

Second record of Ocellated Poorwill *Nyctiphrynus ocellatus* for Nicaragua and third record for Costa Rica

Ocellated Poorwill *Nyctiphrynus ocellatus* is known in Nicaragua from a single specimen collected in 1909⁵, and it has been recorded elsewhere in Central America just a handful of times in the past century. During a March 2011 visit to Refugio Bartola on the río San Juan in south-east Nicaragua, we observed, photographed (Fig. 1) and sound-recorded a male Ocellated Poorwill. It was initially heard at c.21h00 on 16 March 2011, c.400 m north of the cabins at Refugio Bartola (10°58.373'N 84°20.348'W; 60 m), calling persistently from dense second growth c.10 m from the east bank of the río San Juan. The bird called from the same location for almost 30 minutes but was not seen despite playback. It eventually moved 200 m north into more closed forest, where we found it perched c.1.5 m above the ground using a spotlight. The night was overcast although the nearly full moon was occasionally visible. We identified the bird as a male based on its overall dark greyish-brown (not rufous) coloration³.

At the site where we first encountered the bird, KS heard another individual on the opposite

bank of the río San Juan, i.e. in Costa Rica. A third bird may have also been calling several hundred metres further downriver on the Nicaraguan side. Thus, at least two birds, and probably three, were heard in the same area. This suggests males on territories rather than migrants, which theoretically could vocalise. Our efforts to relocate the birds on subsequent evenings were frustrated by rain and / or overcast skies.

Two subspecies of Ocellated Poorwill are recognised: *N. o. ocellatus* has a large range in South America, over most of Brazil, north to south-west Colombia and south to north-east Argentina; and the poorly known *N. o. lautus* of Central America³. Cleere³ described it as mainly a lowland species of small, shady clearings and the understorey of humid and wet lowland forest, evergreen rainforest and dense second growth, which is consistent with the habitat at Refugio Bartola, as is his description of the species' vocal behaviour: 'Sings from a low perch in forest interior or along forest edges'.

Martínez-Sánchez⁴ considered Ocellated Poorwill a rare vagrant to cloud forests in Nicaragua's northern mountains at 800–1,000 m. His inclusion of this species in the checklist of birds of Nicaragua is based on a single specimen collected by Richardson at Peñas Blancas (Jinotega) on 5 June 1909⁶. Nonetheless, it has been speculated that the species is probably a rare permanent resident there⁵. The specimen's label gives no indication of altitude, habitat or gonad size. Miller & Griscom⁶ described it as a new species, *N. lautus*, which is now considered a subspecies of *ocellatus*. Thereafter, Stiles⁹ obtained a male in breeding condition in Costa Rica on 28 March 1988 that he referred to *N. o. lautus*.

More recently, *N. ocellatus* was documented in eastern Honduras in 1997¹, and in north-central Costa Rica in 2007⁸. There is also a single, unconfirmed record from central Panama, based on a sight

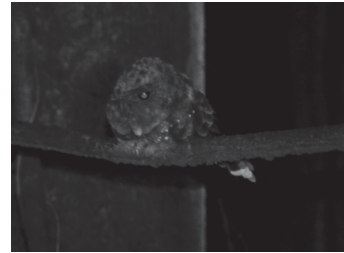


Figure 1. Male Ocellated Poorwill *Nyctiphrynus ocellatus*, Refugio Bartola, Nicaragua, 16 March 2011 (Klemens Steiof)

record of a bird 'believed seen on Achioté Road on Caribbean side of Canal area on March 15, 1978'⁷. Interestingly, Stiles' specimen was collected near Brasilia de Upala in Costa Rica's Alajuela province, c.100 km west of Refugio Bartola, in the north-west corner of the same Atlantic slope drainage that feeds Lake Nicaragua and the río San Juan. The most recent Costa Rican record, a bird heard on 13 February 2007 by C. Sánchez, is from Finca Las Crucitas, San Carlos, Alajuela (10°52'N 84°19'W), just 12 km south of our record.

Based on observations in eastern Honduras, in 1997 near Las Marias along the río Plátano (15°38'N 84°48'W), and in 1999 near Krausirpe (15°02'N 84°52'W), including females on nests, Anderson¹ concluded that Ocellated Poorwill is probably a 'common resident of mature lowland moist forest'. He further speculated that, given how little ornithological work has been undertaken in the Mosquitia of eastern Honduras and north-east Nicaragua, 'further study may likely reveal a broader distribution and breeding range for this species in Nicaragua than is presently known'¹.

Given the species' apparent propensity for dense second growth and forest interior, its presence has probably gone largely undetected in the moist Atlantic slope lowland forests of northern Costa Rica, Nicaragua and eastern Honduras, where the few documented records suggest resident populations.

Our observation is only the second documented record of *N. ocellatus* for Nicaragua and the first in more than 100 years. The bird heard on the opposite bank of the río San Juan represents the third report for Costa Rica. Together these observations apparently also represent only the sixth record in southern Central America. Additional photographs and a sound-recording of the bird at Refugio Bartola can be found at <http://www.nicabirds.com>.

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Robert L. Batchelder

Unit 3240 Box, DPO AA 34021, USA. E-mail: batchelder@yahoo.com.

Klemens Steiof

Wattstr. 4, D-14482, Potsdam, Germany. E-mail: k.steiof@web.de.

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