

A Blue Grosbeak *Passerina caerulea* in north-east Colombia

On 13 March 2011, we observed a Blue Grosbeak *Passerina caerulea* near the Caribbean between Ciénaga and Santa Marta, Colombia (11°02'15"N 74°12'57"W; 10–20 m). The observation was made on the Dole–Papare / La Playita Road, which leads to a coal processing facility, c.1.8 km from Highway 90. At c.09h00 the grosbeak was spotted in an area of scrub, at c.75 m distance perched atop a bush, with the sun behind us. All of us observed the bird through a telescope before it flew off. It could not be relocated and no photographs were taken.

Four of us are familiar with the species from Mexico and North America. The bird was a female or immature, being warm brown overall with two very distinct chestnut wingbars. It appeared larger than a Blue-black Grassquit *Volatinia jacarina* and smaller than a Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*. The finch-like bill was dark and large. There were no face markings or streaking on the back. The underparts were uniform brown, with no evidence of blue. The chestnut wingbars and size permitted confident exclusion of possible confusion species, such as female Blue-black *Cyanocmpsa cyanoides* and Ultramarine Grosbeaks *C. brissonii*, and Great-

billed *Oryzoborus maximiliani* and Large-billed Seed Finches *O. crassirostris*. In addition to lacking wingbars, Blue-black Grassquit is smaller with streaked underparts. Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea* is smaller overall; it has smudgy streaking on the breast, and its wingbars are not chestnut, but less distinct and pale.

Blue Grosbeak is a boreal migrant that breeds in North America as far north as southern New York and southern North Dakota, and west to central California. In Middle America, it breeds in Mexico south to Costa Rica⁵. Blue Grosbeak winters in Middle America south to central Panama, where it is a rare winter visitor. The species is unknown in Panama east or south of the Canal Zone⁹ (K. Allaire pers. comm. 2011). Blue Grosbeaks from eastern North America probably migrate across the Gulf of Mexico to Central America⁵. They are rare migrants on several Caribbean islands, including Jamaica, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands⁷, Guadeloupe and Barbados².

There are four previous records of Blue Grosbeak in mainland South America: two each in Colombia and Ecuador (see Fig. 1). The first mainland Colombian record involved a specimen collected by M. A. Carriker on 4 April 1942, at 1,600 m in the Perijá Mountains, south-east of Codazzi, dpto. Cesar (held at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, USNM 375361)⁴. The second Colombian record was a sighting by Gochfeld *et al.*³ on 18 April 1973, east of Buenaventura, on the Pacific coastal plain. In Ecuador a female was collected along the Río Napo on 1 December 1964⁵ and a male was photographed by Brinkhuizen *et al.*¹ near Hoja Blanca, Esmeraldas, on 1 August 2009. In addition, a female was photographed on Bonaire, off the coast of Venezuela, on 14–20 November 1983⁶. The species has also been recorded on Isla San Andrés, politically part of Colombia, though 700 km north of mainland Colombia, in the Caribbean Sea¹⁰.

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Figure 1. Map showing records of Blue Grosbeak *Passerina caerulea* in South America and the former Netherlands Antilles.

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