

**Range extension for
Rio Negro Gnatcatcher
Polioptila (guianensis) facilis
in Colombia**

Rio Negro Gnatcatcher *P. facilis* is a poorly known, rare and local bird found primarily in southern Venezuela and north-west Brazil. Usually considered a subspecies of Guianan Gnatcatcher *P. guianensis*, recent studies have suggested it might merit species rank given morphological and vocal differences⁹; the split has been accepted by some authorities^{2,8}, but not universally^{5,7}.

The first record of ‘Guianan’ Gnatcatcher *P. guianensis sensu lato* in Colombia was in 1992, when a male was observed in a mixed-species flock at the Serranía de Naquen, dpto. Guainía^{4,6}. The sighting was referred to *P. facilis* on range and the published description did not specifically distinguish the bird from *guianensis*. On 8 January 2012, in *terra firme* forest near the village of Urania, c.6 km east of Mitú, dpto. Vaupés, we observed a pair of *P. facilis* foraging in a mixed-species canopy flock beside a man-made clearing (01°15'54"N 70°10'57"W). They were observed for c.10 minutes through binoculars and a telescope at c.40–50 m range. Identification was straightforward: the birds had a classic gnatcatcher shape and jizz—very small with quite long, narrow tail usually held cocked, and small, slender bill. Head, upperparts, wings and breast uniform, fairly dark bluish-slate, clearly contrasting with white belly. Tail blackish with white outer tail feathers, but precise pattern not noted. Overall appearance somewhat reminiscent of Slate-throated Gnatcatcher *P. schistaceigula*, albeit with paler upperparts. No eye-ring was noted on the bird briefly seen through the telescope. This was initially puzzling, as McMullan *et al.*⁵ stated that an ‘obvious eye-ring’ is a feature of ‘Guianan’ Gnatcatcher. However, an eye-ring is present in some of the *P. guianensis* complex, but not *facilis*⁹. The only possible confusion species in this region of

Colombia, Tropical Gnatcatcher *P. plumbea* has all-white underparts (including the breast) and darker wings contrasting with the mantle, with at least a slight pale wing panel. The birds foraged high in the canopy (20+ m), were very active, often disappeared from view, and seemed to favour bare branches and twigs. Other species present included Orinoco Piculet *Picumnus pumilus*, Pygmy Antwren *Myrmotherula brachyura*, Slender-footed Tyrannulet *Zimmerius gracilipes*, and several tanagers and woodcreepers.

Our record is the second for Colombia, a range extension of c.230 km and the westernmost of the taxon. The record is not entirely unexpected, as Mitú is in the Orinoco-Negro White-sand Forest Endemic Bird Area (EBA 065) and holds most endemics of this region³. Because this gnatcatcher’s range is essentially limited to the EBA, its presence in dpto. Vaupés is unsurprising. Renewed attention from birders and ornithologists has resulted in numerous recent range extensions around Mitú¹, and additional field work will undoubtedly lead to more discoveries.

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