative Studies, Cosanga, Napo, Ecuador; c/o 721 Foch y Amazonas, Quito, Ecuador. E-mail: rudygelis@yahoo.com.

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