AOS Classification Committee – North and Middle America

Proposal Set 2026-B

6 April 2026

Change the group name of *Tympanuchus cupido and T. pallidicinctus* from Prairie-Chicken to Prairie-Grouse

Effect on NACC:

If approved, this proposal would dignify the Greater Prairie-Chicken and Lesser Prairie-Chicken with improved appellation, promoting consistency among congeners.

Background:

The American Ornithological Society presently recognizes 2,212 species of birds in North and Middle America, including adjacent islands (Chesser *et al*. 2025). Of these, 59 species comprise the order Galliformes (gamebirds or landfowl) and, therein, 25 species the family Phasianidae (turkeys, grouse, pheasants, and partridges), including the Lesser Prairie Chicken and the Greater Prairie Chicken.

Gutiérrez *et al*. (2000) did a phylogenetic study of grouse (Subfamily Tetraoninae) based on mitochondrial DNA sequences, and their results “strongly (100% bootstrap) support monophyly of a clade consisting of *all* grouse”; this monophyly includes the Lesser Prairie Chicken and the Greater Prairie Chicken, which also share the genus *Tympanuchus* with Sharp-tailed Grouse.

In short, Lesser and Greater Prairie Chickens are grouse, not chickens, whether discriminated by commonly known differences in plumage and morphology, existing taxonomy, molecular genetics, or flight.

Regrettably, a first use of the term “chicken” in association with Lesser and Greater Prairie Chickens could not definitively be ascertained, so whether the moniker was intended to be pejorative may be lost to time. Nonetheless, it’s incumbent upon us to ask ourselves: are these two beautiful wild gamebird species more nobly and correctly referred to as *prairie grouse*, or, upon review, should their name continue to be suggestive of barnyard poultry?

Of the 2,212 species of birds currently recognized by AOS, there are only two listed with “chicken” in their name – not even the Red Jungle Fowl (*Gallus gallus*), progenitor of domesticated chickens (*Gallus gallus domesticus*), is called a “chicken.” Neither should these two prairie grouse be.

Recommendation:

Change the names of the Lesser Prairie Chicken and Greater Prairie Chicken to the Lesser Prairie Grouse and Greater Prairie Grouse, respectfully.

References:

Chesser, R. T., S. M. Billerman, K. J. Burns, C. Cicero, J. L. Dunn, B. E. Hernández-Baños, R. A. Jiménez, Oscar Johnson, N. A. Mason, and P. C. Rasmussen. 2025. Check-list of North

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Gutiérrez, R.J., Barrowclough, G.F., and Groth, J.G. 2000. “A classification of the grouse (Aves: Tetraoninae) based on mitochondrial DNA sequences.” *Wildlife Biology*, 6:4, 205-211.

Submitted by: Chad David Ferguson, Ph.D.

Date of Proposal: 17 December 2025

Treat *Cistothorus paludicola* as a separate species from Marsh Wren *C. palustris*

Background:

At present, 14 subspecies of *Cistothorus palustris* (Marsh Wren) are recognized. These broadly fall into two evolutionary groups, the *paludicola* group in the west and the *palustris* group in the east (Kroodsma and Verner 2020). The *paludicola* group contains the subspecies *browningi*, *paludicola*, *aestuarinus*, *clarkae*, *pulverius*, *plesius*, and *laingi*. The *palustris* group contains the subspecies *iliacus*, *dissaeptus*, *palustris*, *waynei*, *marianae*, and *griseus*. There is an additional population in the Mexican highlands, *tolucensis*, for which information is largely lacking, but the song seems most similar to *paludicola*. Throughout this proposal, we will refer to western populations as *paludicola* and eastern as *palustris*, as those are the earliest available names for each subspecies group. The Marsh Wren has been considered a single species for most of its history and is currently considered as such by all global checklists.

New Information:

Vocalizations

The most noticeable differences between *paludicola* and *palustris* are in their song structure and vocal repertoire, with *paludicola* learning up to 200 songs and *palustris* learning up to 50 songs, with the songs of *paludicola* often being more complex in nature (Kroodsma and Verner 2020). With respect to vocal differences, the songs of *paludicola* often begin with introductory “*tuk*” notes, with harsh broad-band sounds being repeatedly given and the song often ending in a long trill; the songs of *palustris* often begin with a nasal buzz, and are relatively more musical and tonal and consist of simpler repeated motifs (Fig. 1) (Kroodsma and Verner 2020). There is not much quantified with respect to differences in call notes, but a wintering *paludicola* in central Nebraska responded to tapes of calls from *Corthylio calendula* and strongly to recordings of *Cistothorus* [*paludicola*] *plesius*, but showed limited interest in *C. p. palustris*; thus, work on call discrimination and song discrimination in other parts of the range may be warranted (J.C.C. & Robin Harding, pers. obs.; https://ebird.org/checklist/S158370150). More information on these song divergences, differences, and vocal learning within this system can be found in Kroodsma and Verner (2020) and the bibliography therein.

Distribution

Cistothorus paludicola and *C. palustris* largely segregate into east and west, with a contact zone stretching from central Saskatchewan (e.g., near Saskatoon) south-eastwards across the plains to east-central Nebraska and Kansas (Fig. 2).

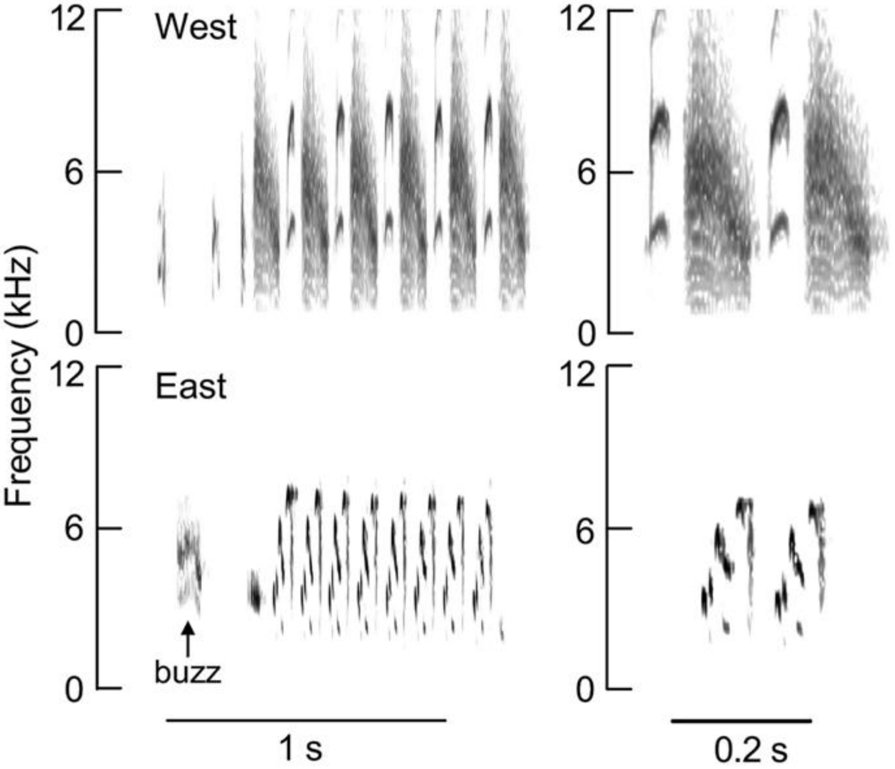


Figure 1. Spectrograms of example western (i.e., *paludicola*) and eastern (i.e., *palustris*) wrens in the Great Plains (Fig. 1. from Kroodsma et al. 2025). Songs in both populations are highly variable but are structurally similar to this example. Note the western bird beginning with *tuks* and having harsh, broad sounds, whereas the eastern bird begins with a buzz and has more fluid, musical songs. The right part of the spectrogram is an enhancement of individual motifs from the western and eastern songs to show differences in song structure.

In the Great Plains of Nebraska, *paludicola* and *palustris* segregate geographically, with *paludicola* being widespread in the Nebraska Sandhills and *palustris* being found in the eastern marshes along the Missouri River and in the Rainwater Basin (Kroodsma 1988, Kroodsma and Verner 2020, Silcock and Jorgensen 2025). Kroodsma (1988) identified a “Wrenless Corridor” in central-eastern Nebraska that was *ca.* 100 km wide separating these two populations, with almost all birds singing the “correct” song type for the side of the corridor on which they were located. This led him to posit that the two groups may be behaving as species in this region, raising questions about interaction dynamics in the other major contact zone in the Canadian Prairie Provinces. Interestingly, the Wrenless Corridor seems to extend further south into Kansas, where large marshes like Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira lack major nesting populations of *Cistothorus* (the high count for Cheyenne Bottoms on eBird between June and July is five individuals in 2016, and there are no counts over 3 individuals in the Quivira region for this date range; Fig. 3) (eBird 2012).

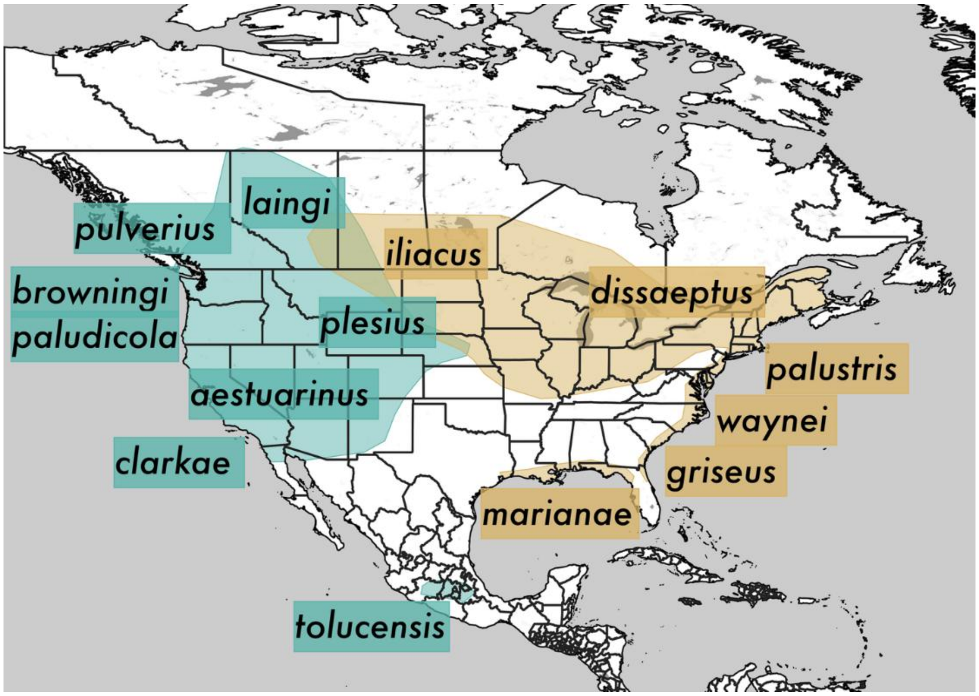
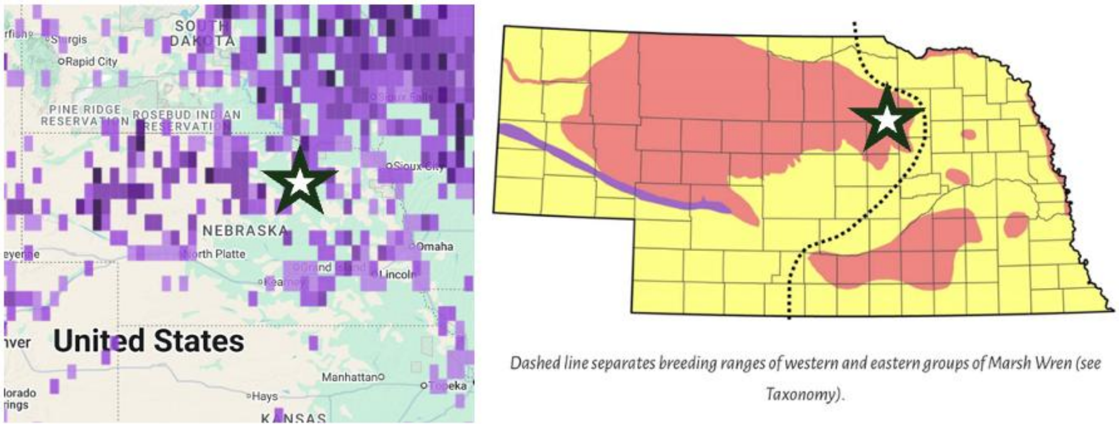


Figure 2. The breeding distributions of *Cistothorus paludicola* and *C. palustris* with subspecies names noted. Subspecies names are placed over the approximate area in which they are found or in adjacent areas offshore for coastal populations (Kroodsma and Verner 2020). Color schemes of polygons align to other figures, with green being populations of *C. paludicola* and brown populations of *C. palustris*. Note that these boundaries are approximate, and more research may be needed in some areas (e.g., western Texas). Prepared with QGIS 3.38.3 (QGIS Development Team 2025).



Dashed line separates breeding ranges of western and eastern groups of Marsh Wren (see Taxonomy).

Figure 3. A screenshot from eBird of *Cistothorus palustris* data from June and July centered on Nebraska (left) with a screenshot of the distribution of *C. palustris* from Birds of Nebraska Online (right). In both maps, the western (left) populations are *C. paludicola plesius* and the eastern (right) populations are *C. palustris iliacus*. The “Wrenless Corridor” is visible in the eBird map as a lack of sightings and is shown on the Birds of Nebraska Online map as a dashed line up the center of the map; also note that the Birds of Nebraska Online map shows that *C. paludicola plesius* will occasionally winter or occur year round along the western Platte River, whereas *C. palustris iliacus* does not appear to winter in the state. The maps show the approximate location of Goose Lake, the only place both *C. paludicola* and *C. palustris* are known to breed, as a star.

In the early 2010s, this area was resurveyed by Robbins (2014), with efforts made to revisit the sites of Kroodsma (1988) and additional marshes in the area. This work not only confirmed the absence of wrens in many marshes on the eastern edge of the Sandhills, but also identified a singular locality, Goose Lake, where *paludicola* and *palustris* breed side-by-side (Fig. 4) (Robbins 2014). Despite these populations being somewhat dynamic, with marshes not being occupied all years, the contact zone is remarkably stable within this region across this *ca.* 25-year period (Kroodsma 1988, Robbins 2014).

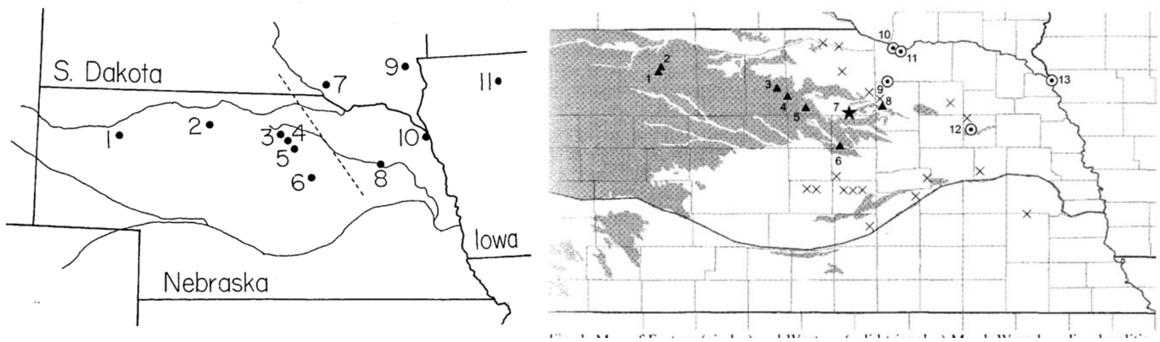


Figure 4. A copy of Figures 1 from Kroodsma (1988) at left and Robbins (2014) at right, showing the locations of *paludicola* (localities 1-6 on left; dark triangles on right) and palustris (localities 7-11 at left; open circles at right), with a star indicating the only location of co-occurrence, Goose Lake, found by Robbins (2014). All locations marked with an "X" in the map at right were surveyed but no *Cistothorus* were found. The Sandhills and other minor outlying sandhill landforms are marked with shading in the map at right. Note especially the stability of the distributions in these maps, with localities and the "Wrenless Corridor" remaining virtually unchanged between these publications.

Although this Wrenless Corridor apparently exists in Nebraska and surrounding states, there is a broad area of overlap between *paludicola* and *palustris* in the prairie provinces of Canada. Over about 180 km of prairie, marsh populations go from being 100% *palustris* (i.e., 0% *paludicola*) to < 10% *palustris* (i.e., > 90% *paludicola*), indicating that turnover occurs between these taxa in this region (Kroodsma and Verner 2020).

These taxa also exhibit different migration routes. Both groups, *paludicola* and *palustris*, contain resident coastal populations and interior and more northerly breeding migratory populations. Migratory populations, however, likewise split the continent east-and-west, with *paludicola* wintering in the interior of southwestern North America and *palustris* wintering in southeastern North America (Kroodsma and Verner 2020). Interestingly, *paludicola* apparently winter further north in the interior, with most winter *Cistothorus* in Nebraska belonging to this populations and not *palustris* (Silcock and Jorgensen 2025).

<u>Plumage & Phenotype</u>

Cistothorus paludicola and *C. palustris* are highly variable across their range, but there appear to be consistent phenotypic differences: *paludicola* is often grayer and duller than *palustris* where their distributions meet. It is worth noting that what is listed here are generalities based on a small sample size of specimens available to us, and more research is needed on whether these traits can consistently separate these taxa across their distributions. Overall, *C. palustris iliacus*, the Eastern population in Nebraska, appears to be a darker chestnut color with a dark cap (Fig. 5) with a white “eyeline” appearing more noticeable due to the stark contrast of the cap. The back and flanks of *palustris* tend to have hints of red within their plumage. The plumage of *C. paludicola pulverius*, a slightly more western population of *C. paludicola*, is a lighter sandy brown color with a lighter and less prominent colored cap. The white supercilium on this group is somewhat prominent, but due to a lighter cap, the eyeline may blend in more with the cap plumage. The barring on the tail is very prominent in the *paludicola group*, whereas, in the *palustris* group, the barring tends to blend into the base colors since they are a deep brown and red. On the underside of *palustris*, the red/brown plumage covers the flanks and stretches into the underside of the bird. The sandy-colored *paludicola* typically has a clean underside with limited coloration. Lastly, the legs on *palustris* are a richer red/brown compared to the *paludicola* group, which has lighter colored legs. Prealternate molt is potentially a major difference as well, as *paludicola* rarely or incompletely undergoes a prealternate molt, whereas *palustris* undergoes a complete prealternate molt (Kroodsma and Verner 2020).

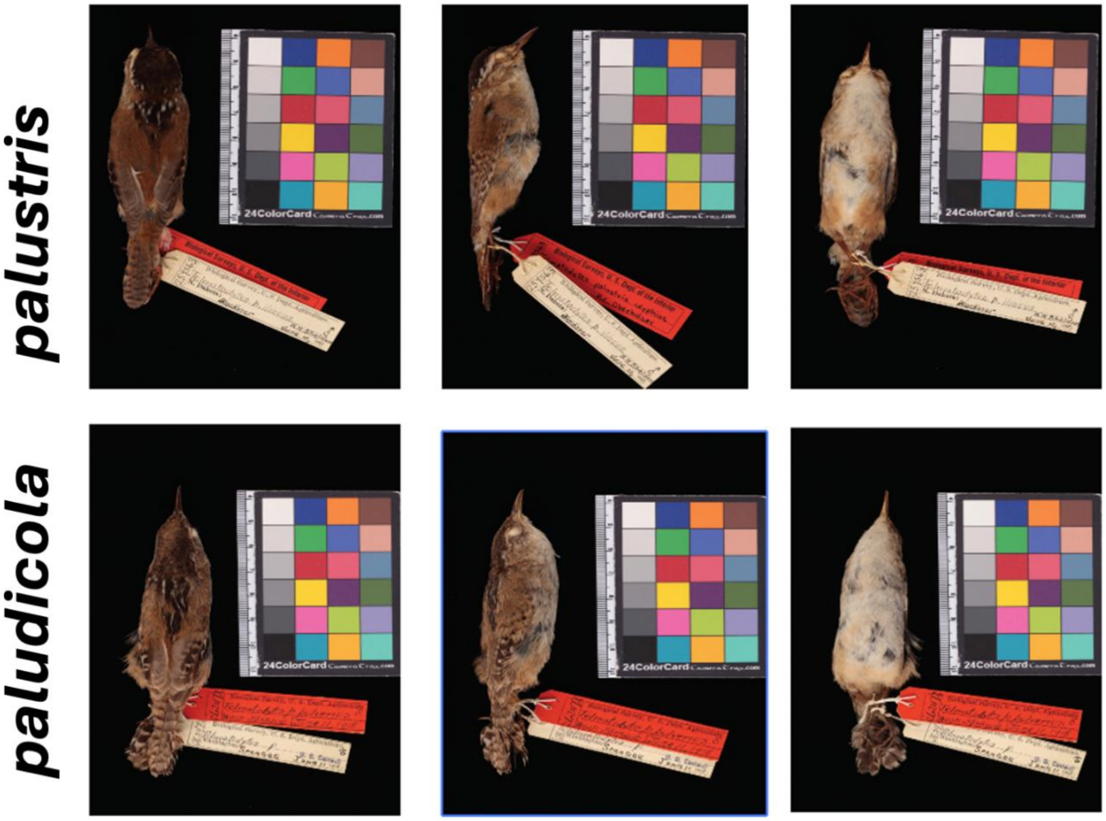


Figure 5. A compilation of representative specimens from the Smithsonian Institution. The top row (from left to right) shows top, side, and underside views of *Cistothorus palustris iliacus* (type specimen of synonymized “*cryphius*”; USNM 259563 from Blackmer, North Dakota, USA). The bottom row shows top, side, and underside views of *C. paludicola pulverius* (type specimen listed online under *plesius*; USNM 262472 from Sprague, Washington, USA). Note the richer reddish-brown plumage of *palustris*, with the prominent cap and less obvious barring on the tail. Photos are listed under the Public Domain.

Genomics and the Canadian Hybrid Zone

Genomic data from the Canadian contact zone indicates large genetic differences between *paludicola* and *palustris* (Kroodsma et al. 2026). Specifically, this research found that, although songs are learned and either population can learn any song, birds in the > 400 km wide contact zone nearly always learn the song that corresponds to their genetic group, and that there is near complete turnover between eastern and western song types across this contact zone (Fig. 6).

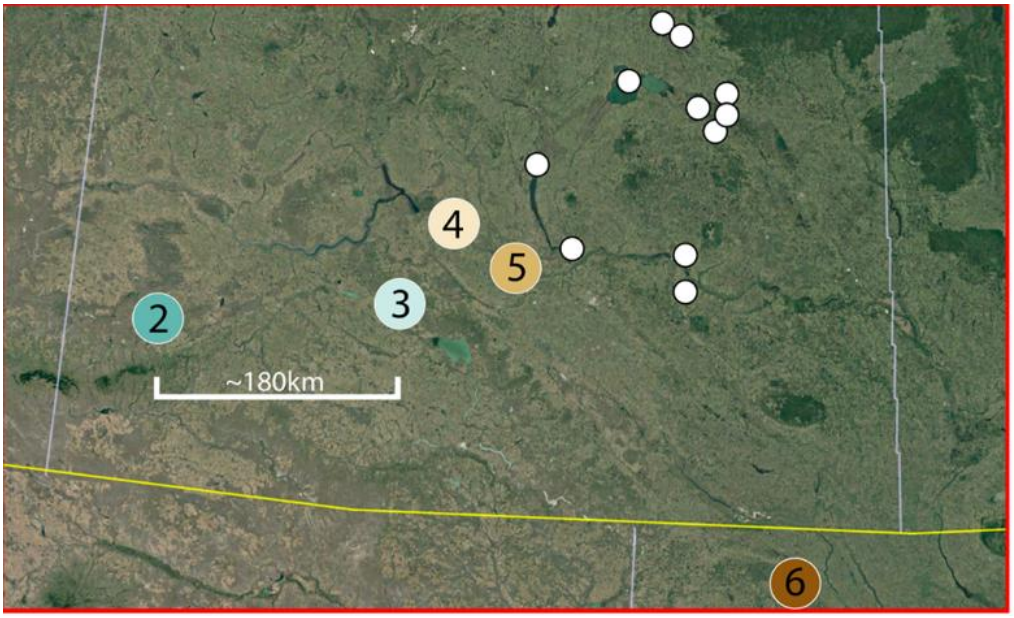


Figure 6. Part of Figure 2 from Kroodsma et al. (2025) showing the transition from mostly western (Site 2) to mostly eastern (Site 5) birds in Saskatchewan.

These genetic groups are well differentiated, with an F_{ST} of 0.61 which is "potentially the highest between any lineages that form a hybrid zone in the North American Great Plains" (Kroodsma et al. 2026) (Fig. 7). For comparison, the F_{ST} between *Icterus bullockii* and *I. galbula* is 0.16 (Walsh et al. 2020, Kroodsma et al. 2026). Few hybrids were found, and those that were detected were mostly from recent hybridization (i.e., F1) or backcrossing, as there is evidence of introgression for these hybrids back into parental populations (Fig. 8). However, there is little evidence of F2 hybrids or of a hybrid swarm; thus, while some genes are moving across the hybrid zone, the populations are maintaining their separate identities, likely due to assortative mating. There are strikingly fewer hybrids than are found in complexes like the *Icterus bullockii* and *I. galbula* complex, where up to 41% of individuals in some parts of the contact zone were F1 or F2 hybrids (Walsh et al. 2020, Kroodsma et al. 2026).

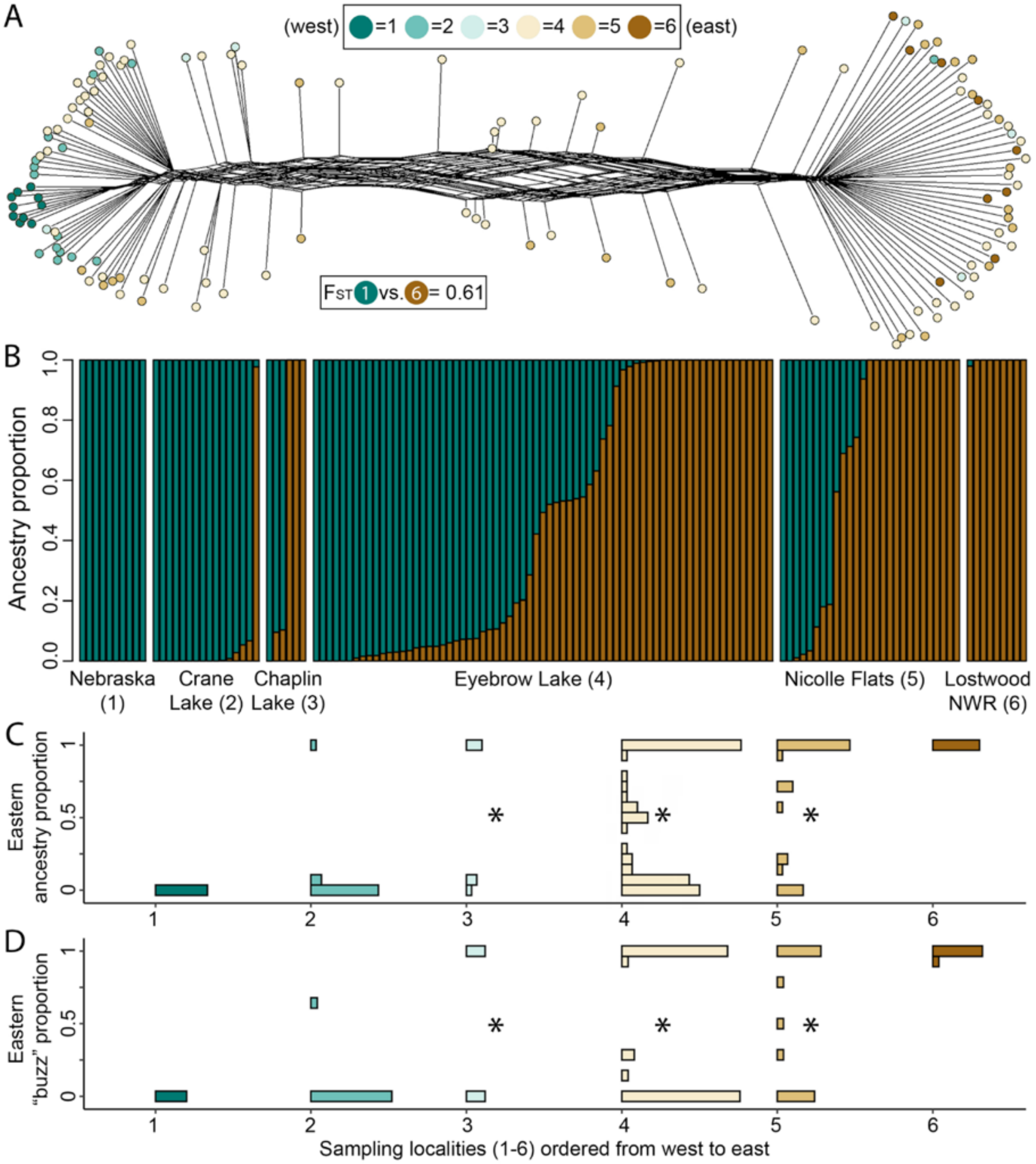


Figure 7. A copy of Figure 5 from Kroodsma et al. (2025) showing genomic differences between western (green, left) and eastern (brown, right) birds. At sites where hybridization occurs, there are still birds that largely fall on one side of the genomic divide, and there is not a broad spectrum of hybrids across the zone. Importantly, sections C and D show the maintenance of two distinct song types in all parts of the zone, even when hybrids are present.

Furthermore, birds of both *paludicola* and *palustris* actively defend territories not just against conspecifics but also against their congeners in the same marsh. Despite recognizing both types of songs and defending against them, very few birds have learned both types of songs and hybrids appear to be rare, evidence of strong prezygotic reproductive barriers related to vocal behavior (Fig. 9). Within Kroodsma *et al.*'s (2025) study, they found that, among 9 birds singing both types of songs, 6 of them had 100% *palustris* genotypes, possibly contributing to observed directional selection of

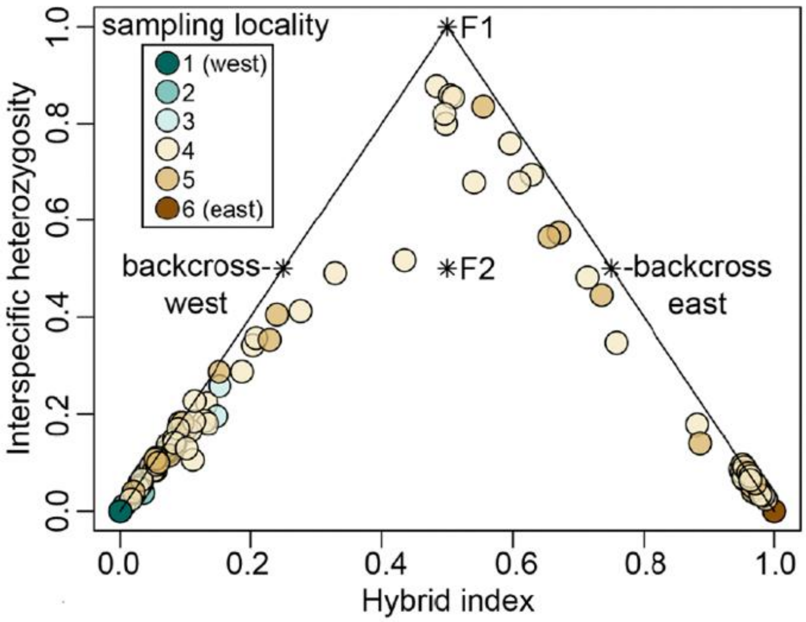


Figure 8. A triangle plot of hybrid indices for western *paludicola* and eastern *palustris* in the Canadian hybrid zone. Note that there are few individuals that could be considered F2, and there is more evidence of backcrossing into the eastern population than into the western population. From Figure 6 in Kroodsma et al. (2025).

palustris alleles into *paludicola* populations (see structure plots, Fig. 7). (Importantly, birds with eastern genotypes could sing both songs or be intermediate, “but no birds … possessed western ancestry and eastern song phenotype” (Kroodsma et al. 2026). Kroodsma et al. (2025) also discuss the different migrations of these populations, noting that western birds arrive and breed earlier than eastern birds, adding to the breeding segregation occurring between these groups in sympatry.

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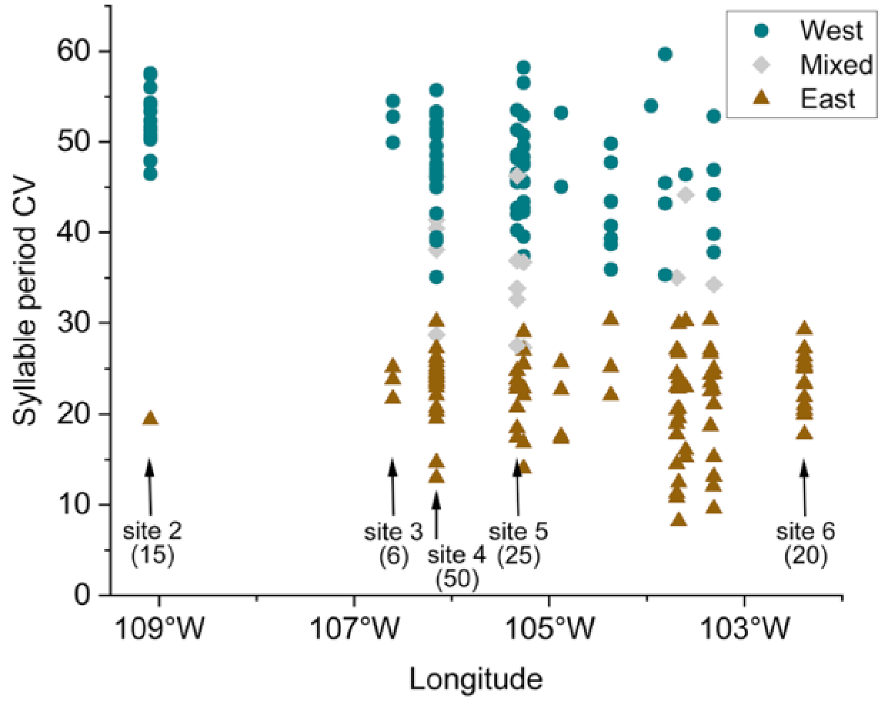

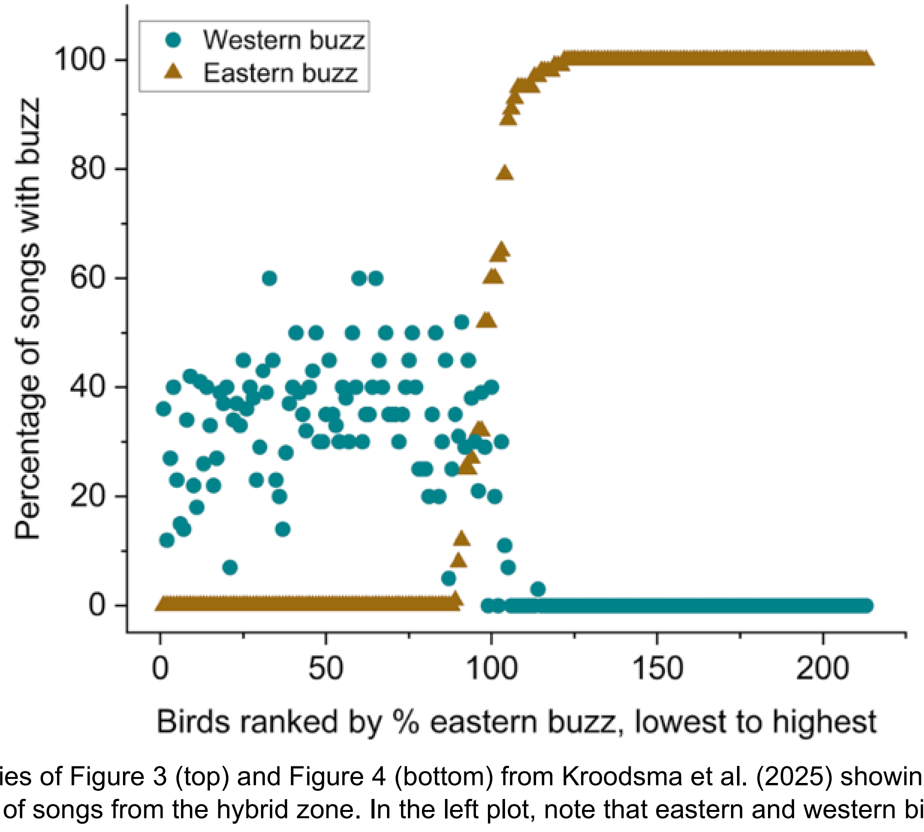

Figure 9. Copies of Figure 3 (top) and Figure 4 (bottom) from Kroodsma et al. (2025) showing the classifications of songs from the hybrid zone. In the left plot, note that eastern and western birds are mostly discrete across the entire contact zone, and that intermediates are rare. In the right plot, note that the amount of eastern starting buzz or western ending buzz in the song changes drastically and quickly across the hybrid zone.

Recommendations:

We are asking the committee to vote on three parts of this proposal: (**A**) whether to split these wrens, (**B**) whether to change their English names to Eastern and Western Marsh Wren, and (**C**) whether Marsh Wren should be hyphenated as Marsh-Wren. We recommend a **YES** vote on all parts of this proposal for the following reasons.

Species limits

We strongly recommend a **YES** vote elevating *Cistothorus paludicola* to species rank. There are clear differences between these populations with respect to vocalizations, distribution, genomics, and phenotype (i.e., with respect to molt). It is likely that these birds have only been considered conspecific until now because they are visually similar to the human eye. Although *paludicola* and *palustris* do hybridize, they are clearly undergoing strong selection for assortative mating in areas of overlap (as evidence by genomic analyses, paucity of F1 hybrids, and near lack of F2 hybrids), with birds selecting for mates of the same genomic ancestry. The hybridization is not enough to “merge” these overlapping populations, and the predilection of these song-learners to learn only the song of their parent population in this region suggests that there is strong selection against hybridization. Furthermore, in the other region of contact (Nebraska), the contact zone (or lack thereof) has been stable for decades, with many areas of seemingly suitable habitat in geographically intermediate areas remaining devoid of either population and only one site being known for having both populations breed. Interestingly, *paludicola* and *palustris* appear to exhibit different dynamics in their two different contact zones, and these zones occur with different described subspecies of *paludicola* (*laingi* in the north, *plesius* in the south).

Our one hesitation is what this split would mean for *tolucensis*. This population appears to start with introductory “*tuks*” and have broad, harsh sounds across the song (see https://xeno-canto.org/290130), thus we think it can be placed within *paludicola* at present. While not mentioned explicitly, Figure 2A in Kroodsma et al. (2025) (shown in Figure 2 herein) also shows the Mexican population as being part of *paludicola*. Therefore, a **YES** vote would elevate *Cistothorus paludicola* (including all subspecies mentioned in the introduction and *tolucensis*) to species rank separate from *C. palustris* (Fig. 2).

PART A: Should *Cistothorus paludicola* be considered a species separate from *C. palustris*?

A **YES** vote would elevate *Cistothorus paludicola* to species rank.
A **NO** vote would maintain the status quo.

English names

We strongly recommend a **YES** vote to change the names to Eastern Marsh Wren and Western Marsh Wren. The names “Eastern Marsh Wren” and “Western Marsh Wren” were suggested by Kroodsma et al. (2025) and have been used elsewhere (Kroodsma and Verner 2020). As much as we dislike simply prepending modifiers to names when species are split, Eastern Marsh Wren and Western Marsh Wren make the most sense in this case, are useful for identification over most of the range, and compliment Eastern and Western Warbling Vireo and Eastern and

Western Wood-Pewee nicely. Unlike the Grass Wren complex, there are no good alternatives to change these birds' names to (unless something like "Verbose Wren" would be favored for *paludicola*, but then what would *palustris* become?).

PART B: Should the modifiers "Eastern" and "Western" be prepended to the English names to separate these taxa?

> A **YES** vote would result in Eastern Marsh Wren and Western Marsh Wren.
> A **NO** vote would result in the search for different English names.

Marsh Wren vs. Marsh-Wren

We strongly recommend a **YES** vote to change Marsh Wren to Marsh-Wren. We would argue that the name Marsh Wren be hyphenated as Marsh-Wren as these birds are extremely similar to each other, appear to be each other's closest relatives, and they represent an interesting habitat-bird name combination similar to Wood-Pewee. Marsh can also be a person's name and "Western Marsh" could be seen as the linked terms rather than "Marsh Wren". Furthermore, should future research indicate *tolucensis* merits species status, this could also be a "Marsh-Wren" (i.e., "Mexican Marsh-Wren") and the term would indicate broader monophyly within this clade of *Cistothorus*. For these reasons, we strongly recommend the group name Marsh-Wren.

PART C: Should the names be altered to "Marsh-Wren" from "Marsh Wren"?

> A **YES** vote would result in the hyphenated "Marsh-Wren".
> A **NO** vote would result in no hyphen in "Marsh Wren".

Acknowledgments:

We would like to thank Oscar Johnson for encouraging us to work on this proposal. Eugene Huryn provided critical comments on this proposal. We thank Mark Robbins and Lucas DeCicco for long discussions concerning *Cistothorus* in the Great Plains.

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Kroodsma, D. E. (1988). Two species of Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) in Nebraska? *Nebraska Bird Review* 56:40–42.

Kroodsma, D. E., D. A. DeRaad, B. E. Byers, D. E. Winslow, and F. K. Barker (2026). Genetic analysis of *Cistothorus palustris* (Marsh Wren) across a broad transition zone in Southern Saskatchewan reveals deep divergence and little hybridization between two cultural phenotypes. *Ornithology* 143:1–15.

Kroodsma, D. E., and J. Verner (2020). Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus palustris*), version 1.0. *Birds of the World*. https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.marwre.01

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Walsh, J., S. M. Billerman, V. G. Rohwer, B. G. Butcher, and I. J. Lovette (2020). Genomic and plumage variation across the controversial Baltimore and Bullock's oriole hybrid zone. *The Auk* 137:1–15.

Submitted by: Jacob C. Cooper & Peggy M. Huss, University of Nebraska at Kearney (in the "Wrenless Corridor")

Date of Proposal: 29 January 2026

Treat Great-horned Owl *Bubo virginianus* as four species

Note: This is a modified version of SACC Proposals 1052 and 1063. SACC 1052 consisted of five parts: (A) Maintain broadly defined *B. virginianus*; (B) Treat *magellanicus* as a separate species from *B. virginianus*; (C) Treat *nigrescens* as a separate species from North American *B. virginianus*, irrespective of the former's status with respect to *magellanicus*; (D) Treat *nigrescens* as a subspecies of *B. magellanicus*; (E) Treat *B. nacurutu* as a separate species from *B. virginianus*, which would then be restricted to North and Middle America. Three of these passed (Part A failed 0-9, Part B passed 9-0, Part C passed 8-1, Part D failed 0-9, and Part E passed 8-1), resulting in the recognition of three new species (in addition to *B. virginianus*). Following the adoption of the English names approved in SACC 1063.1, these three species are Paramo Horned Owl *B. nigrescens*, Tropical Horned Owl *B. nacurutu*, and Magellanic Horned Owl *B. magellanicus*. SACC did not address the question of an English name for the restricted version of Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus*.

Background:

Proposal 328 was a first attempt laid out before SACC to change the taxonomy of Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) in splitting off the austral form *B. (v.) magellanicus* as its own species. The complex had first been reviewed by Traylor (1958), who laid out the distribution and known taxonomy of the South American populations, with a northern Andean subspecies (*nigrescens*, type locality: "Cechce" <sic: Ceche, Chimborazo; Paynter 1993>, Ecuador), a southern Andean and Patagonian subspecies (*magellanicus*, type locality: Tierra del Fuego), a lowland savanna subspecies (*nacurutu*, type locality: Paraguay; including *scotinus* from Caicara, Río Orinoco, Venezuela, and *elutus* from Lorica, Bolívar, Colombia), and a caatinga form (*deserti* from Salitres, near Joazeiro, Bahia, Brazil). As Mark Robbins has laid out the situation of the taxonomy of the group in the previous proposal, I won't run over it much further here. However, largely due to a set of confounding recordings by Ted Parker from the northern Andes of Peru (Cerro Cruz Blanca, Piura) associated with a specimen at LSU (LSUMZ 97577) that has been identified as "*Bubo virginianus nigrescens?"* (see images), the SACC rejected the proposal at the time. These recordings seemed to represent a population of *Bubo* in the Andes of northern Peru that shared both "northern" and austral song types.

Since then, multiple authorities have supported the split, including Clements/eBird checklist (Clements et al 2025), IOC checklist (Gill et al. 2025). This split within the American *Bubo* has been proposed by various authors due to the distinctive song and smaller size of the austral *B. (v.) magellanicus* (e.g., Koenig et al. 1999, Jaramillo 2003, Pearman and Areta 2020) in comparison to the geographically nearby lowland form *B. v. nacurutu*, particularly because of no habitat or elevational overlap between the two despite very close proximity in Argentina (see comments by Jaramillo in Prop 328). The first publication on the genetics of the complex (Ostrow et al. 2023) showed a deep branch between *B. (v.) magellanicus* (including samples from as far north as the Andes of Peru) and the remainder of the *B. virginianus* complex, though not without some messiness. So, it is time for SACC to re-evaluate the situation.

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY 182692 MUSEUM OF ZOOLOGY
PERU: Depto. Junin; 20 km S Marcopomacocha;
11.580370S, 76.263370W, 4750m
♀
5 August 2009 Coll. by Richard E. Gibbons
J.R. Saucier 263

Bubo virginianus magellanicus(?)
810g; ovary 19x6mm granular; oviduct 4mm wide convoluted; largest ovum 3x3mm; no bursa. Skull 100% oss.; light fat; stomach empty; iris yellow; bill black; toes dark horn with dusky horn soles; trace body molt; moderate head molt;
TISSUE B-68779

LA. STATE UNIV. 97577 MUSEUM OF ZOOLOGY
PERÚ: DEPTO.: Piura; "Cruz Blanca", ca 33 road km SW Huancabamba, 3050m ♀
28 July 1980 prepared by Reyes Rivera
M.J. Braun 407

Bubo virginianus nigrescens ♀
JPO '80
1120g. sk.oss.
Ovary 21x10mm.
Iris yellow. Feet pale flesh.
Bill black. Claws black. Stomach: Rodent.

Analysis:

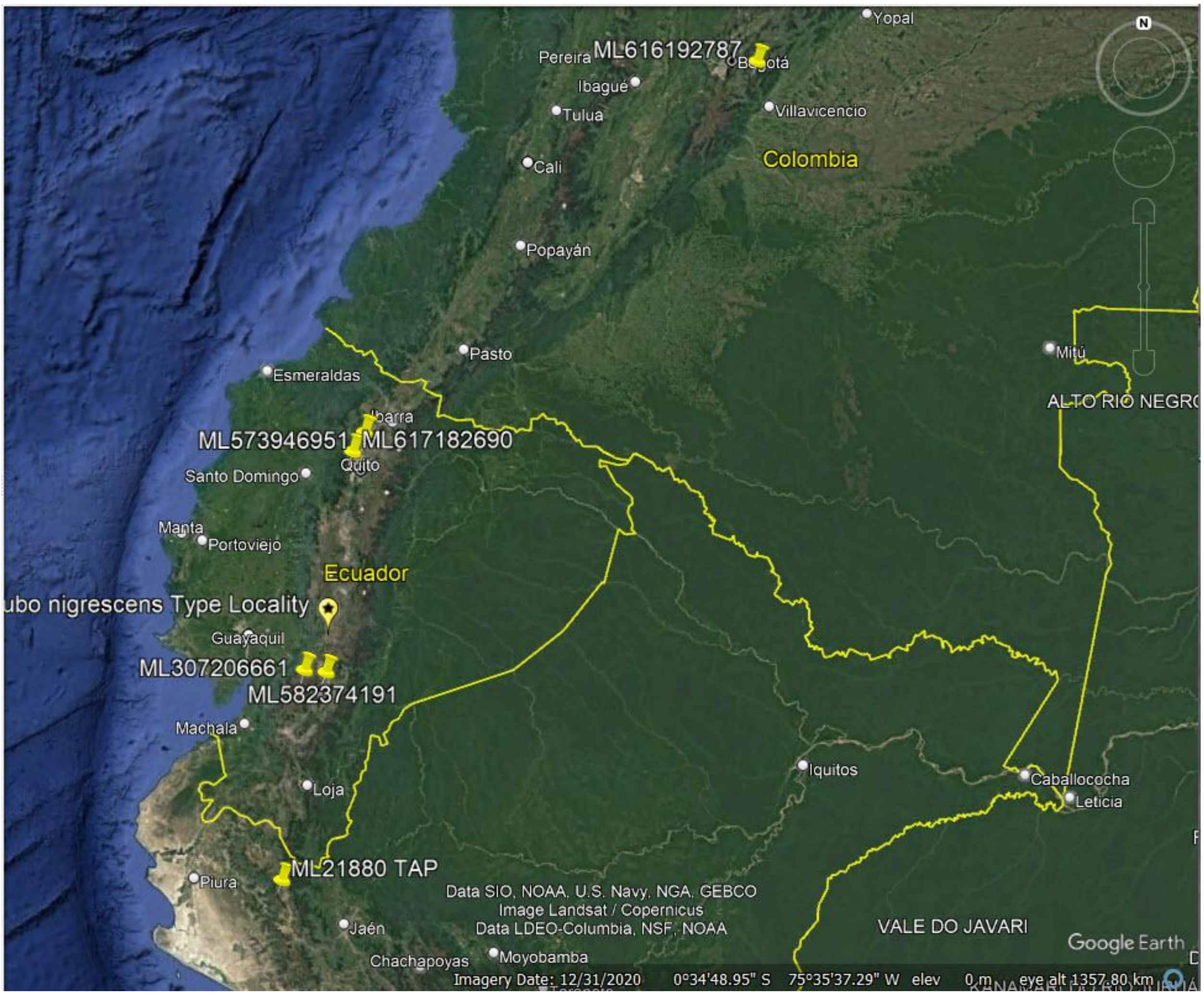
At the time that Mark drew up Proposal 328, we had been stymied by the absence of better voice and genetic specimen sampling along the northern Andes. Since that time, two papers have reviewed both the vocalizations of the American *Bubo* (López-Lanús 2015) and the genetics (Ostrow et al. 2023). Both have supported the split of *B. magellanicus* from *B. virginianus* but have not suggested any further changes to the taxonomy within the latter. In addition, new recordings, from Ecuador and Colombia, have been added to Macaulay Library (see below). I will discuss the voice and the molecular studies separately below.

Voice:

So, to assess is each of these new papers. López-Lanús (2015) did an exhaustive analysis of the vocalizations of all populations of the *Bubo virginianus* complex from Alaska and Canada south to Tierra del Fuego using online sound archives (Macaulay Library and Xeno-canto). He concluded that there were five song types represented: (1) the widespread North American voice (hereafter called "*virginianus*"), (2) the Patagonian *magellanicus*, (3) savana *nacurutu*, (4) northern Andean *nigrescens*, and (5) also considered the Parker recordings mentioned above to represent an undescribed sixth voice type (which he called "Ñécu" and which he proposed to be an undescribed taxon). Interestingly, the *virginianus* voice is very strongly conserved throughout North America and is diagnosably different in pattern (sex for sex) from both *nacurutu* and *nigrescens*. I should point out, that in López-Lanús' study, the least-represented population in the sound collections he checked was *nigrescens* with N=4. Since that time, additional recordings have been archived, particularly in Macaulay Library, and these are key to the situation with *nigrescens* and *magellanicus*. Importantly, these recordings include several duets, which apparently are the circumstance when *nigrescens* gives the puttering series that Parker recorded in Piura and that is so similar to *magellanicus*. These recordings of the puttering duet span the distribution of *nigrescens* from the Eastern Andes of Colombia to Piura, Peru:

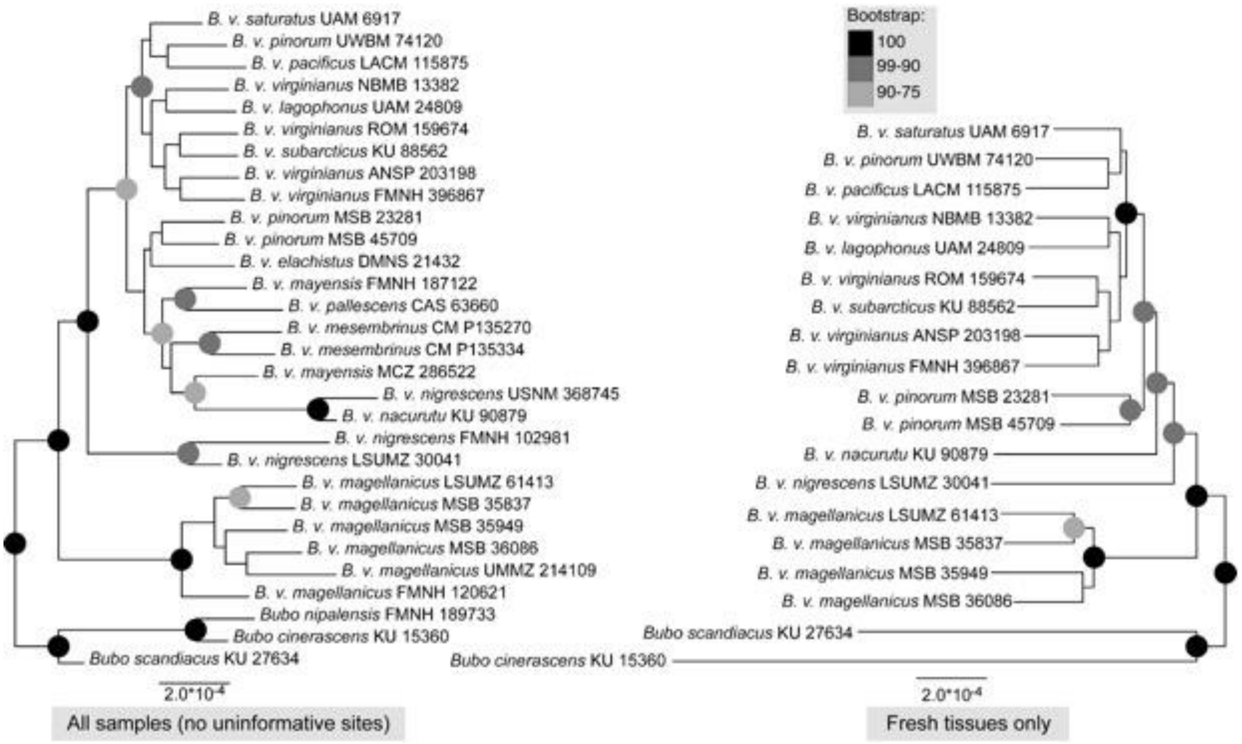
ML cuts of *B. v. nigrescens* giving puttering notes like *B. magellanicus*: **ML616192787** (Cundinamarca, Colombia), **ML307206661** (Azuay, Ecuador), **ML582374191** (Cañar, Ecuador), **ML573946951**, **ML617182690** (Pichincha, Ecuador), **ML21879**, **ML21880**, **ML21890** (Piura, Peru). See map figure.

It is this song type that López-Lanús (2015) considered his "new" voice "Ñécu!" Apparently, it is actually a representative song type over the entire distribution of *B. v. nigrescens*, and this may require a new view on the relationships of that taxon.



Genetic analysis:

Ostrow et al. (2023) used both nuclear UCEs and mtDNA over a large area of both the North and South American distribution of the *Bubo virginianus* complex, although I should note that North American samples greatly outnumbered South American; some specimens were strictly sampled from toepads (including 2 *nigrescens* and 2 *magellanicus*). The sample sizes of the South American taxa were reported as: *nigrescens* 3, *nacurutu* 1, *magellanicus* 6. However, I must point out that one of the "*nigrescens*" (a toepad sample) was from La Guajira, Colombia, and therefore was actually a *nacurutu*. This translates to an actual sample of *nigrescens* 2, *nacurutu* 2, and *magellanicus* 6. In Ostrow et al. (2023), this misidentification resulted in *nigrescens* being paraphyletic in their Figure 2 (all samples) which is a maximum-likelihood UCE tree, with the La Guajira sample being sister to the "single" *nacurutu* sample, although this now makes sense as both samples were *nacurutu*. I will point out that no southern *nacurutu* (which are closer to the type locality) were sampled, so it would be useful to know how much structure there is within the taxon, particularly between northern and southern populations.

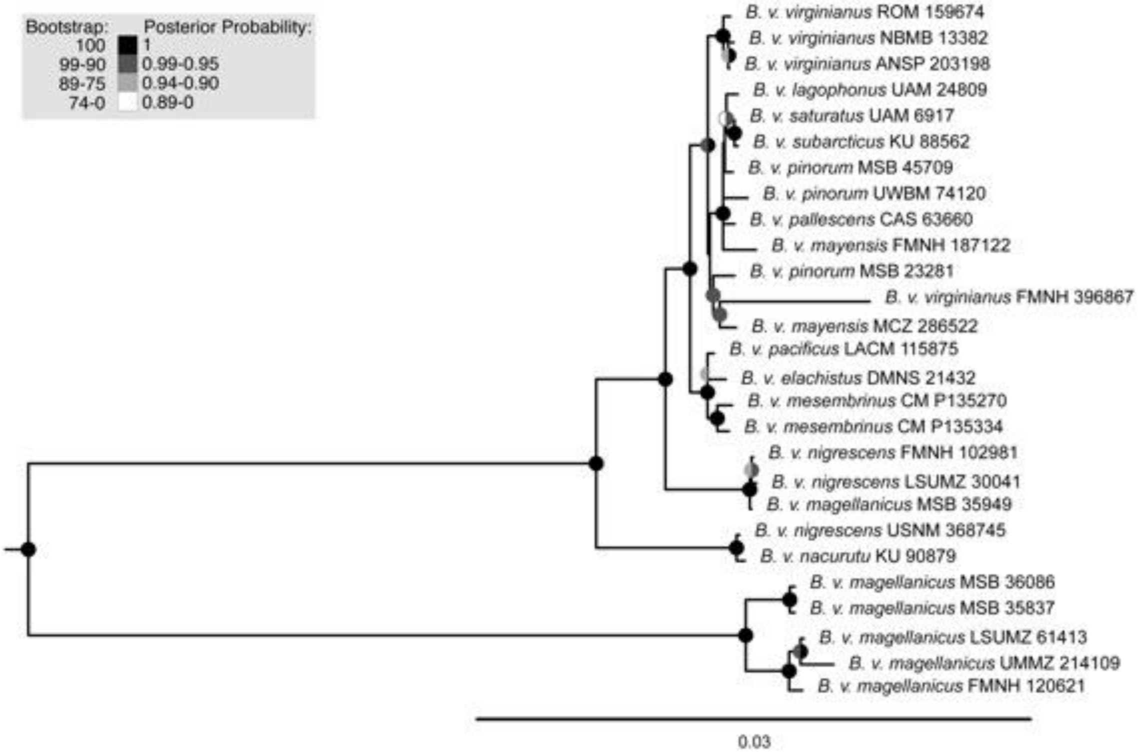


All samples (no uninformative sites)

Fresh tissues only

On the "all samples" tree, the *nacurutu* branch comes out within the North American *virginianus* group among samples that are largely from the southwestern USA and Middle America. Sister to the North American/*nacurutu* group is *nigrescens*, with *magellanicus* sister to this entire clade. In the "fresh tissues only" tree of Figure 2, the North American clade is sister to *nacurutu* (so: the two are monophyletic with respect to one another) with *nigrescens* sister to them and *magellanicus* sister to that entire clade. Figure 3 of Ostrow et al. is a maximum-likelihood tree using mtDNA. This tree has the North American *virginianus* as a monophyletic clade with its sister being *nigrescens* and a specimen of *magellanicus* (from Lima, Peru). Sister to these clades is *nacurutu* (including the misidentified "*nigrescens*"), and finally, the branch with the remainder of *magellanicus*. Ostrow et al. (2023) concluded that there was still gene flow between *nigrescens* and *magellanicus* (both Andean taxa) in Peru, and also (some gene flow between one of the *nigrescens* (Cauca, Colombia) and North American birds (!).

These genetic results have me scratching my head a bit: the trees presented in the main paper of Ostrow et al. (2023) seem not to have concordant branching among the North American birds, *nacurutu*, and *nigrescens*, but all or the bulk of *magellanicus* is always sister to that entire clade. But the positions of *nacurutu* and *nigrescens* with respect to the North American birds switch depending on the tree, and a Peruvian *magellanicus* is on the *nigrescens* branch on the mtDNA maximum-likelihood tree. I can't imagine that *nigrescens* and North American birds are currently experiencing gene flow across the Darien (nor have they in a long time!).



Recommendation:

The publications since Proposal 328 have made a bit of a hash of the distribution and taxonomy of the complex, in part because of errors in assigning names to populations, in part due to missing data that have since become available. The voice and phylogenetic placement of *B. magellanicus* with respect to the rest of the *B. virginianus* complex seems to make a strong argument that it should be recognized as a separate species. However, there appears to be molecular evidence of continuing gene flow between *magellanicus* and *nigrescens* in Peru AND the vocal repertoire of *nigrescens* actually contains the puttering component that makes *magellanicus* so distinctive as to result in its split by so many authorities! So, if the gene flow between the two taxa is real, why aren't they on a single branch apart from the remainder of the complex? Could it be a sampling artifact?. Finally, even though *nacurutu* and *nigrescens* are both later branches off the main *B. virginianus* tree with respect to *B. magellanicus*, each clade has distinctive voices compared to the *virginianus* voice, and neither is actively experiencing gene flow with populations of the North American *virginianus* group (the separation between *nigrescens* and the nearest *virginianus* is between the Central Andes of Colombia and Costa Rica, and similarly between *nacurutu* in the lowlands of northern Antioquia, Colombia, and Costa Rica). My gut feeling is that we should divide up the *B. virginianus* complex into four species: *B. virginianus* (all taxa south to Panama), *B. nacurutu* (lowlands of South America, including the populations named *scotinus*, *elutus*, and *deserti*, the validity of which remain to be reviewed), *B. nigrescens* (Andes of Colombia to Piura, Peru), and *B. magellanicus*. Either this or continue to maintain the full group as one species, as it seems that *nigrescens* and *magellanicus* share the "distinctive" puttering that has been the main character used to separate the latter from the remaining complex, and that Ostrow et al. found evidence of continuing gene flow between the two in Peru. Comprehension of the molecular results of Ostrow et al is not exactly in my wheelhouse, so I will leave it to those on the committee who can address them better and how best to vote. So, these are the options I see:

A. Maintain *Bubo virginianus* with all of the South American populations within it until their relationships are better understood (this seems the least helpful, I recommend NO).

B. Separate *B. magellanicus* from the remainder of *B. virginianus* (this seems the favored stance by most other authors and lists, but leaves some mess swept under the rug, I recommend YES).

C. Separate *nigrescens* from North American *B. virginianus*, irrespective of the former's status with respect to *magellanicus* (vocal and molecular datasets support this. I recommend YES).

D. Consider *nigrescens* a subspecies of *B. magellanicus* (there is evidence of some genetic flow between them, and vocally the two share the puttering vocalization, but it seems to be given under different circumstances within each. We don't have much information on what sort of contact zone there is between the two in Peru. Given that Ostrow et al. do not have any trees showing *nigrescens* to be monophyletic with respect to *magellanicus*, however, I think this may not be the right move. I weakly suggest NO).

E. Also separate *B. nacurutu* from *B. virginianus*, now restricted to North and Middle America (given the voice distinctions, especially compared to the surprising conservativeness within North American populations, I am inclined to recommend YES).

English Names:

SACC adopted the following English names for the newly elevated species:

Paramo Horned Owl for *B. nigrescens*
Tropical Horned Owl for *B. nacurutu*
Magellanic Horned Owl for *B. magellanicus*

Because the new classification restricts *B. virginianus* to Central and North America, SACC did not address the question of whether to retain the English name Great Horned Owl for this species. It is here recommended that the familiar and long-standing name Great Horned Owl be retained for the Central and North American species on the grounds of differential usage and, to some extent, relative range size.

See https://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCprop1063.htm for SACC's discussion of English names.

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Submitted by: Dan Lane

Date of Proposal: May 2025, modified for NACC by R. T. Chesser on 6 February 2026

SACC comments on Proposal 1052:

Vote tracking chart: https://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCPropChart1044-.htm

Comments from Stiles: "A. NO. Clearly at least two species are well defined genetically, vocally and phenotypically. B. YES: the easiest choice; *magellanicus* is clearly separate from all the rest. C [now E]. YES to also splitting off *nacurutu* and *nigrescens* as good species. In going over the distributions of all of these taxa in several recent guides and other treatments, I was surprised at the wide distribution of *nacurutu*, which extends from the entire Caribbean region of NE Colombia through NC Colombia into NW to NE Venezuela, and also extends through the entire region of the Llanos in both countries (if nothing else, this form was severely under-sampled in the genetic studies). It is nearly everywhere a lowland species (ca. 0-600m elevations, although it might reach higher in extreme NE Venezuela). On the other hand, *nigrescens* is entirely montane in its distribution in S Colombia in the Eastern and Central Andes (and the Western Andes as well?) at elevations of 2500-4000m, south in the Andes through Ecuador to NE Perú (and Bolivia?). This species is absent from Venezuela, and there might be some overlap with the range of *nacurutu* in Colombia but the two occupy widely different elevations (and given their different ecologies, vocalizations and genetics, gene flow between them would seem highly unlikely in the recent past).”

Comments from Krabbe: “My votes are:
A: NO
B: YES (split *magellanicus* from *virginianus*)
C: YES (split *nigrescens* from *virginianus*)
D: NO
E: YES (split *nacurutu* from *virginianus*).

“After listening carefully through the vocal material, I must agree with Dan that the Piura recordings (ML21879, ML21880, ML21890) are typical of *nigrescens* in both hoots and the context of the puttering series. Recordings from Cajamarca (XC139660) and Lima (ML54603211, XC215522) are like recordings of *magellanicus* from Chile and Argentina.

“Besides the Piura recordings, I thus concur with López-Lanús (2015) in that there are 4 vocal groups: *virginianus*, *magellanicus*, *nigrescens* and *nacurutu*. As voice appears to be similar throughout the ranges of each group, it makes sense to rank all four as biological species, which is also in general agreement with the phylogenetic trees. Despite the mitochondrial tree suggesting some gene flow between *magellanicus* and *nigrescens*, the fresh tissue UCE tree places all four in separate branches.”

Comments from Areta: “The conflictive *nigrescens* (USNM 368745) from Guajira, Colombia, that falls as sister to *nacurutu* (KU 90879) in both the UCE and mtDNA trees in Ostrow et al. (2023) can be explained away because this bird IS *nacurutu* and not *nigrescens* (based on geography, altitude, and habitat). Once this is accepted, then the only oddball seems to be the placement of a *magellanicus* sample from ‘Peru, Lima’ (MSB 35949; where exactly from?) as part of the *nigrescens* clade in the mtDNA tree, while this sample is well embedded within the *magellanicus* clade in the UCE dataset. Whether this is true mitonuclear discordance or there is some other explanation, I don´t know, but at any rate, the UCE tree solidly places this bird in the *magellanicus* clade, which would seem to make the most sense biogeographically (we also don´t know how this specimen looks).
“The differences in vocalizations between *virginianus* and *nacurutu* are constant but I´d say not dramatic, and the same applies to vocalizations of *nigrescens* and *magellanicus*. When taken in conjunction, the patterns of geographic replacement/parapatry, the differences in plumage, phylogenetic relationships, and vocalizations as described by López-Lanús (2015) and further clarified by Dan, tip the scale towards the recognition of four species-level taxa. Much remains to be done to clarify the extent (if any) of gene flow between the taxa indicated in Ostrow et al. (2023), and whether past hybridization has played any role in the vocal features found in *nigrescens*. Its jumping phylogenetic position depending on the markers and samples analysed, and the vocal features shared with *magellanicus* are intriguing, and this looks like an interesting research question integrating fieldwork and genomics.
“A: NO - It seems untenable to have a single species
“B: YES (split *magellanicus* from *virginianus*)
“C: YES (split *nigrescens* from *virginianus*)
“D: NO - It is not such an easy call, but the phylogenetic trees have never recovered *nigrescens* as more closely related to *magellanicus*

“E: YES (split *nacurutu* from *virginianus*)”

Comments from Naka: “I agree that genetics look messy, but I generally agree with the novel proposal, as follows:

“A: NO, it's time to deal with this species.
“B:YES (split *magellanicus* from *virginianus*), easy.
“C: YES (split *nigrescens* from *virginianus*)
“D: NO
“E: YES (split *nacurutu* from *virginianus*), for now. I wonder if further splitting will be necessary from tropical lowland South America.”

Comments from Robbins: “
“A. NO, clearly more than one species is involved based on vocalizations and genetic data.
“B. YES for recognizing *magellanicus* as a species based on voice and genetic data. Yes, the contact zone between it and *nigrescens* as well as potentially *magellanicus* with southern *nacurutu* need to be examined (in the development of the project, I pointed out to Ostrow that several key samples should be incorporated in the study that ultimately weren’t).
“C. YES for recognizing *nigrescens* as a species despite sampling issues as mentioned above.
“D. NO, see comments above.
“E. YES. I’m more on the fence regarding this recommendation. Despite mislabeling (I pointed out to Ostrow that La Guajira, Colombia sample was mis-labeled prior to publication), much more genetic sampling of *nacurutu* (see my comments under B) is needed throughout its range. Nonetheless, based on available vocal data it appears *nacurutu*’s voice is consistently distinct from populations north of South America. So, I support recognition of *nacurutu* as a species.”

Comments from Stiles: “A. NO. B.YES; C.YES; D. NO; E. YES.”

Comments from Remsen: “The vocal data are convincing to me that the best taxonomic assessment of this complex is to treat them as at least three species. I am seriously concerned with the nagging problems pointed out by Dan with respect to species rank for *nigrescens* and I am tempted to vote against species rank for *nigrescens* until these details are worked out. On the other hand, if better sampling does suggest free gene flow between them, then we can repeal the decision to treat them as separate species. The deciding factor to vote for separate species rank is the point made by Dan in terms of the homogeneity in *virginianus* vocalizations despite remarkable geographic variation in plumage and habitat, so by a yardstick comparison, consistent vocal differences despite some shared motifs argues for species rank. Therefore, my votes conform to those of all voters so far: A. NO. B.YES; C.YES; D. NO; E. YES.”

Additional comments from Stiles: “D. NO to considering *nigrescens* as a subspecies of *magellanicus*. Data on genetics and ecology now available favor considering *nigrescens* as a separate species.”

Comments from Zimmer: “
“A. NO. Evidence for recognizing at least two species within this complex is overwhelming.
“B. YES. As Gary says, this is an easy choice, based upon genetic, phenetic and vocal differences.

“C. YES. The sharp break in vocal differences, along with the molecular data supports this.
“D. NO. This one is the toughest call, given that the two taxa share the distinctive “puttering” call, and that there is at least some evidence for some gene flow, but, ultimately, I am persuaded that these two are different beasts, by voice, plumage and ecology.
“E. YES. As noted by others, the vocal distinctions between *nacurutu* and North/Central American *virginianus* are not particularly impressive, but they are consistent, and when compared to the conserved nature of vocalizations of *virginianus* throughout North & Central America, I think this is enough to justify recognition as separate species.”

<u>Comments from Claramunt</u>:
“A. NO. Redundant option.
“B. YES. This is well-supported by vocal and genetic data.
“C. NO. Given the modest differentiation in song and the ambiguous genetic data, I think it’s better to keep *nigrescens* in the *virginianus* complex.
“D. NO. The genetic data clearly show that *nigrescens* is closer to the main *virginianus* complex, not to *magellanicus*. There may be some signal of ancestral gene flow between *nigrescens* and *magellanicus* but seems minimal, if not entirely artifactual. The sharing of “puttering” notes may be ancestral to the group and not indicative of relationships.
“E. NO. There is not much evidence that *nacurutu* has separated from *virginianus* genetically. Plumage and song differences are subtle.”

Treat Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet *Camptosoma obsoletum* as six species

Note: This is a modified version of SACC Proposals 1039 and 1062. SACC 1039 consisted of five parts: (A) Treat *sclateri* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*; (B) Treat *pusillum* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*; (C) Treat *caucae* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*; (D) Treat *napaeum* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*; (E) Treat *flaviventre* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*. All of these passed (Parts A, B, and D passed 8-1, and Parts C and E passed 6-3), meaning that the *C. obsoletum* complex now consists of six species. English names for these species were adopted in SACC 1062. The six species are Panama Beardless-Tyrannulet *C. flaviventre*, Cauca Beardless-Tyrannulet *C. caucae*, Venezuelan Beardless-Tyrannulet *C. pusillum*, Pacific Beardless-Tyrannulet *C. sclateri*, Amazonian Beardless-Tyrannulet *C. napaeum*, and Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet *C. obsoletum*. Note that although SACC voted on an English name for *C. flaviventre*, this species occurs only in Panama and southwestern Costa Rica. Therefore, we should consider Panama Beardless-Tyrannulet as only a suggestion for the English name of *C. flaviventre*, albeit a good one that had strong support from SACC and that mirrors the geographic names adopted for the other five species.

Background:

Camptostoma obsoletum currently comprises 13 subspecies taxa distributed across Central and South America, from Costa Rica to Uruguay. Fragmentary vocal and genetic evidence suggests that it may include multiple biological species (Ridgely and Tudor 1994, Ridgely and Greenfield 2001, Rheindt et al. 2008). However, current taxonomy remains entirely based on subtle variations in plumage and morphology, which are unlikely to reflect true species limits in this group (Fitzpatrick 2004).

New Information:

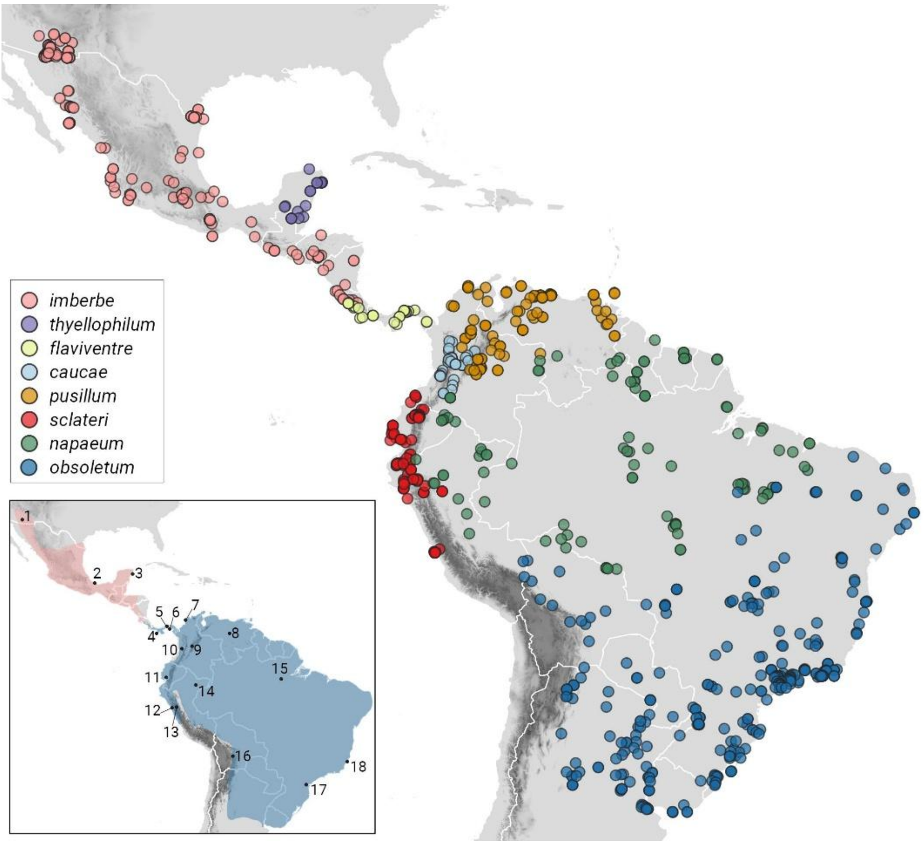
A newly published analysis of geographic vocal variation in the genus *Camptostoma*, based on 1,113 recordings of vocalizations from 994 individuals across 783 localities, identified six vocally distinct populations within *C. obsoletum* (Lima and Vaz 2024). These populations exhibit diagnostic differences in multiple different vocalization types, including vocalizations that are typically species-specific in the Tyrannidae. The populations are mostly allopatric but have abutting ranges over large areas, with little evidence of gene flow between them (Lima and Vaz 2024).

Assuming that the several diagnostic differences in multiple vocalization types have the potential to generate substantial premating isolation among these vocally distinct populations, and considering the apparent pattern of parapatry without gene flow between several of these populations, Lima and Vaz (2024) proposed splitting *C. obsoletum* into six biological species, maintaining vocally undifferentiated taxa with potential plumage differences as subspecies pending further study:

- *Camptostoma flaviventre* Sclater & Salvin, 1865

  - *C. f. flaviventre* Sclater & Salvin, 1865
  - *C. f. majus* Griscom, 1932
  - *C. f. orphnum* Wetmore, 1957
- *Camptostoma caucae* Chapman, 1914
- *Camptostoma pusillum* (Cabanis & Heine, 1860)
- *Camptostoma sclateri* (Berlepsch & Taczanowski, 1884)
  - *C. s. sclateri* (Berlepsch & Taczanowski, 1884)
  - *C. s. maranonicum* Carriker, 1933
  - *C. s. griseum* Carriker, 1933
- *Camptostoma napaeum* (Ridgway, 1888)
  - *C. n. napaeum* (Ridgway, 1888)
  - *C. n. olivaceum* (Berlepsch, 1889)
- *Camptostoma obsoletum* (Temminck, 1824)
  - *C. o. obsoletum* (Temminck, 1824)
  - *C. o. cinerascens* (Wied, 1831)
  - *C. o. bolivianum* Zimmer, 1941

Here's a figure from Lima and Vaz (2024) illustrating the geographic ranges of the proposed species based on the sound recordings examined. For further details about the figure, including information about extralimital taxa, see Lima and Vaz (2024).



The proposal is subdivided as follows:

A. Treat *sclateri* (including *maranonicum* and *griseum*) as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*
Camptostoma o. sclateri differs diagnostically from all other taxa except *maranonicum* and *griseum* in daytime and dawn songs as well as multiple calls (Lima and Vaz 2024). Although field playback experiments suggest weak behavioral discrimination between *sclateri* and *napaeum* based on daytime songs (Freeman et al. 2022), no evidence of hybridization exists despite potential parapatry (Lima and Vaz 2024). Other vocalizations may mediate premating isolation, although this remains untested (Lima and Vaz 2024). Alternatively, *sclateri* and *napaeum* may form undetected, narrow hybrid zones.

B. Treat *pusillum* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*
Camptostoma o. pusillum differs diagnostically from all other taxa in multiple vocalizations, including daytime and dawn songs (Lima and Vaz 2024). There is no evidence of gene flow with adjacent populations (*caucae* and *napaeum*), despite potential parapatry (Lima and Vaz 2024).

C. Treat *caucae* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*
Camptostoma o. caucae differs diagnostically from all other taxa in daytime and dawn songs and multiple calls (Lima and Vaz 2024). No evidence of hybridization exists with the apparently parapatric *pusillum* and *napaeum*, suggesting strong premating isolation (Lima and Vaz 2024).

D. Treat *napaeum* (including *olivaceum*) as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*
Camptostoma o. napaeum differs diagnostically from all other taxa but *olivaceum* in multiple vocalizations, including daytime and dawn songs (Lima and Vaz 2024). While differences with parapatric *obsoletum* are subtle, and some hybridization may occur, phenotypic distinctiveness despite extensive contact (~3,300 km) suggests substantial—albeit incomplete—reproductive isolation (Lima and Vaz 2024).

E. Treat *flaviventre* (including *majus* and *orphnum*) as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*
Camptostoma o. flaviventre, *C. o. majus*, and *C. o. orphnum* collectively form a vocally unique population, differing diagnostically from all others in multiple vocalizations (Lima and Vaz 2024). Although this population occurs only in Central America based on the sound recordings examined by Lima and Vaz (2024), I included it here in the proposal because it may plausibly occur in extreme western Colombia near Panama. I defer to the committee to determine whether South American records exist.

English Names:

As mentioned in the introductory note above, SACC split this complex into six species and adopted the following English names:

Panama Beardless-Tyrannulet for *Camptostoma flaviventre*
Cauca Beardless-Tyrannulet for *Camptostoma caucae*
Venezuelan Beardless-Tyrannulet for *Camptostoma pusillum*
Pacific Beardless-Tyrannulet for *Camptostoma sclateri*
Amazonian Beardless-Tyrannulet *Camptostoma napaeum*
Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet *Camptostoma obsoletum*

See https://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCprop1062.htm for SACC's discussion of English names.

Recommendation:

YES votes are recommended on parts A-E of this proposal. This would result in treating *Camptostoma obsoletum* as a complex of six species. It is recommended that NACC accept the English names adopted by SACC, including Panama Flycatcher for the NACC species *C. flaviventre*.

References:

Fitzpatrick, J. W. (2004). Family Tyrannidae (Tyrant-flycatchers). In *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott and D. Christie, Editors). Lynx Edicions, pp. 170–462.

Freeman, B. G., J. Rolland, G. A. Montgomery, and D. Schluter (2022). Faster evolution of a premating reproductive barrier is not associated with faster speciation rates in New World passerine birds. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 289:20211514.

Lima, R. D., and R. V. Vaz (2024). Divergence in vocalizations indicates cryptic speciation in *Camptostoma* tyrannulets. *Ornithology*: ukae058.

Rheindt, F. E., J. A. Norman, and L. Christidis (2008). Genetic differentiation across the Andes in two pan-Neotropical tyrant-flycatcher species. *Emu* 108:261–268.

Ridgely, R. S., and P. J. Greenfield (2001). The Birds of Ecuador: Status, Distribution, and Taxonomy. Cornell University Press.

Ridgely, R. S., and G. Tudor (1994). The Birds of South America. Volume 2 (The Suboscine Passerines). University of Texas Press.

Submitted by: Rafael D. Lima

Date of Proposal: December 2024, modified for NACC by R. T. Chesser on 13 February 2026

SACC comments on Proposal 1039:

Vote tracking chart: https://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCPropChart968-1043.htm

Comments from Lane: "YES. Regardless of whether there is a molecular component to this study, I applaud the authors' efforts to break down a potential headache of a complex, and I see this study as good enough to act upon here. I agree with their assessments of the taxa, the vocal groupings, and their outlining of daughter species. YES to all proposed splits from *C. obsoletum*."

Comments from Zimmer: "YES to all splits (see separate subproposals below) as advocated in the Proposal, and as suggested by Lima & Vaz 2024. I have long grappled to make sense of what I was perceiving as vocal distinctions within the *C. obsoletum* group across its broad range, and have it mesh with plumage differences and understood distributions of named taxa, but without the kind of geographically broad-based and well-sampled vocal analysis conducted by Lima & Vaz (2024), it has remained a muddled mess in my mind. Part of the confusion is due to the effects of wear and fading on some of the few plumage characters that can actually allow visual discrimination of taxa in the field, and part of it is due to each population having multiple types of vocalizations in their repertoires (songs, dawn songs, contact calls, agitation/interaction calls, etc), and without a systematic, thorough analysis, you can't be sure that you are always comparing apples to apples and oranges to oranges. The absence of a molecular component to this study does not bother me, since I believe vocal differences in these phenotypically conserved groups of suboscines are almost always going to provide the strongest indication of species-limits.

"A. Treat *sclateri* (including *maranonicum* and *griseum*) as a separate species from *C. obsoletum:* YES, also matches my field impressions of vocal distinctions.

"B. Treat *pusillum* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*: YES, also matches my field impressions of vocal distinctions.

"C. Treat *caucae* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*: YES, based upon vocal distinctions and no evidence of hybridization with parapatric *pusillum* and *napaeum*, as detailed in Lima and Vaz 2024.

"D. Treat *napaeum* (including *olivaceum*) as a separate species from *C. obsoletum.* YES. This also matches my field impressions of vocal distinctions.

"E. Treat *flaviventre* (including *majus* and *orphnum*) as a separate species from *C. obsoletum.* YES. This one with particular enthusiasm, based on my own field impressions in Panama/s Costa Rica. I do not, however, have any evidence for whether South American records of *flaviventre* exist."

Comments from Areta: "I´ve been amassing recordings of *Camptostoma* for many years now, which match most of Lima & Vaz´s conclusions. The only point of discontent is at the junction of *flaviventre*, *caucae*, and *pusillum*, which seem vocally very similar in some respects but apparently not in others. I am uncertain on whether the daysong of *caucae* is really the one chosen by the authors, instead of the slower, more whistled vocalization; likewise, I am unable to hear ANY consistent distinction between dawnsongs of *flaviventre* (https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/60355 https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/57359 https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/147441041) and *caucae* (https://xeno-canto.org/307322 https://xeno-canto.org/344295 https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/100724081). The sample sizes are small, which can be tricky in the highly variable *Camptostoma* dawn songs. I´ve also found some other issues around *flaviventre*, *pusillum*, and *caucae*: see for example this dawn song of *pusillum* from Zulia (Venezuela) https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/69881, and this dawn song attributed to *caucae* from Antioquia (Colombia) https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/100724081, both of which share a distinctive inflection in the second and third note and sound remarkably alike, and also add this *flaviventre* in the mix https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/25603. This one from the Coastal Cordillera of Venezuela seems also quite similar to songs of *flaviventre*: https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/69878. Also, these trills from *pusillum* (https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/557328701 https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/530472281 https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/34477 https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/478141441) and these of *caucae* (https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/283449281 https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/272722131 https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/629232892). These voices of *pusillum* https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/597111551 are much like this one from a zone of presumed *caucae* https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/534542081 which in turn is very similar to this one of *caucae* https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/626683461, and this one of *flaviventre* https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/67231361.

"Given the broad similarities, I am not convinced that *flaviventre*, *caucae* and *pusillum* are different species, and so I vote to recognize them under a single species: *C. pusillum*, or alternatively, split *pusillum* and leave *flaviventre* and *caucae* as one thing (which also seems problematic). The most striking difference in vocalizations seems to be the trill that has been attributed to *caucae*, and which seems to be missing from other populations. Is this vocalization really from *Camptostoma*? Has this gone unrecorded in *flaviventre*? After hearing a fair share of recordings unsystematically, I came away unconvinced of the vocal distinctions, especially those between *caucae* and *flaviventre*. Maybe misidentifications to taxon are playing badly on us here, but I can easily imagine the vocal types transitioning through geography (e.g., based on what I hear, some *pusillum* sound slightly higher-pitched and somewhat faster than *caucae* and *flaviventre*, especially if one compares northern to southern examples), and the similarities seem to me to carry more weight than the differences. I don´t think that the spectrogram of the diurnal song of *flaviventre* is really representative of the taxon: in listening to all the daytime songs assigned to this category by Lima & Vaz, I hear a lot of variation, most of which do not fit the spectrogram. I am not fully convinced of anything of the above, but I also do not see strong evidence to split the three as different species. I would like to hear what others think on the northern South America-southern Central America issue.

"Meanwhile, my votes are:

A. Treat *sclateri* (including *maranonicum* and *griseum*) as a separate species from *C. obsoletum* --- **YES**
B. Treat *pusillum* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum* --- **YES**
C. Treat *caucae* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum* --- **YES** (separate from *C. obsoletum*) and **NO** (to treat is as a species on its own): treat *caucae* as subspecies together with *C. pusillum* or together with *flaviventre*.
D. Treat *napaeum* (including *olivaceum*) as a separate species from *C. obsoletum* --- **YES**
E. Treat *flaviventre* (including *majus* and *orphnum*) as a separate species from *C. obsoletum* --- **YES** (separate from *C. obsoletum*) and **NO** (to treat is as a species on its own): treat *flaviventre* as subspecies together with *C. pusillum* or together with *caucae*."

Comments from Niels Krabbe (voting for Del-Rio): "After reading Nacho's comments, I am in doubt whether *pusillum*, *caucae*, and *flaviventre* are separate species, but YES to the rest of the suggested splits. So:

"A: YES. Treat *sclateri* (including *maranonicum* and *griseum*) as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*

B: YES. Treat *pusillum* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum* [but including the subspecies *flaviventre*, *caucae*, *majus*, and *orphnum*]
C: YES and NO. Treat *caucae* as a separate species from *C. obsoletum* [but as a subspecies of *pusillum*]
D: YES. Treat *napaeum* (including *olivaceum*) as a separate species from *C. obsoletum*
E: YES and NO. Treat *flaviventre* (including *majus* and *orphnum*) as a separate species from *C. obsoletum* [but as a subspecies of *pusillum*]"

Additional comments from Rafael Lima: "I do not have field experience with the northern taxa, so I cannot confirm with certainty that the rapid trill belongs to *Camptostoma*. Our assumption was based on two points. First, multiple experienced observers and ornithologists have recorded this vocalization and consistently attributed it to *Camptostoma*. Second, if the slower, more whistled vocalization in Figure 9H represents the daytime song of *caucae,* then there is no clear homologous counterpart among similarly structured vocalizations in *flaviventre* and *pusillum* (Fig. 9G–I). However, the key point remains: as noted in the paper, regardless of whether the daytime song of *caucae* is the rapid trill (Fig. 2D) or the slower, more whistled vocalization (Fig. 9H), *caucae* still has a distinctive daytime song. In other words, the conclusion that *caucae* has a unique daytime song remains unchanged, irrespective of this analytical choice. (All data and scripts necessary to replicate the analyses and figures are publicly available at https://datadryad.org/dataset/doi:10.5061/dryad.612jm64dm, allowing for alternative analyses to test whether different methodological choices affect the conclusions.)

"Regarding the dawn songs of *flaviventre*, *pusillum*, and *caucae*, they are indeed similar. While small sample sizes for *flaviventre* and *caucae* introduce some uncertainty, the subtle differences in their dawn songs were consistently captured in the measurements of the main phrase (Fig. 5), suggesting they are not spurious. However, even if one assumes that these dawn song differences are artifacts of sample size limitations, the distinctiveness of their daytime songs remains.

"Beyond the magnitude of vocal differences, the apparent pattern of widespread parapatry without gene flow between *caucae* and *pusillum* further supports their recognition as separate species (as discussed in the paper). The case for treating *pusillum* as distinct from *flaviventre* is less strongly supported, as it relies on the (subtle) vocal differences alone. Still, I consider the differences in their daytime songs alone sufficient to justify treating all three taxa as separate species."

Comments from Tom Schulenberg (voting for Jaramillo): "YES -- accept all of the splits, as proposed by Lima and Vaz. I should say that the taxa with which I have the least experience - *flaviventre*, *caucae*, and *pusillum* - are at the heart of the issues here; splitting all other taxa is straightforward. I acknowledge Nacho's concerns, and I'll admit that the differences between *flaviventre*, *caucae*, and *pusillum* in some vocalizations are subtle. I too am surprised at the trill attributed to *caucae*, but I'm willing to accept that this vocalization is from a *Camptostoma*. it seems to be a frequent enough vocalization, and if it's not *Camptostoma*, then ... what is it? I wouldn't set it aside without having a clear alternative contender, which in this case apparently would need to be a species whose distribution corresponds to that of *caucae*. So, taking this trill as *caucae*, and in the absence of evidence for this vocalization in other populations, then I don't see any alternative other than to split this taxon."

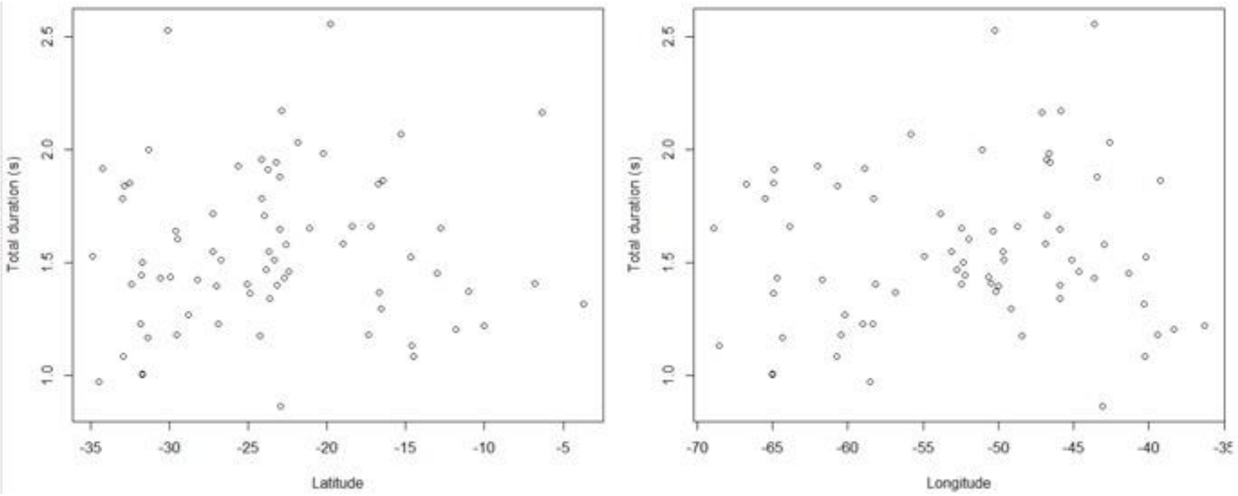
Comments from Stiles: "YES to all splits as proposed after reading Lima's comments regarding vocalizations."

Comments from Remsen: "YES to all parts. The paper and proposal do a great job summarizing and synthesizing existing data on vocal differences. Although this might not be the final word on species limits in the group (as per Nacho's comments), it is certainly a major step forward and a great improvement over the status quo. I can't really add anything specific to all the comments above."

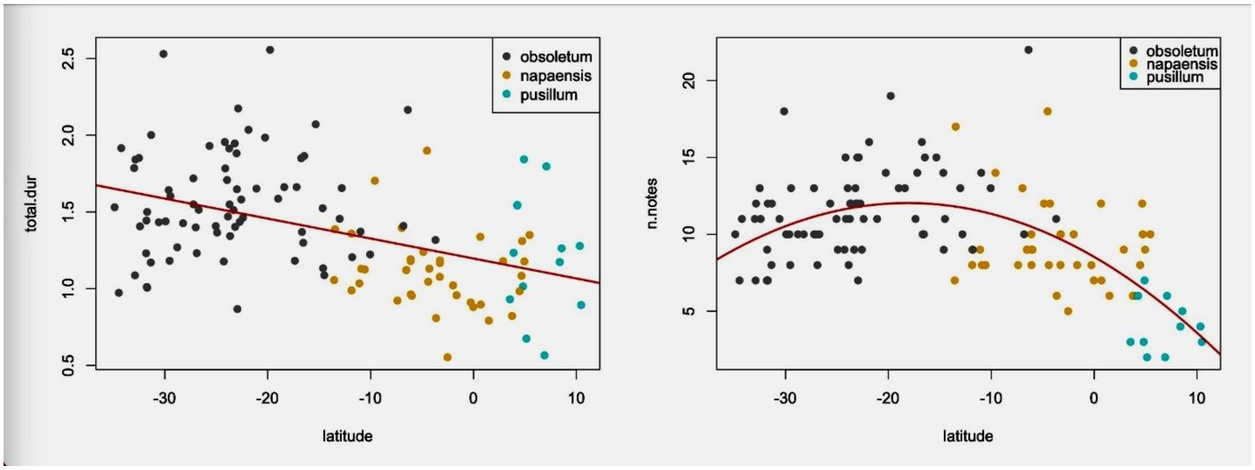
Comments from Robbins: "I spent a fair amount of time listening to vocalizations of this complex over the course of two different occasions. Based on the vocalizations, three of the splits are indeed straightforward. Now, based on Rafael's response to good points made by Nacho, I feel comfortable with recognizing all proposed splits, i.e., YES to A-E. Kudos to Lima and Vaz for sorting this out. Naturally, we all look forward to a genetic assessment of the complex."

Comments from Claramunt: "NO. Levels of genetic divergence and the diversity of vocalization suggest that more than one species may be involved. The study by Lima and Vaz has an impressive sample size and good coverage of all subspecies. However, an important piece of evidence is missing: whether the geographic variation is discrete and not clinal. In some instances, the study argues that no intermediate birds were found in putative contact zones, but a formal analysis assessing whether variation is discrete (a step-cline) or gradual-clinal is missing. It's easy to find "statistically significant differences" between the means of predetermined groups, but that is not sufficient evidence because a gradual cline can show statistically significant differences between arbitrary subdivisions of it. Trends should be analyzed instead with standard spatial regression models, cline analysis methods, or Normal Mixture Models (Cadena et al. https://doi.org/10.1093/sysbio/syx071).

Response from Rafael Lima: "Santiago's concern, that the species-level taxa proposed in the paper could be artifacts of dividing gradual clines, is a valid one. Although we did not explicitly show this in the paper, I want to clarify that there is no noticeable geographic vocal variation (clinal or otherwise) within any of the eight species-level taxa. Importantly, we did not rely on predetermined groups like subspecies labels from recordings. As described in the methods, populations were delineated based on visual differences in spectrograms, so the patterns emerged organically from the data. To illustrate that there is no clinality, consider the total duration of daytime songs of *obsoletum*. This trait is variable (see scatter in Fig. 3B) across a widely distributed taxon, but plotting it against latitude or longitude shows no association with geography. Similar plots can be generated for all acoustic variables and taxa using the data deposited in Dryad. One can also visualize variables on maps to see the lack of consistent variation within the eight taxa. Put simply, the variation within each taxon is individual rather than geographic and, since there is not even geographic variation within these taxa, there is no clinality among them."



Response to Lima from Claramunt: “The relevant clinal variation I’m referring to is not within taxa but across taxa. See for example the attached plot of Total daysong duration for the three taxa in the South American lowlands. Within *obsoletum*, a cline is not detectable, but variation across the three taxa looks like a gradual cline in which total duration decreases gradually towards the north. No discontinuities or step as apparent, suggesting clinal variation that may be the product of gene flow, a climate or latitudinal selective pressure, or both. For the number of notes there seem to be a nonlinear trend across the continent. The fact that *pusillum* has a ‘significant’ reduction in the number of notes is immaterial, as it could be explained by being at one extreme of a continental-wide gradual trend.



Treat Tawny-crowned Greenlet *Tunchiornis ochraceiceps* as four species

Note: This is a modified version of SACC Proposals 1008 and 1036. SACC 1008, which proposed treating *T. ochraceiceps* as four species, passed 9-1. Only one of the newly delineated species, *T. ochraceiceps sensu stricto*, occurs in the NACC area. SACC 1036 established English names for the newly recognized species, as detailed below.

Background:

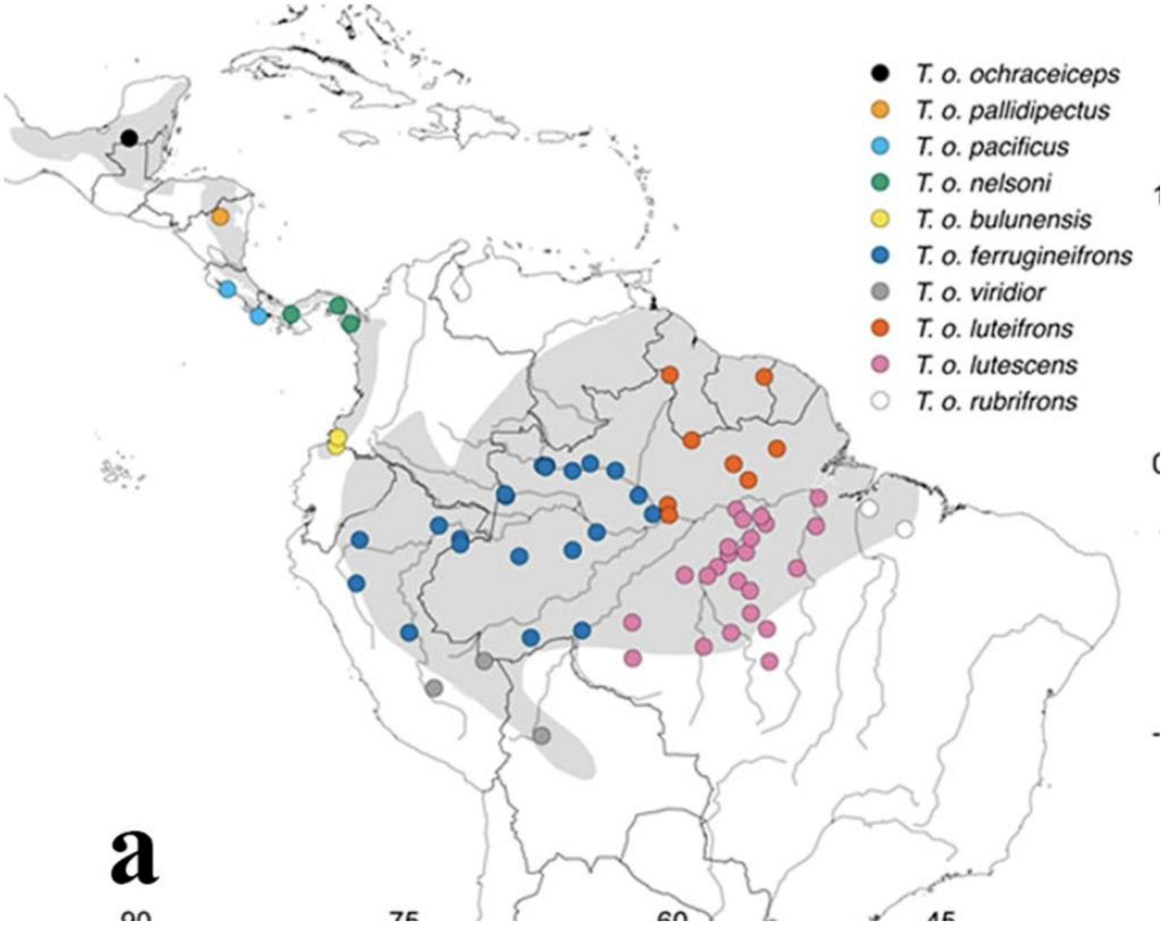
The current SACC note reads as follows:

"14a. See Ridgely & Tudor (1989) for potential reasons for ranking of the southern *rubrifrons* subspecies group as a separate species from *Hylophilus ochraceiceps*. Slager et al. (2014) found deep divergences within among lineages included in *H. ochraceiceps.* Del Hoyo & Collar (2016) treated *luteifrons* of the Guianan Shield as a separate species ("Olive-crowned Greenlet") based in part on Slager et al. (2014) and also on vocal differences pointed out by Boesman (2016h). Buainain et al. (2021) found evidence for treating it as consisting at four species; they found that *luteifrons* is sister to the *rubrifrons* group of southeastern Amazonia, treated as conspecific with ochraceiceps by del Hoyo & Collar (2016). SACC proposal badly needed."

Tunchiornis ochraceiceps (Tawny-crowned Greenlet) is a polytypic species with a large distribution in the Neotropics; 10 subspecies occur from s. Mexico to southern Amazonia. They have always been treated as part of the same species (as far as I know), e.g., Hellmayr 1936, Blake 1968 "Peters", Meyer de Schauensee 1970). The only major break in the distribution is across the Andes, with the number of subspecies equally divided between trans-Andean and cis-Andean populations. It is treated as a single species by Dickinson & Christidis (2014) and IOC (v. 13.2; 2023).

Boesman (2016) sampled 6 recordings of trans-Andean *ochraceiceps*, 9 of the Amazonian *ferrugineifrons-rubrifrons* group, and 8 of Guianan Shield *luteifrons*. Unfortunately, the locations and subspecies allocations were not reported, so for example there is no way to know which Amazonian taxa were sampled, which is critical given that Buainain et al. considered *ferrugineifrons* and *rubrifrons* to be separate species. Boesman found that *luteifrons* differed strongly from his other two groups: "Surprisingly, the different song of *luteifrons* has seemingly nowhere been picked up in literature: its song consists of two notes with decreasing pitch (score 4), resulting in an overall longer song phrase (score 2-3) and larger frequency range (score 1-2). When applying Tobias criteria, this would lead to a total vocal score of about 5 vs. all other races." And "All in all, we can conclude that the Guianan group clearly stands apart vocally."

Here's the map (from Buainain et al. 2021), which will be useful in evaluating the proposal:



New information:

Nelson Buainain and colleagues used 625 specimens, 152 vocal recordings, and 69 tissue samples, with complete taxonomic and broad geographic sampling. The genetic results were based on UCE data from 2267 usable loci. The vocal results were based on analysis of a typical range of characters quantified from sonograms. Standard morphometric measurements were used to evaluate morphological differences. Plumage variation was analyzed by applying Smithe color names and also by simultaneous comparisons of a large series of specimens assembled at the AMNH; photographs of all type specimens were examined as well as all original descriptions. This is another outstanding empirical study coming out of Brazil.

A detailed synopsis of all these data would take too much space here. The analyses are detailed and objective. My favorite is the Estimated Effective Migration Surface analysis in Fig. 3 – cool stuff. The basic point that this bird consists of a bunch of old lineages with minimal phenotypic differentiation is biologically important, and as analyses of Neotropical lineages in this detail increase, through a comparative framework perhaps we will gain a better idea for why some change quickly whereas others do not. If I'd reviewed the paper, I would have pointed out that one of Joel's own papers could have been used to illustrate conservative phenotypic evolution in the group: Reddy & Cracraft (2007; MPE 44: 1352-1357) showed that two Indomalayan genera are actually sister New World vireos, and in fact Indomalayan *Erpornis* looks remarkably like a *Hylophilus* sensu lato despite ca. 30 MY of separation, and some Indomalayan *Pteruthius* resemble *Vireolanius*. Anyway, congrats to the authors on a great paper. Check out the details for yourselves. My only criticism is that when they listed their four species, a Diagnosis for each, summarizing their data, would have been very useful. As is, one has to backtrack through the paper to piece together the characters used to delimit the four species-level taxa (and two additional subspecies-level taxa).

From the standpoint of taxonomy, here's what stands out to me:

***Plumage*:** Of consequence to eventually incorporating subspecies taxonomy into SACC, only two of the five trans-Andean subspecies is 100% diagnosable. The plumage variation is almost all clinal, from s. Mexico to nw. Ecuador, with a blip due to Gloger's Rule, according to their analyses. However, no official tests of diagnosability were conducted on the plumage data, which constitutes the basis of the subspecies original descriptions; rather than simply point out that they were not diagnosable, perhaps a better approach would have been to show that quantitatively to see what the level of diagnosability is because even the most rigid application of PSC-like thinking allows for something below 100% diagnosability. Before synonymizing all 5 subspecies, the data should be re-evaluated from this standpoint; the pattern is clearly clinal, but is it a step cline, with each of the 5 subspecies representing plateaus? The subspecies nelsoni is stated as intermediate between northern *ochraceiceps* and *bulunensis* of the Chocó, and is also clearly a genetically admixed population of the two in terms of mtDNA, but is it a phenotypically diagnosable unit? The text mentions differences in iris color between some groups, but apparently these are not fixed.
Three subspecies groups are, however, diagnosable by head coloration, and these are two of the taxa that they proposed to be elevated to species rank (see below): *T. luteifrons* of the Guianan Shield and *T. rubrifrons* of SE Amazonia. However, they evidently could not diagnose the Middle American *ochraceiceps* group from *ferrugineifrons* from W Amazonia, although they stated that there are trends in coloration that correspond to these groupings. Thus, it is also not clear to me now whether the two subspecies taxa retained in their classification are diagnosable only as mtDNA lineages, in which case there is no basis for recognition as subspecies, in my opinion. I'm confused.
Perhaps all of this explained and detailed in Supplementary Information, although there is no text reference to such files on morphology. For some reason, I cannot access the SI.

***Morphometrics*:** None of the taxa, even those ranked as species by the authors, is diagnosable by morphometrics. No surprise there.

***Vocalizations*:** Vocalizations of course are critical to species limits in the Vireonidae. As far as I know, all taxa recognized as species in the family differ in vocalizations. For several decades, I've heard through others that vocal differences were notable among some of the populations of *T. ochraceiceps*. Therefore, I was expecting their analysis of 150+ recordings to confirm the discrete differences I had heard discussed. Here is their lead sentence:

"The qualitative analysis shows no diagnostic vocal characters for any of the populations of *T. ochraceiceps* (Fig. 8a–d). Some variation, however, is noteworthy and a relatively reliable indicator of population assignment."

They provided the following comments on the vocal differences among their geographic groups, for which I am adding their proposed species name rather than the geographic clusters in the paper:

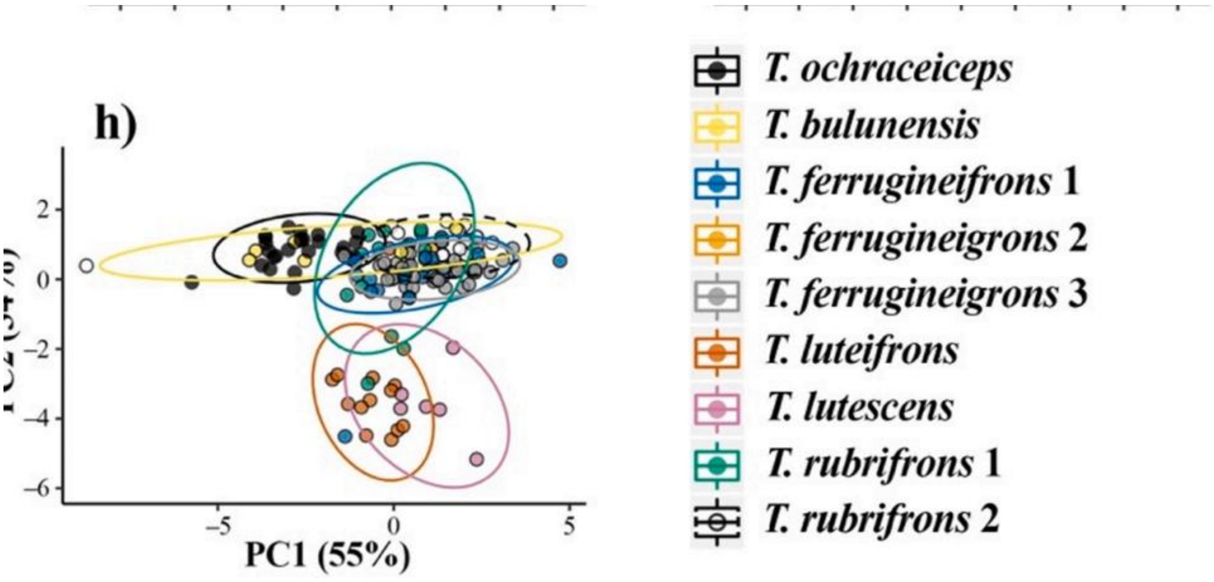
- *ochraceiceps:* "The *trans*-Andean forms tend to have higher frequency (higher pitch) songs (Fig. 9c-g), although there is much overlap with other populations."

- *luteifrons*: "The NEA populations east of the Branco River, predominantly produced a distinct song with two whistled syllables, between the frequencies of ~ 2.7–3.8 KHz, being the last syllable descending in modulation. However, it is clear that these birds can eventually produce one syllable vocalizations (ML 80429, NB observation during field work around Manaus, AM, Brazil) that are apparently indistinguishable from songs with one syllable from the other populations."

- *rubrifrons*: "All recordings from the Madeira-Tapajos ´ interfluve, in SEA, contained a distinct song with two to three syllables, between the frequencies 2.8–3.5 KHz, but with ascending second and third syllables, thus different from the NEA population in modulation. However, songs with one and two syllables were recorded in the Juruena-Teles Pires (whose confluence form the Tapajos River) interfluve. This area lies in the limit between the single and multiple syllable song populations in SEA. Thus, although some interesting difference in frequency of vocal pattern exist, it is not possible to unmistakably distinguish populations by their songs."

- *ferrugineifrons*: [not really discussed per se, as far as I can tell, but see graph below]

Here is their Fig. 9h, which is a PCA classification of quantitative vocal characters:



I find this figure difficult to decipher, but what stands out to mw is that there are 3 clusters: (1) upper left, which corresponds mainly to the nominate ochraceiceps group, but also some portion of the Chocó taxon *bulunensis* (accidentally treated as a species in the legend); upper right, which is a supo of *rubrifrons* and *ferrugineifrons* 1, "ferrugineigrons" 3 [unfortunately conspicuous typo missed by 8 authors, and an unknown number of editors and reviewers], and some *bulunensis*; perhaps due to poor eyesight, I cannot spot where *T*. "ferrugineigrons" 2 is; and (3) *T. luteifrons* and what is marked as *T. lutescens*, which they consider a subspecies of *T. rubrifrons* in their classification. Thus, I really don't know what to make of all this. As noted in their lead sentence above, the authors stated upfront that none of the populations have diagnostic vocal characters. Certainly, as far as I can tell, vocal differences seem somewhat chaotic and don't map well on to their genetic groups. I hope someone else can dig further into this in case I am misinterpreting something.

With all appropriate caveats from concluding anything from single recordings, here are a few I picked out from xeno-canto. This is tedious because the number of recordists who rate their recordings as "A" quality have obviously never listened to, for example, an Andrew Spencer recording among others, so you have to wade through lot of mediocre recordings to get to a good one. I think xeno-canto is one of the world's great bird resources; I just wish there was a more objective way to rate recordings other than self-rating, so that the truly best would come nearest the top.

• *ochraceiceps* (from Puntarenas, Costa Rica, by Peter Boesman): https://xeno-canto.org/274157

• *luteifrons* (from Brownsberg, Suriname, by Peter Boesman): https://xeno-canto.org/271834

• *ferrugineifrons* (Rîo Javarí, Peru, by Peter Boesman) https://xeno-canto.org/270735

• *rubrifrons* (Cristalino Lodge, n. Mato Grosso, Brazil, by Frank Lambert): https://xeno-canto.org/68496

From the standpoint of someone who was familiar (once upon a time) only with *ferrugineifrons* from Bolivia, these all basically sound similar to someone not embedded in the greenlet voice universe; even the two-noted *luteifrons* doesn't sound radically different from the others.

***Genetic divergence*:** Here is their main figure. I have superimposed the four proposed species name in blue on each cluster. Obviously *T. ochraceifrons* consist of four fairly old lineages in terms of mtDNA. The estimated divergence time of the *ochraceiceps* cluster from the *ferrugineifrons* cluster is almost 5 MYA (Pliocene), which is older than many crown lineages we rank as species. The separation of the crown lineages *luteifrons* and *rubrifrons* is much older, ca. 7.5. MYA (Miocene), i.e. older than many crown lineages we rank at the genus level. I do not have the qualifications to evaluate their time calibrations, but taken at face value, they certainly are consistent with species rank.

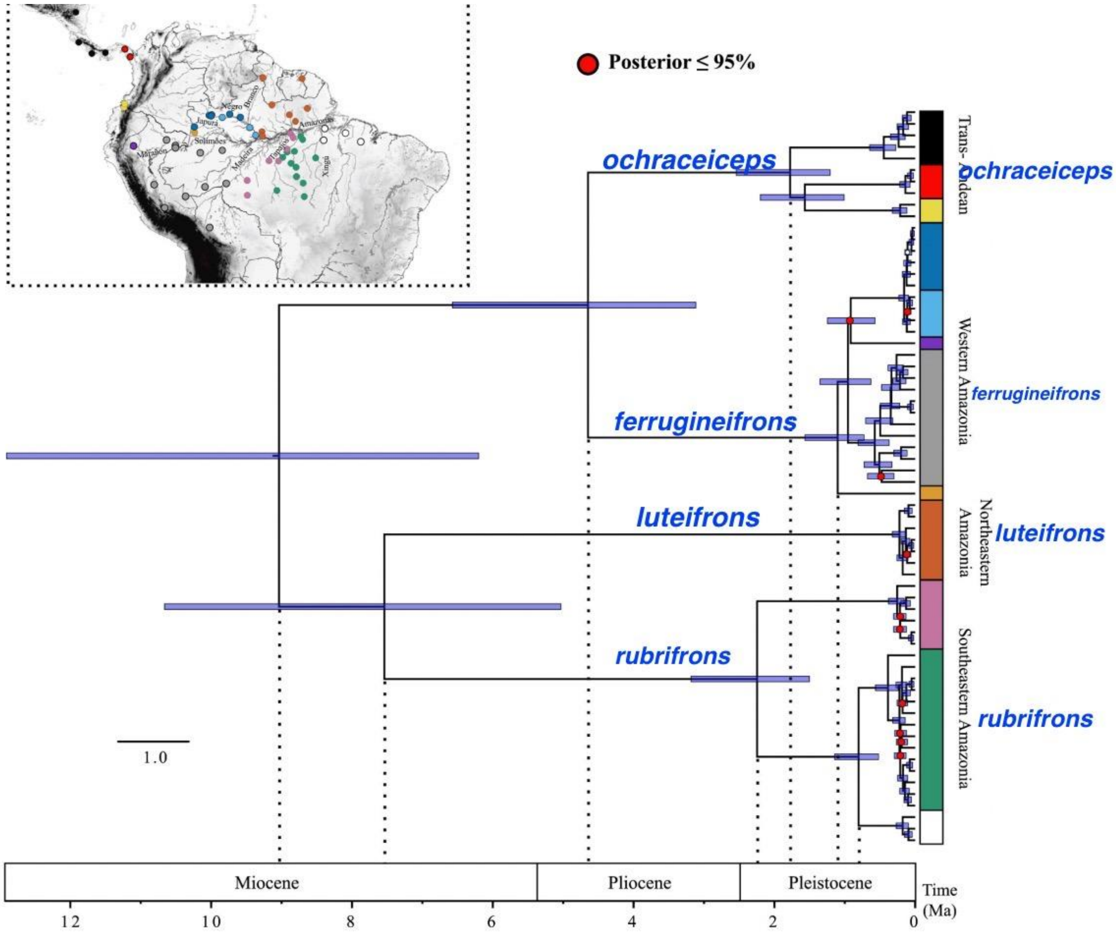


Fig. 5. Bayesian phylogenetic time tree of *Tunchiornis ochraceiceps* inferred in BEAST2 using the 13 CDS mitochondrial genes. The final result is a consensus tree generated from three independent runs combined. All nodes had posterior ≥ 0.95 except the ones colored in red. Error bars represent the 95% HDP (High Posterior Density) of node ages. Map inside dashed rectangle represent geographic position of samples used in the analyses, colored by clade in this tree. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

A summary of their recommended species classification is as follows:

- *Tunchiornis ochraceiceps*: s. Mexico through Central America to nw. Colombia and south in Chocó region to nw. Ecuador; includes *T. o. bulunensis*.

- *Tunchiornis ferrugineifrons* (Sclater, 1862)*:* w. Amazonia, from W of Rio Branco through s. Venezuela, se. Colombia, e. Ecuador, e. Peru, and ne. Bolivia to w. bank of Rio Madeira in sw. Amazonian Brazil.

- *Tunchiornis luteifrons* (Sclater, 1891): Guianan Shield east of Rio Branco through the Guianas to n. Pará and Amapá to n. bank of Amazon.

- *Tunchiornis rubrifrons* (Sclater & Salvin, 1867): s. Amazonia S of the Amazon from Rio Madeira east to Rio Tocantins and se. Pará (?and w. Maranhão), including *T. r. lutescens*)

Here is their figure with geographic distributions and subspecies/species classification

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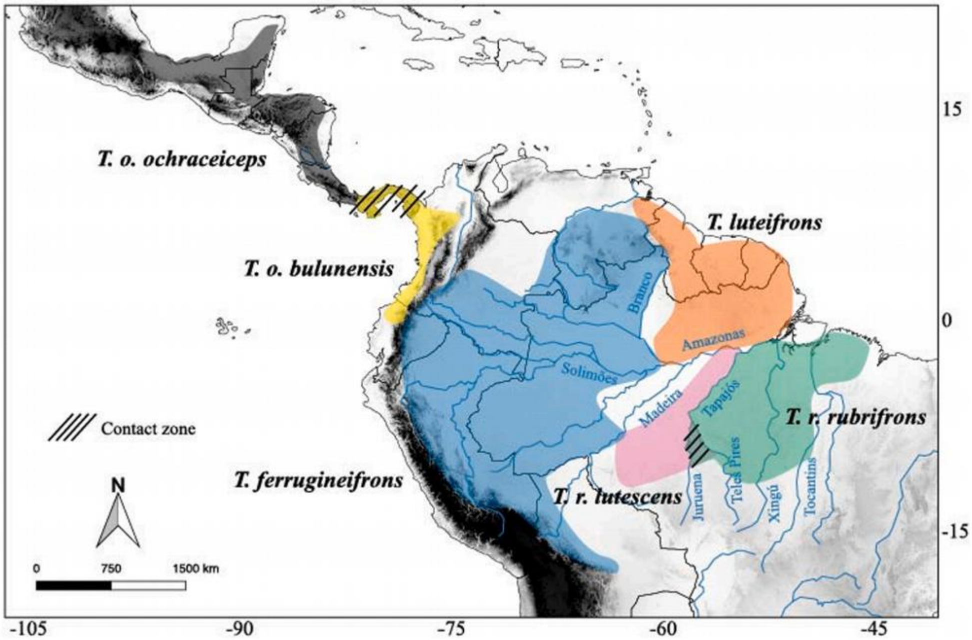


Fig. 10. Geographic distribution of the taxa delimited in the *Tunchiornis* genus after our taxonomic decision based on genomic, morphologic and vocal data. The distribution polygons were drawn around all samples used in this study (see Fig. 1). Possible contact zones between taxa are shown in black diagonal bars.

Discussion:

Basically, my impression is that the data are terrific, but the interpretations of the analyses are insufficiently clear, at least to me, for sorting it all out in terms of taxonomy. The genetic results scream out for recognition of at least four species, but when one tries to diagnose these vocally, it falls apart, with a few instances of songs mismatched to genetic group and no crystal clear vocal groups. I suspect a reanalysis of plumage characters would reveal not just three but at least four and probably many more phenotypically diagnosable units. Central to the problem is that *luteifrons* appears to be the most distinctive taxon in terms of both voice and plumage (no rufous color on crown or face), yet it is sister to *rubrifrons*, which cannot be separated, evidently, from *ferrugineifrons* vocally. So, what we have here is a case of unequal rates of character evolution, which poses a dilemma for species concepts.

Biologically, this is a fascinating situation. Genetically, the results seem crystal clear and tidy, but once one tries to integrate this with plumage and voice, it's a mess. The authors say as much in the paper. Do we go with the deep genetic divergence and ignore apparent lack of phenotypic distinctiveness? Vireonidae has may cases of barely differentiated taxa treated as species, e.g. most recently *Vireo chivi* and *V. olivaceus*.

I have no recommendation either way – I'm going to see what others say, especially with regard to voice.

For voting, let’s do it this way:

YES = Recognize 4 species, as per recommendations in the paper.

NO = Do not recognize 4 species at this point but maintain status quo, at least temporarily, with acknowledgement that the complex may contain 1, 2, 3, or 4 species pending further evaluation.

English names:

After a long period of discussion, SACC adopted these English names for the four species:

Tunchiornis ochraceiceps Northern Tawny-crowned Greenlet
Tunchiornis ferrugineifrons Western Tawny-crowned Greenlet
Tunchiornis luteifrons Guianan Tawny-crowned Greenlet
Tunchiornis rubrifrons Para Tawny-crowned Greenlet

As noted above, *T. ochraceiceps* is the only species that occurs in the NACC area.

For the full discussion on English names, see https://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCprop1036.htm

Literature Cited:

Boesman, P.F.D. 2016. Notes on the vocalizations of Tawny-crowned Greenlet (*Hylophilus ochraceiceps*). Ornithological Note 168. Birds of the World, Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Buainain, N., M. F.A. Maximiano, M. Ferreira, A. Aleixo, B. C. Faircloth, R. T. Brumfield, J. Cracraft, and C. C. Ribas. 2021. Multiple species and deep genomic divergences despite little phenotypic differentiation in an ancient Neotropical songbird, *Tunchiornis ochraceiceps* (Sclater, 1860) (Aves: Vireonidae). Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution 162: 107206.

Submitted by: Van Remsen

Date of Proposal: June 2024, modified by R. T. Chesser for SACC on 27 Feb. 2026

SACC comments on Proposal 1008:

Vote tracking chart: https://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCPropChart968-1043.htm

Comments from Areta: “YES. I vote for the 4-way split. The deep genetic differences coupled with somewhat different vocalizations, plumages and eye-color, indicate that keeping all these taxa as a single species is incorrect. I share Van´s misgivings on how the information is organized and summarized, and I think that more detailed vocal analyses will uncover more clear vocal distinctions among the four main species-level taxa.”

Comments from Claramunt: “YES. I think the proposed taxonomy is a step forward. The data clearly show that there are multiple species-level lineages in this complex and the proposed splits are supported by evidence.”

Comments from Robbins: “Unless one strictly relies on the mtDNA for making species allocations, this is messy from a vocal and plumage morphology standpoint. An example of vocal issues, I have recorded birds in Nicaragua and Guyana that both give single and two-noted calls that are very similar. Listening to recordings from elsewhere I get the same impression as what is stated in the paper, seems to be no diagnosable song for each of the four clades. As Van pointed out, conservative plumage morphology may be clinal and it is unclear whether there are diagnosable characters for each clade. Unless I missed something, it is unclear if there are consistent differences in eye color. So, I’m on the fence on this one and look forward to seeing comments by others.”

Comments from Jaramillo: “YES – This is a complicated group with lack of outstanding plumage features to work with. I guess this is why they call them greenlets. In any case, I am persuaded by the data here and the summary that Van provides. All Vireonidae differ in vocalizations – Van have you heard singing Philadelphia Vireos? Even the Red-eyes can’t tell them apart!! But yes, their calls are different.”

Comments from Stiles: “YES. The 4-way split of *Tunchiornis* seems well justified – it certainly is a long step forward in understanding *Tunchiornis* and serves as a solid base should additional data indicate further splitting in the future.”

Comments from Lane: “NO. Ugh. This is one of those cases that just doesn’t really feel like it is cooked enough to take out of the oven. I guess we can just take the molecular results and shrug at the fact that the plumage and voice data don’t map well onto them. I just did a quick search as per Alvaro’s comments to see if there are enough recordings of calls to provide support in that group of vocalizations being stronger evidence for differences, but there are very few call recordings (at least in X-c) for several of the taxonomic groups so it is hard to say. I really would rather wait for more evidence to elucidate the situation before accepting splits here. NO.”

Comments from Andrew Spencer (who has Remsen vote): “YES - this was a really tough vote for me. No one factor convinces me that these should be split, but when taken together they tip me into the yes camp. Regarding vocalizations, as others have already stated here, the situation seems really murky. Listening to recordings, I do get the general patterns laid out by Boesman and expanded on by Buainain, especially regarding *luteifrons* and also trans-Andean birds vs. the rest. But the variation in any one group does muddy the picture significantly. That said, I don't particularly see that as a mark against a split. Philadelphia and Red-eyed vireos songs are often completely indistinguishable by anyone (including themselves), and others like some members of the former Solitary Vireo differ mostly in average characters somewhat like these greenlets. Conversely, vocal differences by themselves aren't going to persuade me to split these or other Vireonidae, given dialectical differences in other members of the family that (in my opinion) aren't indicative of separate species status. Calls may well be a better avenue to show speciation here, but even if they eventually prove to not be that different I still think my points above stand.

“It's those average differences combined with the other evidence presented persuades me to still vote for the split. I understand Dan's point that this has some aspects of "doesn’t really feel like it is cooked enough", to use his terminology. But I do think that the four species interpretation is a step forward in our understanding of the complex, and in my opinion at least, a significant step forward.”

Comments from Mario Cohn-Haft (who has Del-Rio vote): “YES. I basically agree with everybody else (the nays and yays). Here in the central Amazon, it's really obvious that there are consistently distinct voices and plumages across the rios Negro and Madeira and lower Amazon, and seemingly across the Tapajos as well. So, the 4-way split proposed is, I would say, a conservative description of reality (there are probably more than 4 spp. involved) and a perfectly reasonable conclusion from the point of view of nomenclature and distributions.

“On the other hand, the story as published leaves a lot to be desired in the way of convincing evidence. That is, I'm more convinced by my own experience than by what's available in the literature. And I think the reason for that is that a proper vocal analysis requires a lot more work and thought than anybody has been willing to give it so far. I'm the first to admit that I didn't tackle the problem myself out of sheer laziness. Way back in the late 80s when Ridgely's frustratingly erroneous description of the situation irked me into actually thinking about doing something, I realized what a big job it was going to be, and I've sat around hoping someone would do it up right ever since. Yes, some populations can produce vocalizations just like others, making 100% diagnosis on one character alone difficult. So what? (Ah, and guess what, that happens with suboscines too.) A good vocal analysis needs to take into account repertoire, context of vocalizations, frequency (not kHz, but opposite of rarity--the number of times that a particular vocalization is given); carefully chosen vocal variables (not a universal recipe of maxs, mins, etc.-- I could go on and on about what good vocal variables are, but this isn't the place) and comparison of analogous vocalizations, not just everything at random; means and variances, for example, only make sense in these specific contexts. What we're seeing consistently nowadays are molecular studies to which vocal or morphological components are added almost as an afterthought to "strengthen" (or not) the molecular conclusion, but that do not stand on their own. In that sense I totally agree with Dan and others who say this cake is only half-baked at best. (By the way, I can't remember if iris color entered into any of this, but it's also a relevant diagnostic character in this complex.)

“The hard question for me is: How purist (perfectionist?) are we going to be? I think the 4-spp answer is right (and an underestimate), so how much longer will we wait before it makes it into the checklist? If we were Peters, or better yet my hero John Zimmer, we'd just declare it and be done with it and let nay-sayers or future generations of topic-challenged grad students worry about the details. And that's what I'm inclined to do. I vote YES, believing it's the correct answer, while recognizing that the published and available evidence don't tell a thoroughly convincing story. Messy? A bit authoritative or arbitrary? Sorry. Watching the planet burn, flood, become bare of vegetation at the rate it is now, I find it hard to justify waiting to do up properly the taxonomy of what I used to hold aside as "my pristine Amazon". We are literally on the brink of cataloging extinct species.”

Comments from Zimmer: “YES. A complicated one indeed. The depth of the genetic splits here are impressive, and combined with some average differences in plumage, iris color, and vocalizations, even in the apparent absence of diagnosability, are enough to sway me. As Andrew and Alvaro both note, songs of some accepted species pairs of vireos (Red-eyed vs. Philadelphia; all 3 of the splits from former “Solitary” Vireo) are doubtfully diagnostic. I will say, that without having ever conducted anything approaching a quantitative analysis, I’ve long been struck by apparent vocal differences corresponding to each of these suggested four species. I agree with Mark that some populations can give either 1 or 2-note songs, and that they are all broadly similar in quality, but nonetheless, I can still hear qualitative differences in inflection and pitch. Granted, these may not hold up to broad geographic sampling of each population, but, at least in my coarse-grained field experience with this group, it has always been my impression that there were some pretty consistent geographic differences in songs that correspond pretty well to the partitioning suggested by the genetic data. The case is a long way from perfect, but I would agree with Andrew that this represents a step forward in our understanding, and I think the genetic data combined with the sum of mean differences in various character states is enough to hang our hats on.”

Comments from Bonaccorso: “YES. Although the plumage differences are not entirely diagnosable, and the song data are limited and substantially overlapping, neither type of character alone is expected to be diagnostic for this group. However, the molecular divergences, even if based only on mitochondrial DNA, are impressive.”

Additional comments from Robbins: “Given that the vast majority supported recognition of the 4 way split, I will shift my on the fence vote to a YES.”

Comments from Naka: “YES. As far as I understand it, the 4-spp split fixes most problems from the Brazilian Amazon, particularly within the Guiana Shield, where *luteifrons* and *ferrugineifrons* replace one another. Along the Rio Branco suture zone, birds are genetically, vocally, and morphologically distinct, which includes a pale iris in *ferrugineifrons*, as Mario mentioned on his vote. So, despite some concerns, I agree with Kevin in that those split populations have always looked and sounded different to me.”

Treat *Leiothlypis ridgwayi* as a separate species from Nashville Warbler L. *ruficapilla*

Effect on NACC:

If accepted, this proposal would add a new species, *Leiothlypis ridgwayi*, to the NACC list.

Background:

Leiothlypis ruficapilla ridgwayi (van Rossem 1929) has long been treated as an allopatric subspecies of *L. r. ruficapilla* (Wilson 1811), and the two together have been considered to form a superspecies with *L. virginiae*. All three taxa are allopatric or nearly so (Lowther and Williams 2020), and some authors have considered all three to form a single species (Monson and Phillips 1981).In analyses of the mitochondrial gene cytochrome b, Klein et al. (2004) and Weir & Schluter (2004) found *L. ruficapilla* to be paraphyletic with *L. r. ridgwayi*, being more closely related to *L. virginiae* rather than to *L. r. ruficapilla*. A subsequent paper, however, using different mtDNA markers, found that the two species were reciprocally monophyletic and separated into divergent haplotype groups whose sequence differed by 1.7–2.3% (Lovette et al. 2004).

The two taxa are thought to differ in plumage, morphology, behavior, and calls. Plumage differences are sometimes described as *ridgwayi* being “marginally brighter than nominate, with larger area of white on belly” (del Hoyo et al. 2010). Others have noted in addition that *ridgwayi* has average grayer back and brighter yellow rump, giving it less contrast between the hood and the back and more contrast between the back and the rump than is shown by *ruficapilla* (Lowther and Williams 2020). Nevertheless, we found no formal quantification of color variation between taxa. Subspecies *ridgwayi* also averages slightly longer in tail and tarsus (Relyea 1936), with a louder more metallic call, and regularly bobs its tail, whereas *ruficapilla* rarely does so (Lowther and Williams 2020).

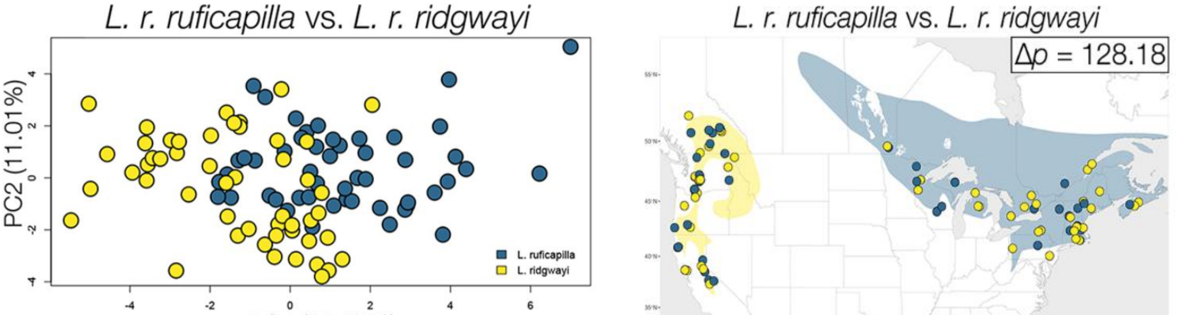
This split was previously voted on by the committee (2017-C) and was not accepted in a 6-4 vote, the main concerns against the split being the limited evidence based on mtDNA.

New Information:

Vocalizations:

As noted above, call notes differ between the two taxa; however, no formal analysis has been published to quantify differences in calls. To DVP’s ear *ruficapilla* actually sounds more like Virginia’s Warbler (*L. virginiae*) than either sounds like *ridgwayi*. Single examples from Macaulay Library illustrating this are *ruficapilla* https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/224731, *ridgwayi* https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/70650131, and *virginiae* https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/354198301.

Phung & Toews (2024) used a clustering approach to evaluate song divergence between this pair of taxa (among others) and found that differences between subspecies are on average larger than differences within subspecies. Nevertheless, there was considerable overlap of song characteristics between taxa (Fig. 1a). Song was best described in two clusters; however, individual assignments to clusters do not necessarily match geographic distribution (Figure 1b). Despite this new information on subtle song differences, the authors highlighted the lack of evidence that such differences are important for behavioral reproductive isolation.



a b

Figure 1. From Phung & Toews (2024): a. PCA analysis comparing songs of *ruficapilla* and *ridgwayi*; b. partitioning around medoid analysis with blue dots representing individuals clustered with *ruficapilla* and yellow those clustered with *ridgwayi*.

Playback Experiments:

Two recent complementary studies have tested for behavioral reproductive isolation by evaluating the aggressive response to homotypic and heterotypic playbacks in territorial males of *ridgwayi* (Freeman et al. 2022) and *ruficapilla* (Phung et al. 2026). On the one hand, Freeman et al. (2022) found no difference in aggressive response in *ridgwayi*, males being equally aggressive towards both signal types. On the other hand, *ruficapilla* were more aggressive towards homotypic signals (Fig. 2), as expected if song is important for conspecific recognition and behavioral isolation (Phung et al. 2026). It is worth mentioning that these studies based the aggressive response on a single metric (closest distance to the speaker) and other components of the response such as latency, vocalization, and displays were not evaluated.

Phylogenetics:

Lovette et al. (2010) placed *ridgwayi* in a clade with *L. virginiae* and *L. luciae* based on ~5kbp of mtDNA and 6 nuclear introns, where internal relationships have little support. Specifically, the Bayesian analysis of mtDNA supported the topology [*ruficapilla*, [*L. luciae, L. virginiae*]] (Fig. 3a), whereas the introns supported [*L. luciae*, [*ruficapilla, L. virginiae*]] (Fig. 3b), both with posterior probability values >0.90.

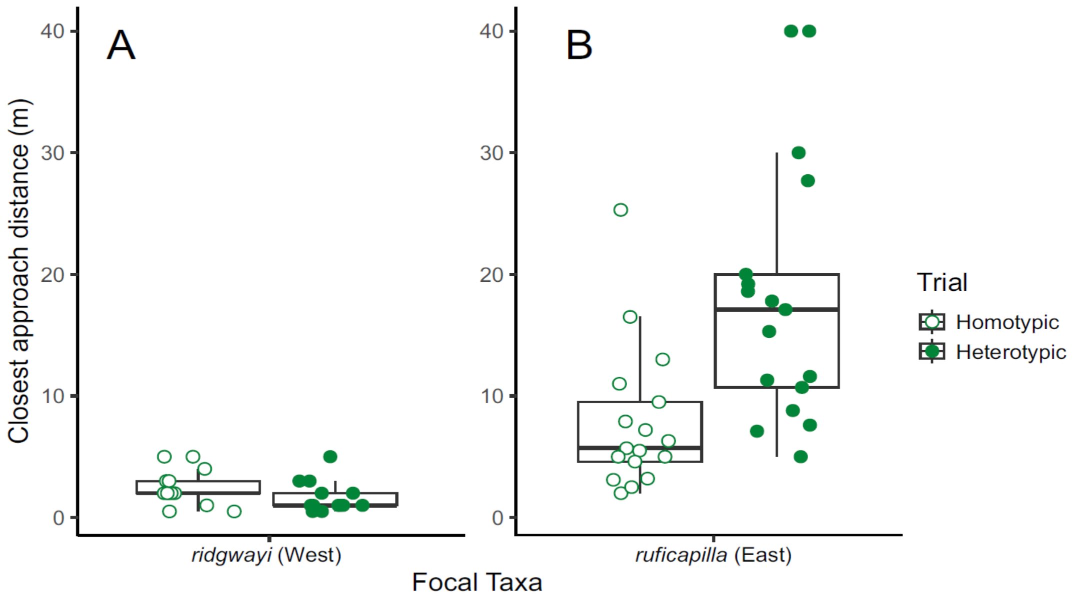


Figure 2: Closest approach distances in response to homotypic and heterotypic signals, from Phung et al. (2026).

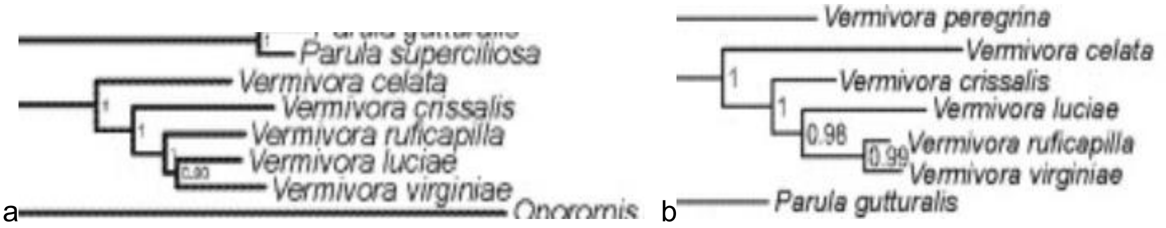


Figure 3: Relationships in the former *Vermivora* clade, fragments from the phylogenies from Lovette et al. (2010): Bayesian analysis from a) mtDNA; b) from 6 nuclear introns. Numbers at the nodes show the posterior probability values.

More recently, Zhao et al. (2025) placed *ruficapilla* as sister to [*L. luciae, L. virginiae*] based on the mitogenome (Fig. 4a), but sister to [[*L. luciae, L. virginiae*], *L. crissalis*] based on UCEs (Fig. 4b). These two studies used a single sample from *ridgwayi* (Lovette et al. 2010) and *ruficapilla* (Zhao et al. 2025) respectively, providing no direct evidence for the paraphyly of the taxa. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that the mtDNA from both studies supported the same topology despite using samples from different subspecies. Altogether, this information suggests a case of mito-nuclear discordance and rapid radiation with little phylogenetic signal.

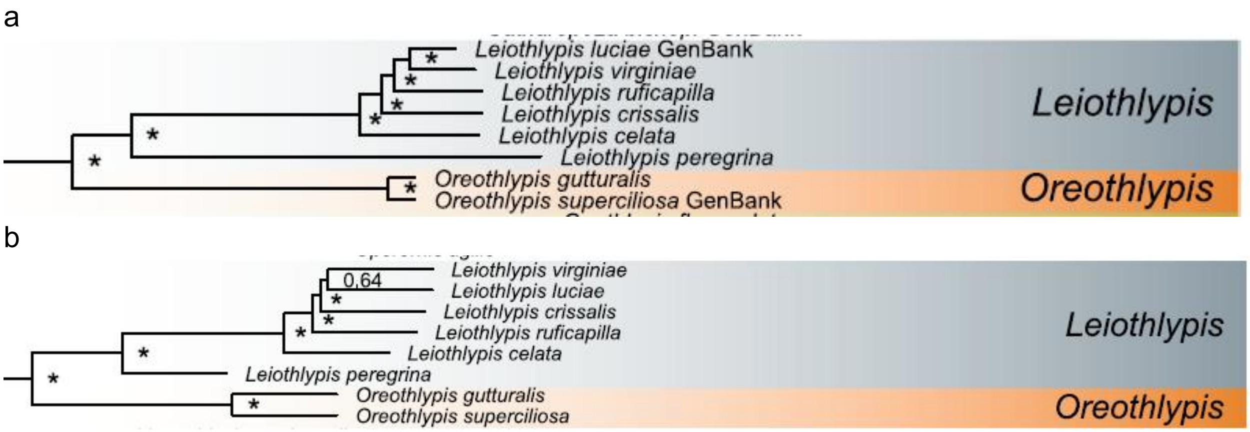


Figure 4. Relationship of the *Leiothlypis* clade, fragments from the phylogenies from Zhao et al. (2025): analysis from a) mitogenomes; and b) Ultra-Conserved Elements. Asterisks depict full node support.

<u>Genomic variation and demographic history</u>:

lcWGS (~5x coverage) from 24 individuals (12 of each taxon) showed clear genomic clustering by taxon (~14% of genomic variance, Fig. 5), with a global FST of 0.087 and dozens of highly differentiated peaks of divergence (Fig. 6a; Phung et al. 2026). The genomic differentiation is comparable to that between nominate *Setophaga coronata* and *S. c. audubon* and lower than that between the species *S. virens* and *S. townsendi* (Phung et al. 2026). Phung et al. (2026) also found no evidence of admixture which suggested they have been on separate evolution trajectories for the past million years; however, no samples were used that were close to where the two taxa approach one another (the two are currently allopatric but may come into rare contact in Alberta). Additionally, reconstruction of the historical changes in effective population size showed that these taxa had different demographic histories in the last one million years (Figure 6b, Phung et al. 2026).

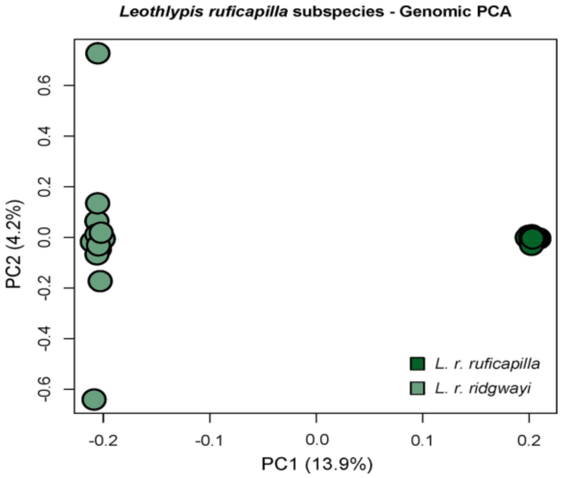


Figure 5: PCA from Phung et al. (2026) showing variation between *ruficapilla* and *ridgwayi*. Note also variation within *ridgwayi* along PC2 that is not reflective of geography.

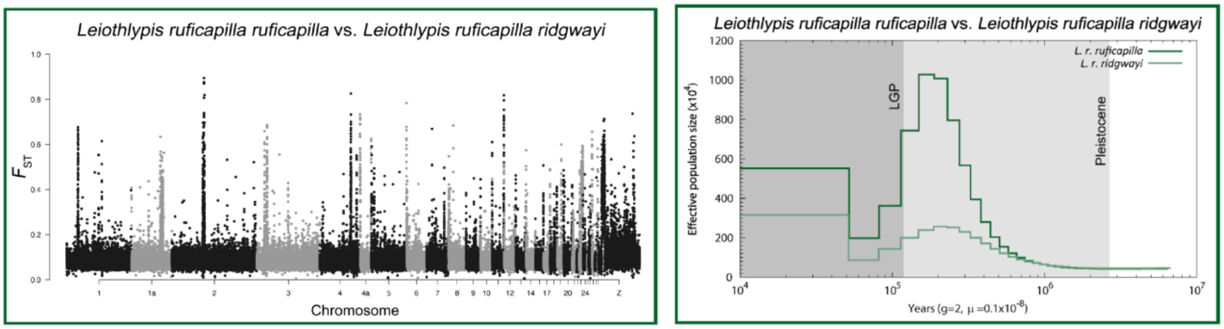


Figure 6: From Phung et al., (2026). a) Genome-wide FST in nonoverlapping 10 kb windows across the genome; b) historical estimation of effective population size.

English Names: The western taxon *ridgwayi* has long been called Calaveras Warbler. Though suggested in the prior proposal as a name for eastern *ruficapilla,* Rusty-capped Warbler found no support, with most feeling Nashville was fine. Eastern and Western Nashville warbler have been suggested as well, but those names are rather uninspired. If the split is approved, we would recommend adopting Calaveras Warbler for *ridgwayi* and retaining Nashville Warbler for *ruficapilla*, although we are open to other names. If Calaveras and Nashville are not chosen, a separate proposal for English names would be needed.

Recommendation:

This is a borderline case and given the close relationship and previously described mtDNA paraphyly between *L. ruficapilla* it is perhaps surprising that samples from both subspecies have not been included in recent phylogenetic studies on the group. So far, there is evidence of subtle phenotypic and genomic divergence between taxa, independent demographic history, and local adaptation, all consistent with isolated populations. Nevertheless, we feel there is currently no clear evidence of reproductive isolation that warrants changing the current taxonomic status. although the hypothesis of separate species remains supported by the paraphyly observed in cyt-b (Klein et al. 2004). We recommend a “NO” vote until further evidence is available.

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Submitted By: David Vander Pluym and Diego Ocampo

Date of Proposal: 27 February 2026

Recognize the genus *Nannus* for three species of wren

Note: The following is a proposal originating from the Palearctic Regional Advisory Group (RAG) of AviList. Prior to submission to the Taxonomic Committee of AviList, opinions and votes are sought from NACC, as the home of all the wren genera in question.

Background:

The genus *Troglodytes* is represented by 18 species, including Eurasian Wren *T. troglodytes*, the only non-American member of the wren family. However, several molecular phylogenies have shown *Troglodytes* to be paraphyletic, where the Eurasian Wren and its close relatives, the previously conspecific Winter Wren *T. hiemalis* and Pacific Wren *T. pacificus*, instead are sisters to *Cistothorus*.

Previous studies:

Already in 1999, Rice et al., based on a 534-bp portion of the mitochondrial ND2 gene, found the Winter Wren (then included in *T. troglodytes*) to fall outside of *Troglodytes*: "our results suggest that *Troglodytes*, as currently defined, is polyphyletic. Exhaustive searches

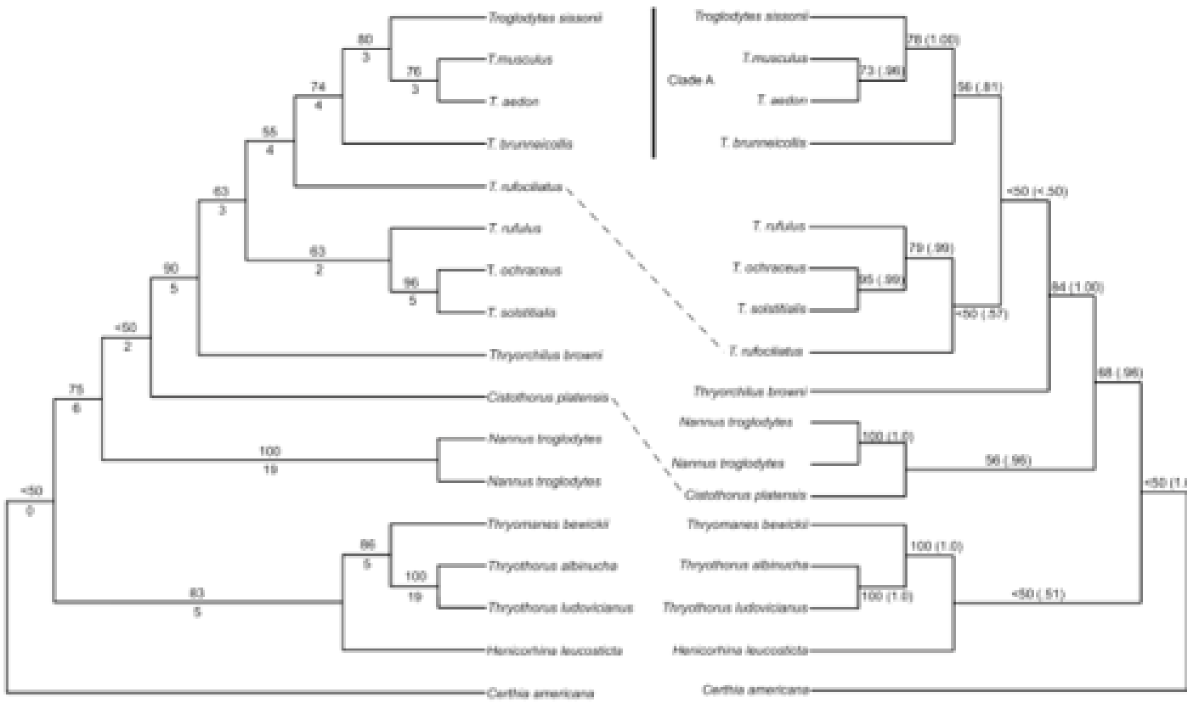


Figure 1. Phylogenetic hypotheses suggested via parsimony, maximum likelihood, and Bayesian analyses of ND2 sequences. Left: topology resulting from equally weighted parsimony, right: topology resulting from likelihood and Bayesian analyses. Numbers at the nodes are likelihood bootstrap values and Bayesian posterior probabilities. From Rice (1999).

under varied assumptions all indicated that the Winter Wren is not part of the clade including other *Troglodytes* wrens examined in this study, which is somewhat surprising given our initial hypothesis that the Winter Wren and Rufous-browed Wren would be sister taxa!"

Rice (1999) recommended that Winter Wren to be removed from *Troglodytes* and placed in a separate genus. As the type species of *Troglodytes* is *T. aedon* (Paynter and Vaurie 1960), he proposed that *Nannus* Billberg 1828 be recognized for Winter Wren.

Gómez et al. (2005) studied the phylogenetic position and generic placement of the Socorro Wren, then placed in *Thryomanes*. Apart from their main finding that *Thryomanes* is embedded in *Troglodytes*, they reiterated the findings of Rice et al.:

"Here, using a different outgroup and adding five new taxa to the analysis resulted in the placement of *T. troglodytes* basal to *Thryorchilus browni* and the other *Troglodytes* (and to *Cistothorus platensis* in one tree). This pattern supports Rice et al.'s (1999) placement of *Troglodytes troglodytes* as *Nannus troglodytes*, though its definitive placement will depend on the final position of *Cistothorus* and *Thryorchilus* in relation to *Troglodytes*; the alternative to treatment as *Nannus* would be a very inclusive *Troglodytes*."

Barker (2017) reported "the first nearly genus-level sampling of certhioids, based on concatenated and species tree analyses of 8520 bases of DNA sequence data from six gene regions". In it, both *Cistothorus* and previously unsampled *Ferminia* separated *Nannus* from *Troglodytes*, though neither relationship showed substantial support. However, the sister relationship between *Troglodytes* s.s. and *Thryorchilus* was fully supported (node support 100%).

Barker (2017) added: "Bayes factor comparison of these results to an analysis with *Troglodytes* monophyly constrained strongly favored the former. However, the marginal likelihood of an analysis with *Nannus*, *Thryorchilus*, and *Troglodytes* constrained as monophyletic was indistinguishable from the unconstrained analysis, indicating that the strongest signal is for monophyly of *Troglodytes*+*Thryorchilus*. Thus, these data would not contradict a classification that subsumed all three genera (*Nannus*, *Thryorchilus*, and *Troglodytes*) within *Troglodytes*, as previously done by its describer (Bangs, 1902), and some subsequent taxonomies (e.g., Paynter and Vaurie, 1960). Unless subsequent data strongly separate *Nannus* from *Troglodytes*+*Thryorchilus*, this would seem appropriate, despite the distinctiveness of *Thryorchilus*."

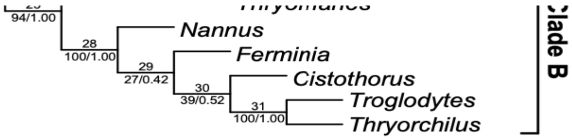
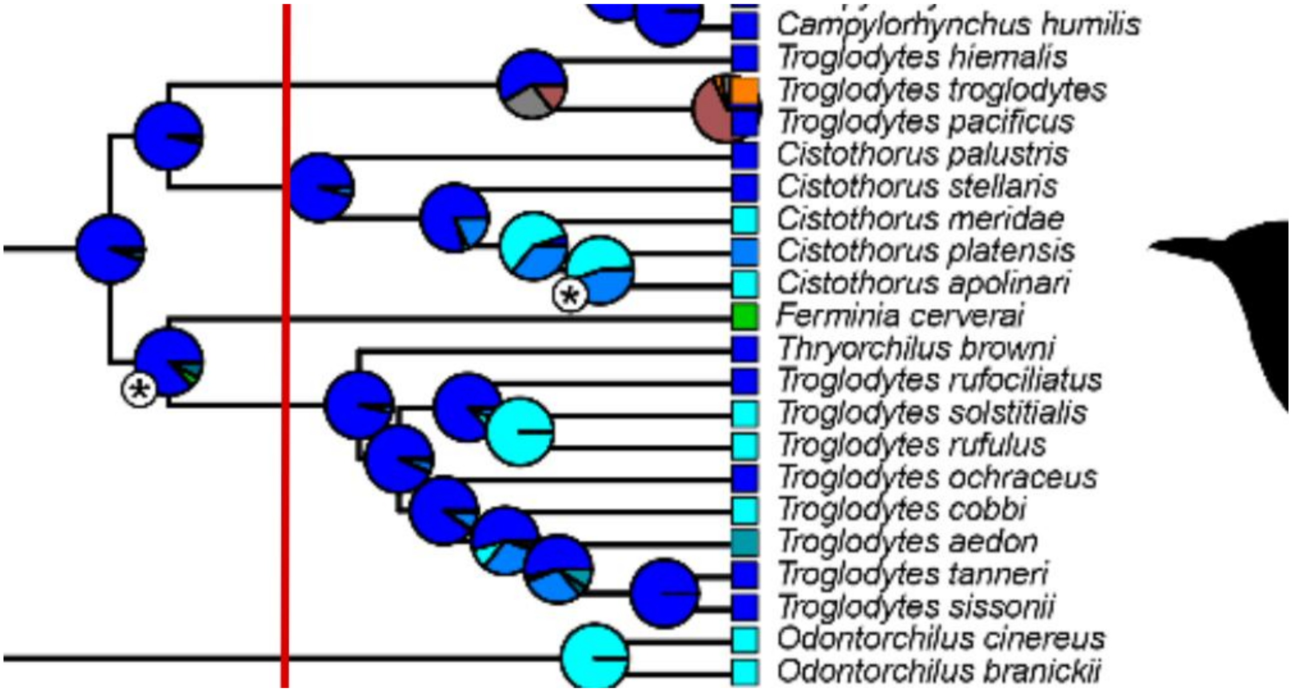


FIGURE 4. Best estimate of certhioid phylogeny, based on concatenated analysis of 8517 bases from five gene regions (cytb, FGB-I4, FGB-I7, RAG1, RAG2, and ZEB1). Shown is the maximum-likelihood tree from a partitioned RAxML analysis, with nonstationary partitions AGY-recoded (see text). Bootstrap support values (from 1000 fast bootstrap replicates; left) and estimated posterior probabilities from partitioned, concatenated Bayesian analysis (right) are shown below each branch. Node numbers correspond to barplots in figure 5.

Using an augmented supermatrix approach including one mitochondrial and nine nuclear sequences, Imfeld et al. (2024) studied the family and its closest relatives. In *Troglodytes*, all traditional members were included except Mountain Wren (and some members of the House Wren complex just very recently elevated to species level).

Imfeld et al. (2024) ”recovered a distinct clade of 3 *Troglodytes* species (*hiemalis*, *pacificus*, and *troglodytes*) that was sister to *Cistothorus*, rendering the genus *Troglodytes* paraphyletic, as previously shown (Rice et al. 1999, Barker 2017). In line with those analyses, but now based upon complete sampling of relevant species and close relatives, we again recommend recognizing these 3 species under the name *Nannus* (Billberg 1828).”

Strong support was found for the monophyly of *Troglodytes s.s.*, as well as for *Thryorchilus* as its sister taxon, “consistent with the continued recognition of the latter at the genus level”:

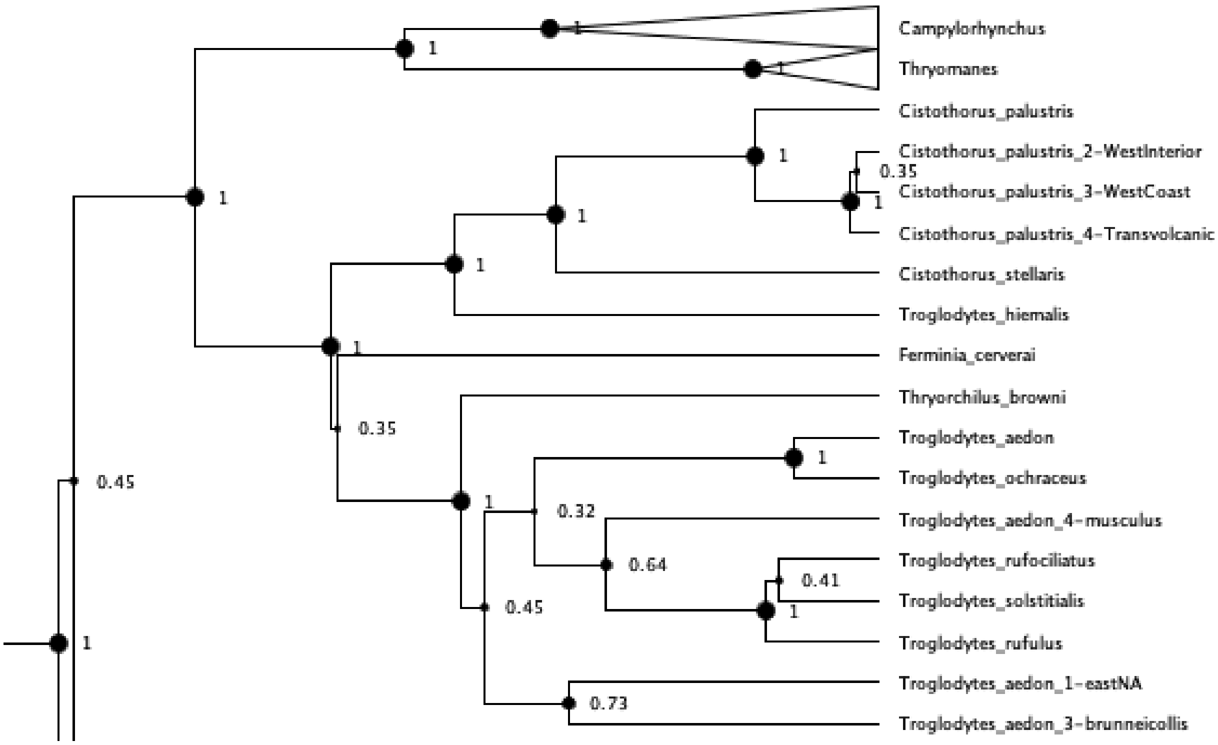


New analyses of nuclear loci:

Martin Stervander reanalyzed the concatenated sequence matrix used for Imfeld et al. (2024). The nuclear loci were separated and reanalyzed, ’empty’ sequences trimmed off and substitution models evaluated (per locus; not done at codon position level for exonic sequence atm). Stervander set up and optimised Bayesian phylogenetic runs in BEAST2, and produced trees per nuclear locus.
Given the nature of nuclear DNA with lower mutation rates and slower sorting, nuclear marker trees aren’t necessarily expected to exactly correspond to the species tree, but it allows us to

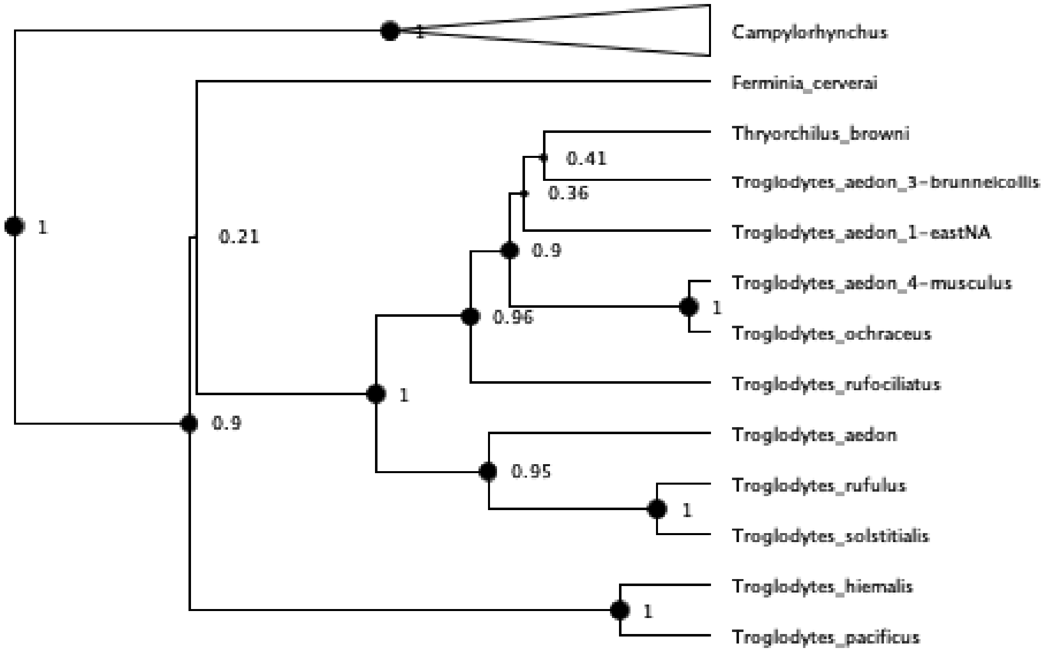
check whether those trees are consistent with the taxonomy as currently treated (monophyletic *Troglodytes*) or/and as implied by the studies referenced above (paraphyletic *Troglodytes*). It is reasonable to evaluate this for the *Nannus* clade and for *Thryorchilus*, even if the latter is outside of RAG Pal's area.

In the following tree shots, nodal support (PP 0–1) is written at nodes and visualised with size of node symbol. Markers given with their abbreviation followed by length and substitution model determined by BIC.

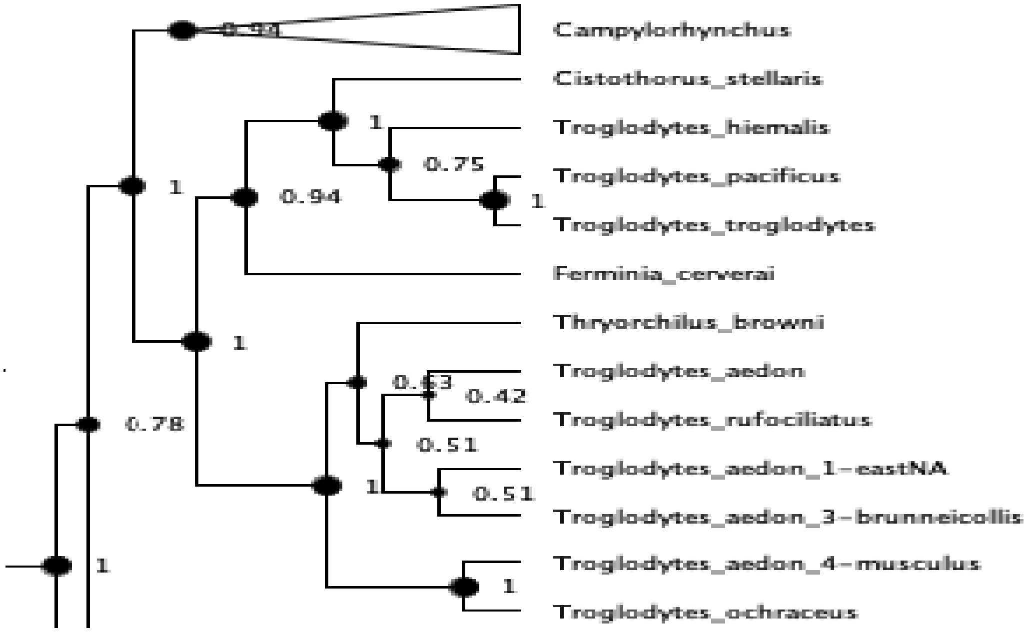


ACO1 (1,057 bp; TIM3+G). *Nannus* clade is sister to *Cistothorus*, with full support (*Troglodytes* paraphyly). *Thryorchilus* is in a clade with *Troglodytes* s.s. with full support, but may be basal sister (i.e. *Thryorchilus* could be valid, though minimally differentiated from *Troglodytes* s.s.).

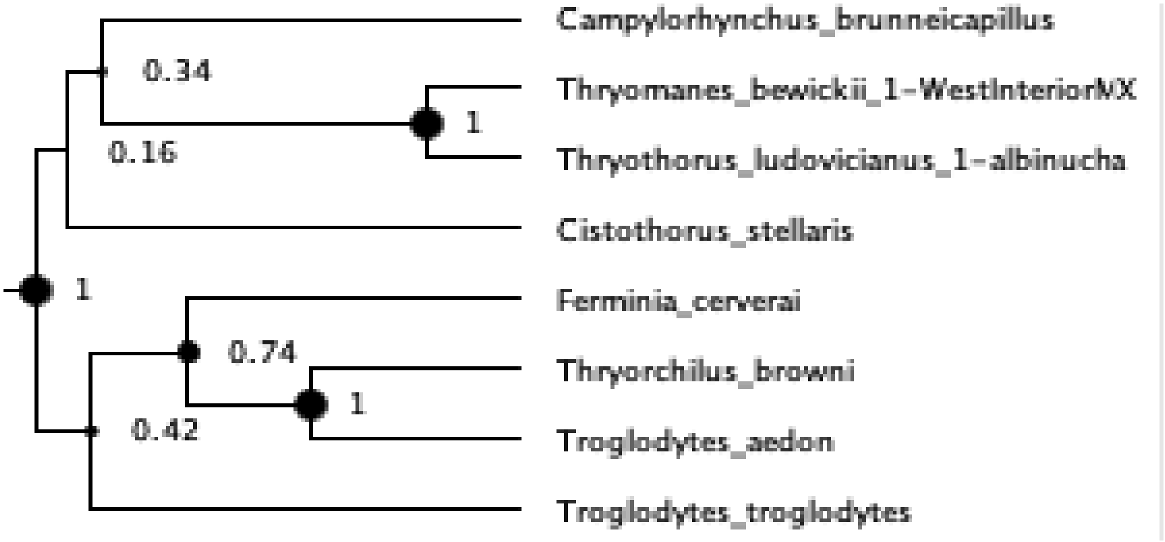
FGB (2,460 bp across 3 introns; TPM3+G; variable taxon coverage across introns). *Nannus* clade: Exact placement of *Cistothorus* unclear (compatible with sister relationship with *Nannus* clade), but demonstrates *Troglodytes* paraphyly. *Thryorchilus*: In clade with *Troglodytes* s.s. with full support (could be minimally diverged basal sister or embedded within *Troglodytes* s.s.)



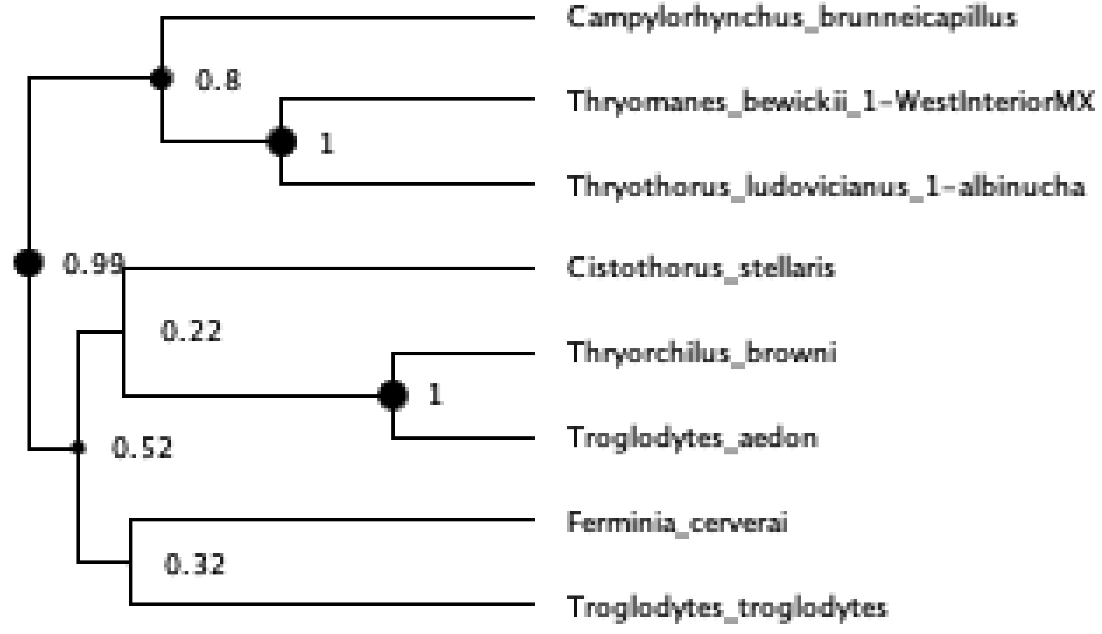
PPWD1 (690 bp; HKY+G). *Nannus* clade: No sequences of *Cistothorus*, so relationship not evaluated, but topology compatible with paraphyly with regard to *Troglodytes* s.s. Given lack of *Cistothorus* and uncertain placement of *Ferminia*, this topology could also be compatible with *Troglodytes* monophyly (if presuming *Thryorchilus* is synonymous with *Troglodytes*). *Thryorchilus*: Embedded in clade with *Troglodytes* s.s. with full support. Interestingly, *Thryorchilus* is grouped in a *Troglodytes* s.s. subclade with PP = 0.96, which is strong support for a synonymy.



RAG1 (2,882 bp; TN+G+I). *Nannus* clade: Sister to *Cistothorus* with full support (demonstrating *Troglodytes* paraphyly), here also with *Ferminia* as sister to those, with PP = 0.94. *Thryorchilus*: In clade with *Troglodytes* s.s. with full support (could be minimally diverged basal sister or embedded within *Troglodytes* s.s.)



RAG2 (1,171 bp; K80+G; low taxon representation). *Nannus* clade: Single representative and single representative of *Cistothorus*; topology poorly supported and uninformative (other than *Thryorchilus*; see below). *Thryorchilus*: Sister to the single representative of *Troglodytes* s.s. with full support, but uninformative other than with regard to the *Nannus* clade.



ZEB1 (1,638 bp; HKY+G+I). Topology and interpretation exactly as for RAG2.

None of these analyses show unequivocal support for a monophyletic *Troglodytes s.l.*, whereas three do provide **unequivocal support for a paraphyletic *Troglodytes s.l.***, implying that the topologies reported by the primary papers referenced are **not** only dictated by a mitochondrial signal.

As for *Thryorchilus*, things do get a little complicated. Life would have been immensely much easier had Klicka et al. (2023) included a *T. browni* sample or two in their sampling for RADsequencing, generating genome-wide nuclear SNPs. Their study led to the split of Southern House Wren *Troglodytes musculus* from Northern House Wren *T. aedon*, and could indeed be compatible with sister relationship of the former with *T. browni*, as indicated by some of these analyses. In order to assess this properly, however, genomic data of all parties involved (and preferably the other *Troglodytes*) would be highly desirable.

Implications and potential revisions:

The evidence is strong that the Eurasian Wren (*T. troglodytes*) complex is not the sister taxon to true *Troglodytes*. To align with current knowledge, this would require changes at the generic level. We see two options to accommodate this. One is to place the three species *troglodytes*, *pacificus* and *hiemalis* in a separate genus, for which *Nannus* Billberg, 1828, has priority; a move recommended by the above referenced studies. The alternative option would be to expand *Troglodytes* to include all of *Troglodytes* s.l., *Thryorchilus*, *Cistothorus*, and *Ferminia*.

Recognizing *Nannus* would move *troglodytes*, *pacificus* and *hiemalis* to *Nannus* Billberg, 1828, resulting in *N. troglodytes* (Linnaeus, 1758), *N. pacificus* (Baird, 1864) and *N. hiemalis* (Vieillot, 1819). This option would require fewer taxonomic changes, leaving long recognized and distinctive genera intact. The split of *Nannus* has already been adopted by, e.g., Howard & Moore 4th ed. (Dickinson & Christidis 2014), Fjeldså et al. (2020) and Albrecht et al. (2020). In the latter, examining the internal phylogeny of the Eurasian Wren, the generic placement is commented as such: "Although these taxonomic recommendations have not yet been implemented into a major taxonomic compendium, we assume that this will be inevitably the case in the near future and we therefore follow the suggestion by Barker and henceforth refer to the spp. *troglodytes*, *pacificus*, and *hiemalis* as members of the genus *Nannus*."

Expanding *Troglodytes* to encompass *Thryorchilus*, *Cistothorus* and *Ferminia* as well would result in greater taxonomic changes. However, as indicated by the current delimitation of *Troglodytes*, there are very obvious similarities between the *Nannus* clade and *Troglodytes* s.s. It would therefore not be a huge leap to also sort *Thryorchilus* and *Cistothorus* in that general box. Admittedly, though, *Ferminia* might deviate a bit more morphologically (long- and strong-billed; long-tailed), but there are members of *Troglodytes s.s.* that are somewhat similar in those respects (e.g., *T. beani*).

In terms of clade age, as PAC points out, within Certhioidea there are genera of similar age (*Certhia*) or older (*Sitta*, *Polioptila*). Within Troglodytidae, however, there are not, and an expanded *Troglodytes* would be the oldest genus. It would only be somewhat older than *Henicorhina*, though. Dealing with the *Nannus* clade by an expansion would have the advantage of preemptively addressing *Thryorchilus.*

Recommendation (Palearctic RAG)

Our conclusion is that action is needed, but we refrain from recommending any of the two options described above. Instead, we refer NACC and SACC to choose a path.

Recommendation to NACC (Rasmussen):

Thanks are due to the Palearctic RAG for this comprehensive and timely proposal, on which I am merely acting as messenger conveying it to NACC (and providing this recommendation). Consideration by SACC would need to be sought should a generic change that affects *Cistothorus* pass (the other genera, *Thryorchilus, Ferminia*, and the proposed *Nannus* not occurring in South America). I recommend what I view as the least disruptive and most informative option, which would be to recognize *Nannus* and continue to recognize the other genera. However, there seems sufficient reason to question the generic standing of *Thryorchilus* that this seems a good opportunity for reevaluation of this issue. I personally do not favor the solution of lumping all concerned taxa, as *Cistothorus* in particular seems such a well-defined genus, and its inclusion in *Troglodytes* would create a much more disparate and perhaps morphologically undiagnosable genus. Knowledge of the relationships of *Ferminia* seems to still be in flux; although it looks much like a long- and wedge-tailed *Troglodytes*, considerable uncertainty remains. In addition, the issue of clade age as compared to other wren genera summarized in the proposal suggests that the multigeneric treatment that includes the recognition of *Nannus* would be more appropriate in this family, whereas recognition of a broad *Troglodytes* would probably mean that several other genera now recognized in Troglodytidae should be reconsidered for lumping. The fact that clade age of an expanded *Troglodytes* is comparable to that of *Polioptila* and *Sitta* might suggest to some (but by no means all) that reevaluation of those broad genera is in order.

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Submitted by: Palearctic Regional Advisory Group of AviList (proposal written by Gustav Asplund, Martin Stervander and Erling Jirle; modified slightly for NACC by Pamela C. Rasmussen and Terry Chesser)

Date of Proposal: 6 March 2026

Treat West Indian Woodpecker *Melanerpes superciliaris* as two or more species

Effect on NACC:

If successful, this proposal would increase the number of species recognized for the NACC area by from one to three, and result in one or more territory/country-specific endemic species.

Background:

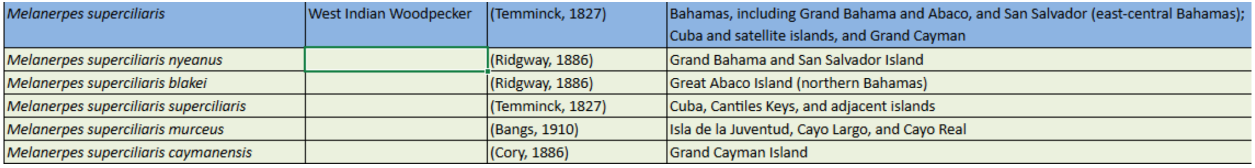
The *Melanerpes* woodpecker of Grand Cayman was described as *Centurus caymanensis* Cory, 1886 and was considered a distinct species by some until at least 1974 (Clements 1974). However, by the second edition of Clements (Clements 1978), it was lumped into West Indian Woodpecker *Melanerpes superciliaris* of Cuba, the Bahamas, and Cayman Islands (or Bahama Woodpecker, as Clements and others called it, or Great Red-bellied Woodpecker by Short 1982). In 1886, Cory could not have applied the BSC, and he described no fewer than 13 new taxa from the Cayman Islands as species in the same paper, so his description of *caymanensis* at the level of species carries little weight. For the genus *Centurus* (now part of *Melanerpes*), his 1 Jan 1886 list of the birds of the West Indies (Cory 1886a) listed only *Centurus superciliaris*, as none of the other taxa now considered subspecies were described until later that year. Lowe (1911) called *caymanensis* “[p]eculiar to and resident on Grand Cayman”, and Bangs (1916) considered *caymanensis* a “strongly characterized island species” endemic to Grand Cayman. Cory (1892, 1919) treated not only *caymanensis* as a distinct species but also granted species status to *nyeanus* Ridgway, 1886 of San Salvador (formerly Watling’s Island), Bahamas, and *blakei* Ridgway, 1886 (the latter including *bahamensis* Cory, 1892, in his 1919 paper) of Abaco and Grand Bahama, respectively. (The first two of these were described by Ridgway in the same volume, *nyeanus* on p. 336 and *blakei* on p. 337.) Thus, the only subspecies of *superciliaris* recognized by Cory (1919) were the nominate of Cuba and the somewhat smaller *murceus* Bangs, 1910 of the adjacent Isle of Pines (now Isla de la Juventud). Much more recently, two further subspecies were described from cays south of Cuba, *florentinoi* Garrido, 1966, and *sanfelipensis* Garrido, 1973, but these are not now accepted as valid, having been lumped with *murceus* by Short (1982), followed by, e.g., Kirkconnell et al. (2020).

Notably, despite the drastic lumping enacted throughout the Peters’ *Checklist* series, including in *Centurus*, Peters (1948) continued to treat *caymanensis* as a separate species, while he treated the Bahamian and Isle of Pines taxa as subspecies. This is despite the fact that Bond was already treating *caymanensis* as a subspecies in his first definitive book on birds of the West Indies (Bond 1936), although without providing any justification, as well as in his first and subsequent editions of his regional checklist (Bond 1940) and all editions of his field guide (Bond 1947 and following).

Selander and Giller (1963) expressed surprise that Peters (1948) would not have lumped *caymanensis* with *superciliaris*. They stated that *nyeanus* of San Salvador, *bahamensis* of Grand Bahama, and *blakei* of Abaco bridge the gap between *superciliaris* and *caymanensis,* and that they therefore “see no course but to regard the whole complex as a single species, although one might justifiably entertain doubts as to whether the most dissimilar forms, *superciliaris* and *caymanensis*, would interbreed and successfully exchange genes if they were brought into sympatry". With this statement, Selander and Giller (1963) appear to have supplied the most detailed published rationale for the lumping of *caymanensis*. Soon thereafter, Short (1974) referred to sound recordings from Grand Cayman as being of *superciliaris*. Thus, by the 6th edition of the AOU Checklist (AOU 1983), when the West Indies were first included, *caymanensis* was generally accepted as a subspecies of *superciliaris*, as it now is treated by all global checklists (e.g., Clements et al. 2024, Gill et al. 2025, AviList Core Team 2025).

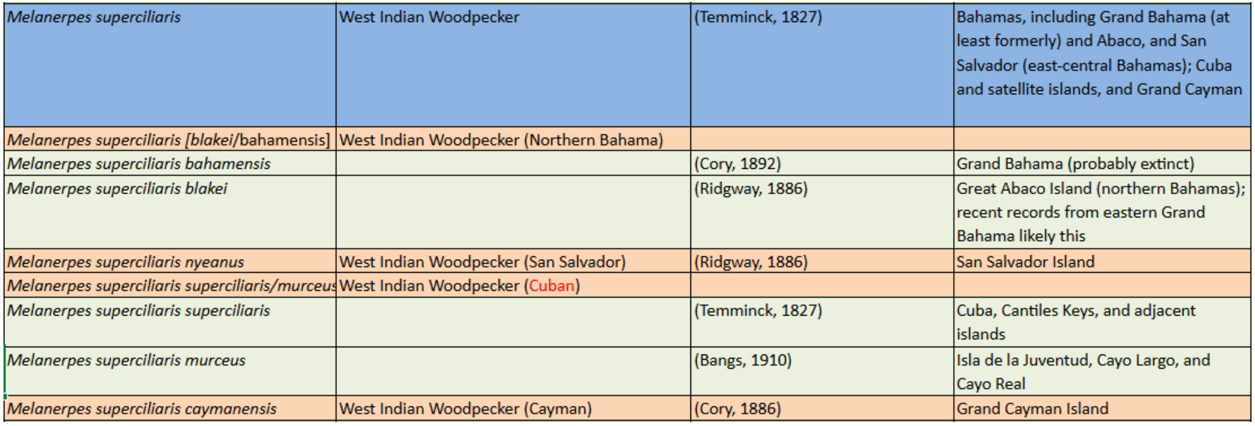
Below, for ease of reference, is the current version of Clements et al. (2025), followed by a draft (subject to change) of the proposed infraspecific changes in taxonomy for 2026. (Note: "West Indian Woodpecker (Cuban)" is a tentative group name only.)

Clements et al. (2025):



Melanerpes superciliaris	West Indian Woodpecker	(Temminck, 1827)	Bahamas, including Grand Bahama and Abaco, and San Salvador (east-central Bahamas); Cuba and satellite islands, and Grand Cayman
Melanerpes superciliaris nyeanus		(Ridgway, 1886)	Grand Bahama and San Salvador Island
Melanerpes superciliaris blakei		(Ridgway, 1886)	Great Abaco Island (northern Bahamas)
Melanerpes superciliaris superciliaris		(Temminck, 1827)	Cuba, Cantiles Keys, and adjacent islands
Melanerpes superciliaris murceus		(Bangs, 1910)	Isla de la Juventud, Cayo Largo, and Cayo Real
Melanerpes superciliaris caymanensis		(Cory, 1886)	Grand Cayman Island

Clements et al. (2026) (draft):

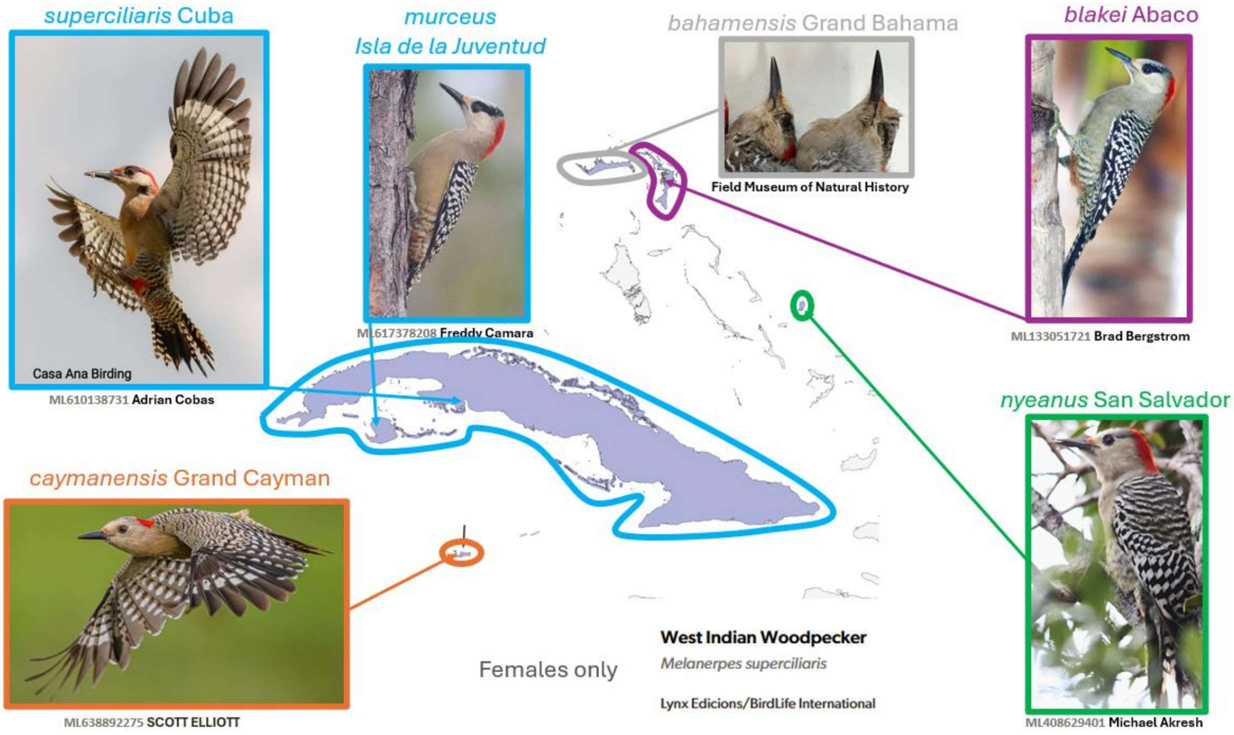


Melanerpes superciliaris	West Indian Woodpecker	(Temminck, 1827)	Bahamas, including Grand Bahama (at least formerly) and Abaco, and San Salvador (east-central Bahamas); Cuba and satellite islands, and Grand Cayman
*Melanerpes superciliaris [blakei/*bahamensis]	West Indian Woodpecker (Northern Bahama)		
Melanerpes superciliaris bahamensis		(Cory, 1892)	Grand Bahama (probably extinct)
Melanerpes superciliaris blakei		(Ridgway, 1886)	Great Abaco Island (northern Bahamas); recent records from eastern Grand Bahama likely this
Melanerpes superciliaris nyeanus	West Indian Woodpecker (San Salvador)	(Ridgway, 1886)	San Salvador Island
Melanerpes superciliaris superciliaris/murceus	West Indian Woodpecker (Cuban)		
Melanerpes superciliaris superciliaris		(Temminck, 1827)	Cuba, Cantiles Keys, and adjacent islands
Melanerpes superciliaris murceus		(Bangs, 1910)	Isla de la Juventud, Cayo Largo, and Cayo Real
Melanerpes superciliaris caymanensis	West Indian Woodpecker (Cayman)	(Cory, 1886)	Grand Cayman Island

Short (1982), when discussing subspecies of *superciliaris*, granted that "[m]ost distinct among the races is *caymanensis* of Grand Cayman". Indeed, most measurements as given by Winkler et al. (1995) overlap little if at all sex-for-sex between *superciliaris* and *caymanensis*, especially for bill, but measurements are not provided therein for the other taxa. In fact, all the other taxa are smaller, often much smaller, than Cuban nominate *superciliaris* (Winkler et al. 1995, Askins et al. 2020).

The most obvious difference between *caymanensis* and other subspecies of *superciliaris* is the lack of black over the eye in the former. This is glaringly obvious, and gives them a very different appearance reminiscent of a Red-bellied Woodpecker. However, Short (1982) stated that the black area is "usually" absent in *caymanensis*, implying that it sometimes occurs, and there is described variation in this among other subspecies (based on museum specimens), with *nyeanus* of San Salvador (formerly Watling's Island) said to often have little black over the eye. Although the possibly extinct *bahamensis* of Grand Bahama is usually synonymized with San Salvador *nyeanus* (e.g. Clements et al. 2025, Gill et al. 2025), following Short (1982), despite the major and interrupted range gap (by *blakei* from the Abacos) between them, *bahamensis* had more black over the eye than does *nyeanus* (Hayes 2006; PCR's examination from three FMNH *bahamensis* specimens). Short's (1982) rationale for the counterintuitive lumping of *bahamensis* with *nyeanus* was "these are a trifle longer billed and a bit paler below, averaging less black on the head of males, but otherwise seem identical with Grand Bahama specimens, and the latter do not merit separate status nomenclaturally (as "*bahamensis*"). Henceforth in this proposal we will refer to San Salvador birds as *nyeanus*, and Grand Bahama birds as *bahamensis*. However, consistent differences between *bahamensis* and *blakei* seem unclear, and validity of the former requires substantiation, but it clearly should not have been synonymized with *nyeanus*. The other differences (besides lack of black above eye) for *caymanensis* that have been enumerated by various authors seem more minor and variable, and easily accommodated as a subspecies, and so on the face of it, it seems understandable that they have been universally lumped since the late 1970s.

Below is a selection of typical females (males differ in having a more extensive red crown) for each extant taxon mapped onto a range map from *Birds of the World* (originally from Lynx Edicions/BirdLife International):



New information:

Hayes (2006) commented on the distinctiveness of some taxa currently placed within *Melanerpes superciliaris sensu lato* (*s.l.)*, and Kirwan et al. (2019) considered *caymanensis* a "[d]istinctive woodpecker", placing it in its own group as "Cayman Woodpecker *Melanerpes* [*superciliaris*] *caymanensis*", with a listing of plumage differences. However, they stated with respect to voice "[n]o known differences from West Indian Woodpecker". The HBW volumes and illustrated checklist (del Hoyo and Collar 2014), and thus the work by Kirwan et al. (2019) and illustrations accompanying Askins et al. (2020), which all used the same excellent illustrations by Hilary Burn, however, did not include illustrations of *nyeanus*, but rather of the less distinctive-appearing *blakei*.

Vocalizations:

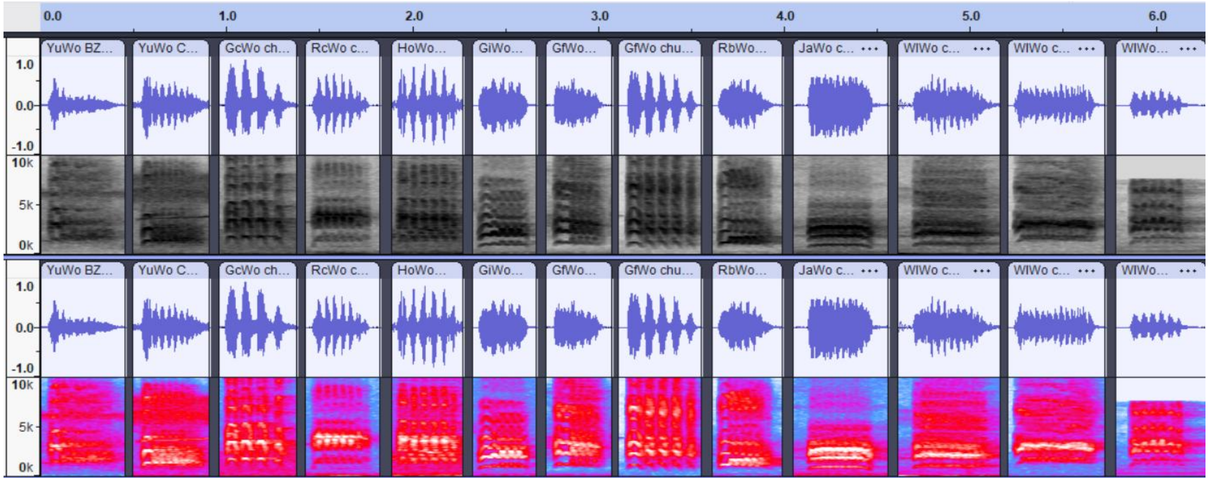
Very few recordings have been available online of *caymanensis*, and even fewer of *blakei* and *nyeanus* (and none of *bahamensis*), but there are many of nominate *superciliaris*. However, on a short May 2014 trip to Grand Cayman, PCR sound-recorded multiple *caymanensis* (recordings now on ML).

What these recordings show is that, despite their overall similarity, nominate *superciliaris* has distinctly and notably lower-pitched *kwirr* and chatter calls than does *caymanensis*. There is some variability in both taxa, likely representing lower-pitched calls from larger males in both; in some cases in which two birds are calling, one is distinctly lower-pitched, but whether this is a sexual difference of course needs corroboration. In any case, there does not seem to be overlap between the higher-pitched *superciliaris* and the lowest-pitched *caymanensis*. This difference is entirely expected, given the major size difference between the nominate and *caymanensis*. Similarly, though based on much smaller sample sizes, the calls of *blakei* and *nyeanus* are also notably higher-pitched than those of the nominate. Again, this seems clearly related to their smaller body sizes than for the nominate. See sonagrams below.

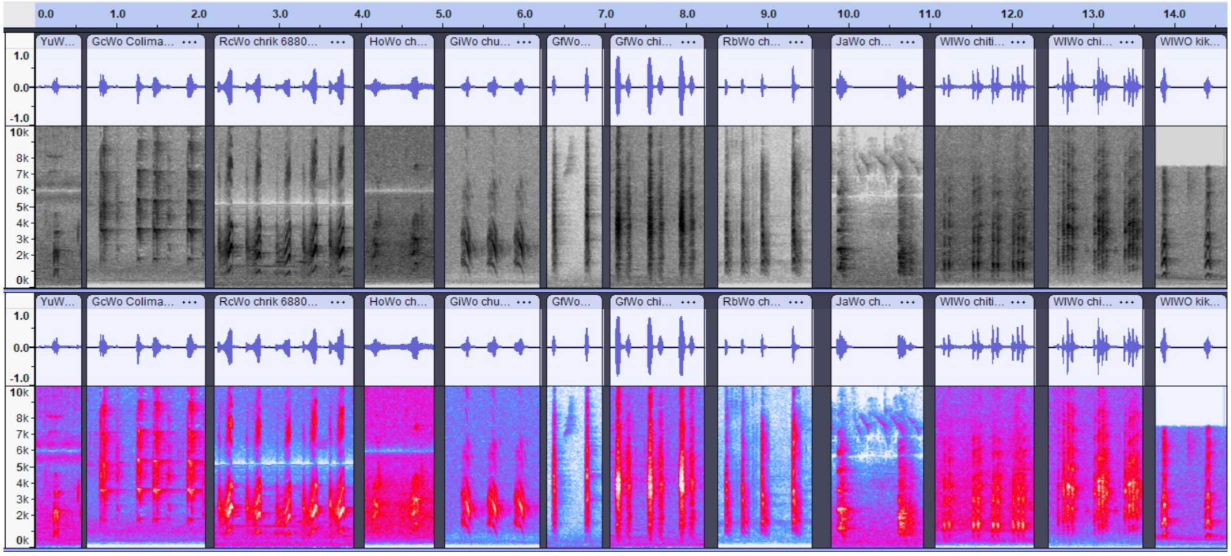
Centurus clade vocal comparisons.---In the *Centurus* group of *Melanerpes* (not including the similar-looking but aberrant Hispaniolan Woodpecker, *M. striatus*; see Selander and Giller 1963), calls are for the most part highly conserved. To put putative differences among taxa of the *M. superciliaris* complex in perspective, compilations of each call type in this subgenus are presented here. All members of the *Centurus* clade (including *Melanerpes pygmaeus, M. chrysogenys, M. rubricapillus, M. hoffmannii, M. uropygialis, M. aurifrons, M. carolinus, M. radiolatus*, and *M. superciliaris*) more or less commonly give a short, distinctive call type known as the "*kwirr*" or "*churr*" call. This is similar in most species, least of all in Golden-cheeked Woodpecker *M. chrysogenys*, which gives just a few, slow notes, whereas Yucatan Woodpecker *M. pygmaeus*, Red-bellied Woodpecker *M. carolinus*, Jamaican Woodpecker *M. radiolatus*, and West Indian Woodpecker give the fastest, most run-together *kwirr* calls (somewhat slower in *caymanensis*; see below). There are also distinct overall frequency differences between taxa, as mentioned above, that are best visualized in color. All taxa appear to commonly give their version of the *kwirr* call, although none were available on Macaulay Library (ML) or xeno-canto (xc) for San Salvador *nyeanus*.

There is considerably more interspecific variation in the isolated chattery calls (here called *kit* or *kitur* calls) given by members of the *Centurus* clade. Some taxa give such calls commonly, and others rarely if at all (although scarcity or lack of such recordings on public sites cannot be equated with lack of such vocalizations, but they are suggestive). Particularly distinctive chattery calls are given by Golden-cheeked, possibly by Yucatan (evidently rarely), Gila (commonly), Jamaican (commonly), while these (common) calls of Red-bellied and Golden-fronted are similar to each other, and less so in southern ("Velasquez's") populations. These calls of Hoffmann's and Red-crowned are also most similar to each other. Those of West Indian

Woodpecker differ strikingly among taxa, with San Salvador *nyeanus* being much higher-pitched than Cuban nominate *superciliaris*, and *caymanensis* giving slower, more nasal calls (although sample size of all these taxa is inadequate).



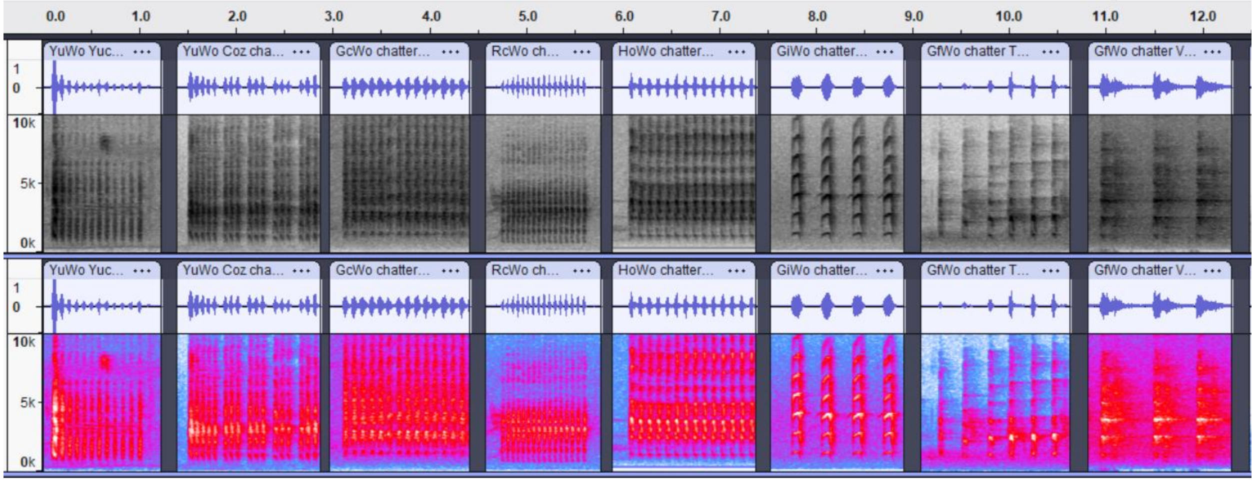
Above, *kwirr* calls of *Centurus* clade of *Melanerpes*, left to right (both rows, same sonagrams in color on bottom row): Yucatan Woodpecker *M. pygmaeus* (mainland; ML428551391, O'Brien), *M. pygmaeus* (Cozumel; ML288371, Boesman); Golden-cheeked Woodpecker (ML252532131, Aguilar); Red-crowned Woodpecker *M. rubricapillus* (ML65113, Schwartz); Hoffmann's Woodpecker *M. hoffmannii* (ML566816511, Mastromatteo); Gila Woodpecker *M. uropygialis* (ML44595, Tucker); Golden-fronted Woodpecker *M. aurifrons* (Texas; ML44595, Tucker), Golden-fronted Woodpecker ("Velasquez's" group; ML536111, Medler); Red-bellied Woodpecker *M. carolinus* (ML323504401, Herschberger); Jamaican Woodpecker (ML164795, Sutton); West Indian Woodpecker (nominate; ML236105, Macaulay), West Indian Woodpecker (*blakei;* ML33097000, Spencer), and West Indian Woodpecker (*caymanensis*; ML33097000, Spencer).



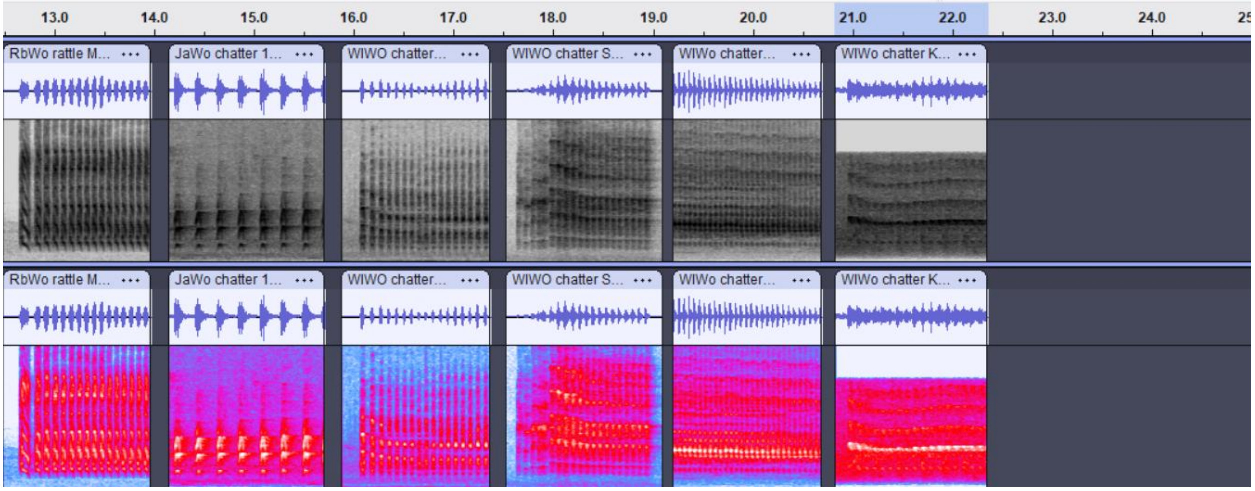
Above, *kit or kitur* (etc.) calls of *Centurus* clade of *Melanerpes*, left to right (both rows, same sonagrams in color on bottom row): Yucatan Woodpecker (Cozumel; ML609053809, Rasmussen); Golden-cheeked Woodpecker (ML402184531, Fuentes); Red-crowned Woodpecker (ML6880, Schwartz); Hoffmann's Woodpecker (ML130884231, Juarez); Gila Woodpecker (ML44679, Tucker); Golden-fronted Woodpecker (Texas; ML536110, Barry); Golden-fronted Woodpecker ("Velasquez's"; ML20912, Thurber); Red-bellied

Woodpecker (ML410050981, Ellerbusch); Jamaican Woodpecker (ML203962581, Simonite); West Indian Woodpecker (nominate; ML630985253, Melo); West Indian Woodpecker (*nyeanus*; ML423680751 Akresh); and West Indian Woodpecker (*caymanensis*; ML214188521, Thierren).

In addition, each species in the *Centurus* clade gives some version of a long chattery rattle, although in the case of some, e.g., Gila, Golden-fronted, and Jamaican woodpeckers, it takes the form of long series of individual, well-spaced, near-identical notes rather than a rattle, but seems likely to be homologous as no recordings of rattles were found. All the others, including all extant taxa of West Indian Woodpecker, give a rapid rattle, and in the latter these are similar except for being lower-pitched in Cuban nominates.



Above, rattle calls of *Centurus* clade of *Melanerpes*, left to right (both rows, same sonagrams in color on bottom row; if longer than 1.5 s, each rattle was trimmed to that length): Yucatan Woodpecker (mainland; ML80822801, McGowan), Yucatan Woodpecker (Cozumel; ML84504421, McGowan); Golden-cheeked Woodpecker (ML643629041, Hughes); Red-crowned Woodpecker (ML65112, Schwartz); Hoffmann's Woodpecker (ML33874501, Holmes); Gila Woodpecker (ML109063, Keller); Golden-fronted Woodpecker (Texas; ML110029991, Marvin); Golden-fronted Woodpecker ("Velasquez's"; ML632995048, O'Brien); rattle calls continued below.



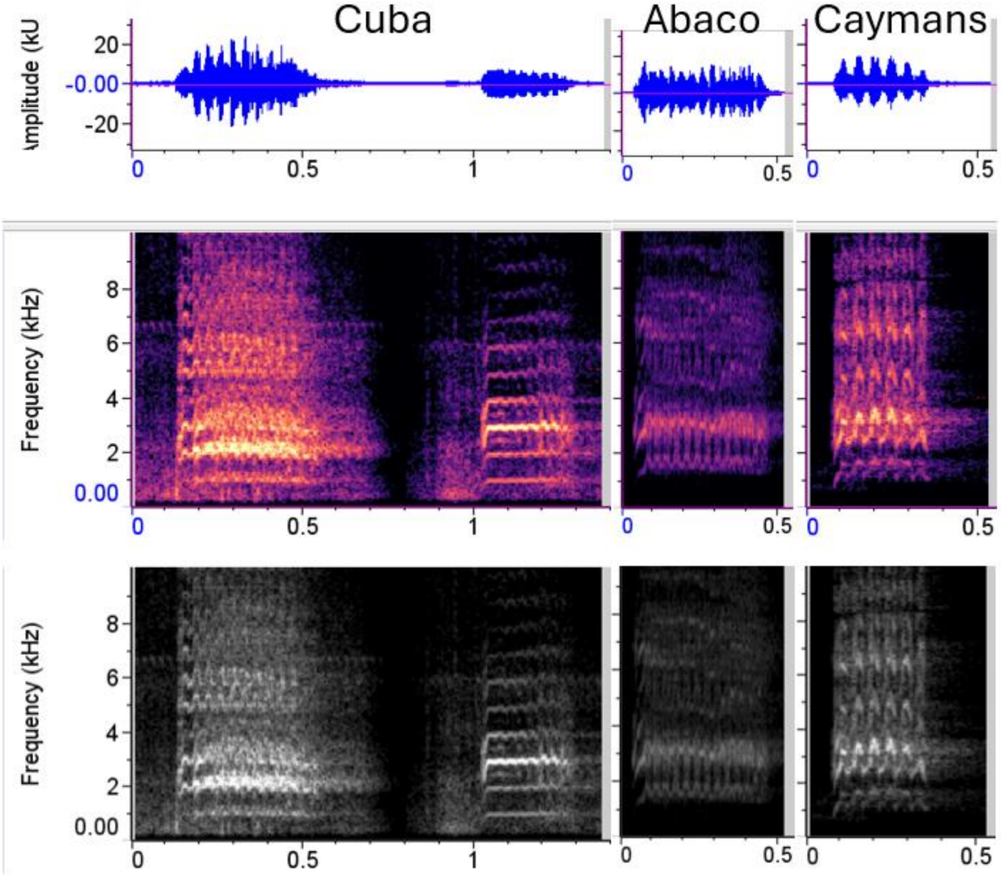
Above, rattle calls of *Centurus* clade of *Melanerpes*, left to right (continued; both rows, same sonagrams in color on bottom row; if longer than 1.5 s, each rattle was trimmed to that length): Red-belled Woodpecker (ML549292, Herschberger); Jamaican Woodpecker (ML164611, Budney); West Indian

Woodpecker (Cuba; ML133243, Anderson); West Indian Woodpecker (*nyeanus*; ML423680761, Akresh); West Indian Woodpecker (*blakei*, ML33097000, Spencer); West Indian Woodpecker (*caymanensis*, ML641118307, Rasmussen).

Drumrolls of all *Centurus* species appear to be similar, in being short and of uniform rate and amplitude throughout, and thus are not discussed further here. Occasional drumrolls of at least some taxa start slowly and accelerate, but samples are too small to comment further.

Vocal comparisons within *Melanerpes superciliaris*: *kwirr* calls.—Measurements of recordings of the *kwirr* call (note that multiple strophes of the same individual were measured due to low sample size of *caymanensis,* and thus variation is both intra- and inter-individual) show that *caymanensis* differs from nominate *superciliaris* not only in overall frequency ($\bar{x}_{\text{lowest frequency}}$ and $\bar{x}_{\text{highest frequency}}$ 1991.7 and 3203, respectively, *n*=34, SD=196.73 and 385.59 in *caymanensis* vs. $\bar{x}_{\text{lowest frequency}}$ and $\bar{x}_{\text{highest frequency}}$ =1656 and 2420, n=23, SD=146.22 and 256.89 in *superciliaris*), but in having fewer elements per strophe ($\bar{x}$=6.53, *n*=58, SD=0.82 in *caymanensis* vs. $\bar{x}$=9.60, *n* = 38, SD=1.84 in *superciliaris*), these being delivered at a slower pace in *caymanensis* ($\bar{x}$=0.05 notes/sec, *n*=46, SD= 0.04 in *caymanensis* vs. $\bar{x}$=0.03 notes/sec, n=37, SD= 0.06 in *superciliaris*). Strophe length is highly variable in *superciliaris*, and much less so in the *caymanensis* sample, although the average for the two taxa is similar ($\bar{x}$=0.305, *n*=60, SD=0.03 in *caymanensis* vs. $\bar{x}$=0.31, *n*=38, SD=0.06 in *superciliaris*). The whirr strophes of nominate *superciliaris* seem to be of two main types, a longer, lower-pitched, more frequency-modulated overall (slightly rising then falling) version and a shorter, higher-pitched version lacking overall frequency modulation. These presumably correspond to male and female, respectively, but confirmation is needed; in any case, this accounts for much of the variation in strophe length in *superciliaris*. In addition, the fundamental frequency range of *caymanensis* is broader-band than that of *superciliaris* ($\bar{x}$=1237 kHz, n=32, SD=288.11 in *caymanensis* vs. $\bar{x}$=759 kHz, *n*=23, SD=168.44 in *superciliaris*). Finally, good recordings of *caymanensis* show up to 4 (sometimes 5) rather widely spaced harmonics, and rarely show a hint of harmonics below the fundamental frequency, whereas *superciliaris* typically shows fairly strong harmonics below the fundamental frequency, with several closely spaced, overlapping harmonics. The strong lower harmonics in *superciliaris* vs. none or nearly none in *caymanensis* surely contribute towards the distinctly lower-sounding *kwirr* calls in *superciliaris*. The two *kwirr* recordings available for *blakei* (xc48495 and ML33097000) do not allow robust comparisons but the latter has nine iterations, and all are similar. In summary, *blakei kwirr* calls are slightly longer ($\bar{x}$=0.39, *n*=10, SD=0.03), and with slightly more notes ($\bar{x}$=11.6, *n*=10, SD=0.70) than for *superciliaris* but delivered at about the same rate ($\bar{x}$=0.03 notes/s, *n*=10, SD=0.003), much higher-pitched ($\bar{x}_{\text{lowest frequency}}$ =2319.83, *n*=10, SD=90.70, $\bar{x}_{\text{highest frequency}}$ =3406.53, *n*=10, SD=116.47), and with slightly broader bandwidth ($\bar{x}$=0.1086.7, *n*=10, SD=191.94). Thus, *kwirr* calls of *blakei* are more different from those of *caymanensis* than they are from those of *superciliaris*, except in frequency. (No samples of *kwirr* calls were available for *nyeanus*.)

Vocal comparisons within *Melanerpes superciliaris*: isolated chatter or *kit* calls.—Of the many recordings of Cuban nominate on ML and xc, including many of the rattle call, only a single recording (ML630985253, Melo) is of isolated, sporadic *kit*-type calls given in couplets and a triplet. One of the two *nyeanus* recordings on ML is of a similar call type as the above Cuban recording, but much higher-pitched, and mostly in bursts of 4 (range 3-5) notes. In both these taxa, the *kit*-notes are very short and rapidly delivered, almost run-together. In contrast, in the small sample of *caymanensis* recordings there are three that include isolated *kit*-type calls (each recording differing in detail). The samples are too small for meaningful statistics, but clearly this call type is not a common one for nominate *superciliaris*, and it seems that the notes are more rapidly delivered in the other taxa than in *caymanensis*.

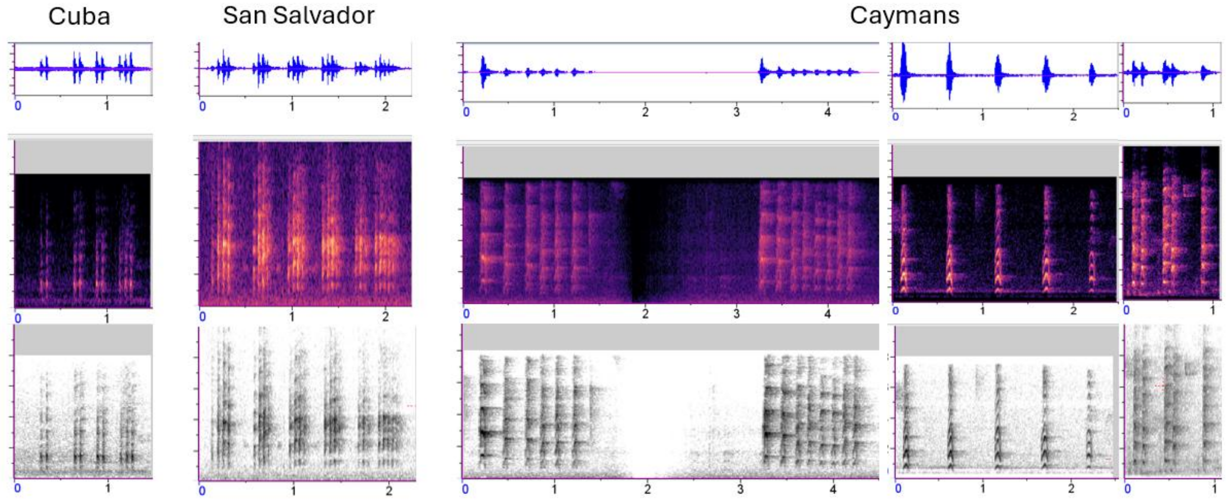


Above, typical *kwirr* calls of *Melanerpes superciliaris s.l.* taxa (left to right; same calls in color above and grayscale below) for nominate *superciliaris* (ML236105, Macaulay, presumed male then presumed female); *blakei* (ML3397000, Spencer); and *caymanensis* (ML641114133, Rasmussen). Note the lower fundamental frequencies of the male-type *superciliaris* compared to the others; the fewer elements and broader-band frequency range of *caymanensis*; and the greater number of harmonics in *superciliaris* than in *caymanensis* (the latter not clear in *blakei*).

That said, the rattle calls are given by *superciliaris* in bursts of varying length, usually many but sometimes as few as five in a uniform series that intersperses longer series.

Morphology:

Unfortunately, *bahamensis* of Grand Bahama is very rare or, perhaps more likely, extinct, although there are a few fairly recent eBird photo records that are thought to pertain to immigrants from nearby Abaco. Bond (1936) listed *bahamensis* as uncommon in coastal scrub on Grand Bahama, but Emlen did not find it in his extensive ecological work on Grand Bahama in 1968–1969, which sampled the range of natural habitats on the island. A period of about 30 years with no sightings whatsoever on Grand Bahama of West Indian Woodpecker, despite numerous visits by observers, led to the conclusion that *bahamensis* is probably extinct (pers. comm., Bruce Hallett). However, from 2003-2019, there were several reports, including on eBird, of West Indian Woodpecker from the easternmost part of Grand Bahama, McLean's Town, which is less than 20 miles from Crown Haven, Little Abaco, and these birds were thought to be invaders from the Abacos. Following Hurricane Dorian of 2019, which devastated pine woods on Grand Bahama and the northern half of the Abacos, there have not been further records of West Indian Woodpecker from Grand Bahama (pers. comm., Bruce Hallett).



Above, *kit* calls (all those available online, as discussed above) of *Melanerpes superciliaris s.l.* taxa (left to right; same calls in color above and grayscale below) for nominate *superciliaris* (ML630985253, Melo,; *nyeanus* (ML423680751, Akresh), and three of *caymanensis* (ML214188521, Thierren; ML651873441, Bevier; and ML640974351, Rasmussen).

Black mark over eye.—Photos confirm the variability of black over the eye in *nyeanus*, and its limited extent. Here, for example, is a male with a moderate amount of black (some have more): https://ebird.org/checklist/S65732977, and a male with very little: https://ebird.org/checklist/S44110952. None of the photos of *nyeanus* from San Salvador seem to show birds that completely lack black feathering over the eye, but it is clearly variable in that taxon. Short (1982) stated that the "broad black area over eyes in most races, [is] reduced in *nyeanus* and usually absent in *caymanensis*" (but see following section regarding the lack of evidence for black over eyes in *caymanensis*).

At the time of writing there were 403 ML images (some of them duplicates of the same individual) of *caymanensis* from Grand Cayman. Many of these are excellent, including flight shots. As far as PCR could determine, none show any hint of a black area over the eye, but the bare skin patch around the eye is rather broad and dark gray or blackish, making the isolated eye look especially large. Of 80 FMNH specimens of *caymanensis* (including the type) examined by PCR in September 2025, none showed any black mark over the eye. The 3 *bahamensis* (including the type) and 4 *blakei* in the main FMNH collection have a prominent black mark over the eye. Thus, *caymanensis* is obviously different from all other taxa in this respect, though as noted above, the black mark can be quite small in *nyeanus* (which is not represented in the FMNH).

Upper, three FMNH specimens of *bahamensis* in dorsal view, showing dark eye patch; lower, three FMNH specimens of *bahamensis* and four of *blakei* in lateral view, showing dark eye patch. Preparation style of the *bahamensis* specimens makes the eyepatch difficult to appreciate from the side.

Rear crown in females.—Of 28 adult female *caymanensis* in FMNH (based on lack of red on crown), most showed at least a few dark spots on the crown, which are the feather bases showing through. In contrast, most females in photos do not show any dark spots, with the crown appearing smoothly pale gray, so this difference is likely an artifact of preparation and preservation, but here (e.g., ML149919441) is one that does show this feature. The two female *bahamensis* and two female *blakei* in FMNH all show an incomplete but gray-speckled black hindcrown band, whereas the 6 female *superciliaris* in FMNH have the black hindcrown band very pronounced and broad, despite being variably gray-speckled in some.

About half of the FMNH specimens of *caymanensis*, showing grayish crown of most females and buffy, narrowly barred mantles of both sexes.

Upper, FMNH specimens of *superciliaris* showing broad black crown bands of females and mostly strongly black-and-white mantles of both sexes. (A partially leucistic individual is in the lower left.) Lower, three *bahamensis* (left) and four *blakei*, showing partly black crown band of females and strikingly black-and-white, rather broad barring above.

Narial tufts.—The nasal tufts of *caymanensis* are only lightly tinted reddish or hardly different from the surrounding buffy-whitish feathers, while these are usually conspicuous and bright red in *superciliaris* and *nyeanus*, variable in *bahamensis* (two of four FMNH specimens have these large and bright red, the other two have minimal red) and paler or barely evident in Abaco *blakei*.

Bill size.—The bills of *caymanensis* and the Bahamian taxa are shorter, usually distinctly so, compared to the nominate, and that of *caymanensis* was termed "disproportionately shorter" by Short (1982), although this does not seem obvious especially when compared to photos of *nyeanus*.

Mantle.—The mantle of *caymanensis* typically has a buffier background color than all the other taxa, and the black bars are typically narrower than the buffy ones, in more extreme cases appearing almost flicker-like above (see dorsal photos above). In particular, the black mantle bars of the four FMNH *blakei* are especially broad compared to those of *caymanensis*. There is some variability, however, and while not every specimen is clearly different from the others in both of these characters, in combination, the buffy and narrowly banded upperparts of *caymanensis* contribute to the impression of a drabber, less conspicuously marked bird than the others.

Wing patch.—The white wing patch in the primaries of nominate *superciliaris* is bold and obvious (e.g., ML77299651, ML617824856, ML450659191), while in the other taxa it is much less evident due to the black bands running through it and black outer webs in both sexes, and thus is not really a patch at all, just an area of somewhat broader white bands (e.g. ML638892276, ML638892275, ML636505007). A common display of the nominate in Cuba is wing-flashing (e.g. ML634074796, ML632562420; pers. obs. JLD and L. M. Díaz), and this has evidently not been described for *caymanensis*, nor would it likely be very effective as a signal, given the relative drabness of the underwing pattern (e.g., ML638853837, ML636505008; see also photo in Bradley and Rey-Millet 2013: 172).

Underwing linings.—Photographs of the underwings of flying *caymanensis* show it to have buffy underwings, but specimen preparation style precludes checking this character in skins. Photographs of nominate *superciliaris* show the underwing linings to be notably whiter, creating a bolder pattern. This taxon (nominate *superciliaris* frequently displays the wing pattern, holding them open for a short time (pers. obs. JLD).

Underparts.—Three features of the underparts of both sexes typically distinguish *caymanensis*, as well as *bahamensis* and *blakei*, from nominate *superciliaris*. First is the drabber and more uniform overall underparts color of *caymanensis*, usually lacking any hint of yellowish surrounding the belly patch; nominate *superciliaris* often has a strong wash of yellowish, though it is quite variable in this respect. Second, the reddish belly patch is notably paler in *caymanensis* than in nominate *superciliaris* of both sexes; this is evident from the series at FMNH but is usually difficult to observe in photographs of live birds. And third, the barring on the flanks of *caymanensis* is extensive but weak compared to the notably stronger, black and whitish flanks barring in nominate *superciliaris*. Both *bahamensis* (n=4) and *blakei* (n=4) are similar to *caymanensis* rather than nominate *superciliaris* in the first two characters, whereas these specimens of *blakei* have intermediate-strength flank barring.

Tail pattern.—Kirwan et al. (2019) described *caymanensis* as having a “more evenly barred tail with white reaching outer webs of central pair of feathers”. However, all taxa are highly variable in the amount of white in the tail, according to ML photos and in FMNH specimens. San Salvador *nyeanus* seems to show considerably more black and less barring in the tail (e.g., ML49538791, ML545161791) than *caymanensis* especially, but this should be validated with specimens.

Biometrics.—Olson et al. (1990) considered *nyeanus*, with their male specimen weighing just 77.5 g, well within the size range of “diminutive” *caymanensis* (males 68–81 g, females 63–78 g; Olson et al. 1981), as opposed to nominate *superciliaris*, for which they gave weights of 111 g (male), 83 g (female), and 106 g (female?) (Olson 1985).

Osteology.—Olson et al. (1990) reported that (based on a single specimen) *nyeanus* has the posterior margin of the palatines truncate instead of slender and tapered as in series of nominate *superciliaris* and *caymanensis*.

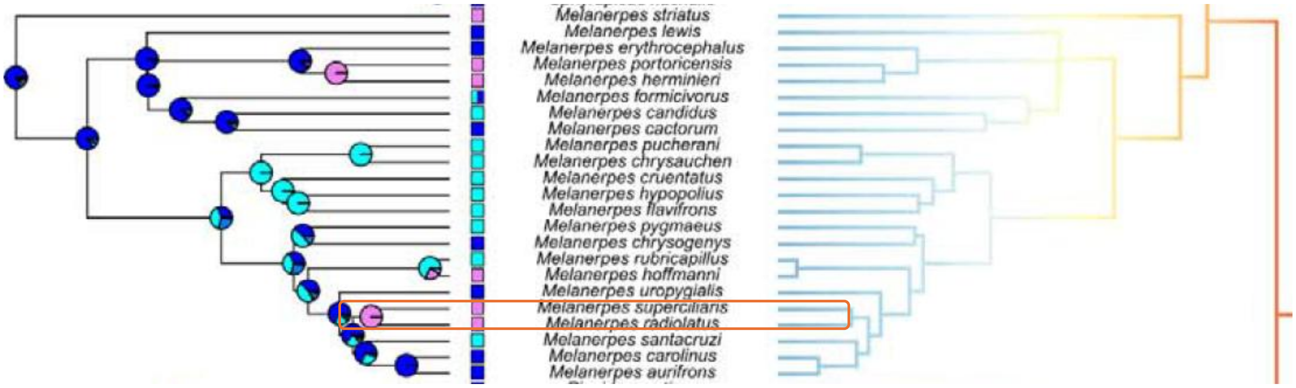
About half of the FMNH specimens of *caymanensis* showing relatively drab underparts, with relatively weak flank barring.

Upper, FMNH specimens of *superciliaris* showing large bright red belly patch with yellowish border and strong flank barring (second bird from left appears to be immature). Lower, three *bahamensis* (left) and four *blakei*, showing relatively drab underparts but strong flank barring.

Genetics:

García-Trejo et al. (2009) included a single sequence of *Melanerpes superciliaris caymanensis* as the sole representative of the species (or indeed any West Indian *Melanerpes*) in their phylogeny. In this analysis, *caymanensis* appeared as sister to the clade comprised of Red-bellied and Golden-fronted woodpeckers. The same sample was used by Dufort (2016), with a similar result for this clade.

The results of Shakya et al. (2017), however, suggest that *Melanerpes superciliaris blakei* (from Abaco; https://collections-zoology.fieldmuseum.org/catalogue/1706448) and *M. radiolatus* of Jamaica are fairly closely related, despite their obvious differences in plumage, and that they are less closely related to the Red-bellied Woodpecker clade.



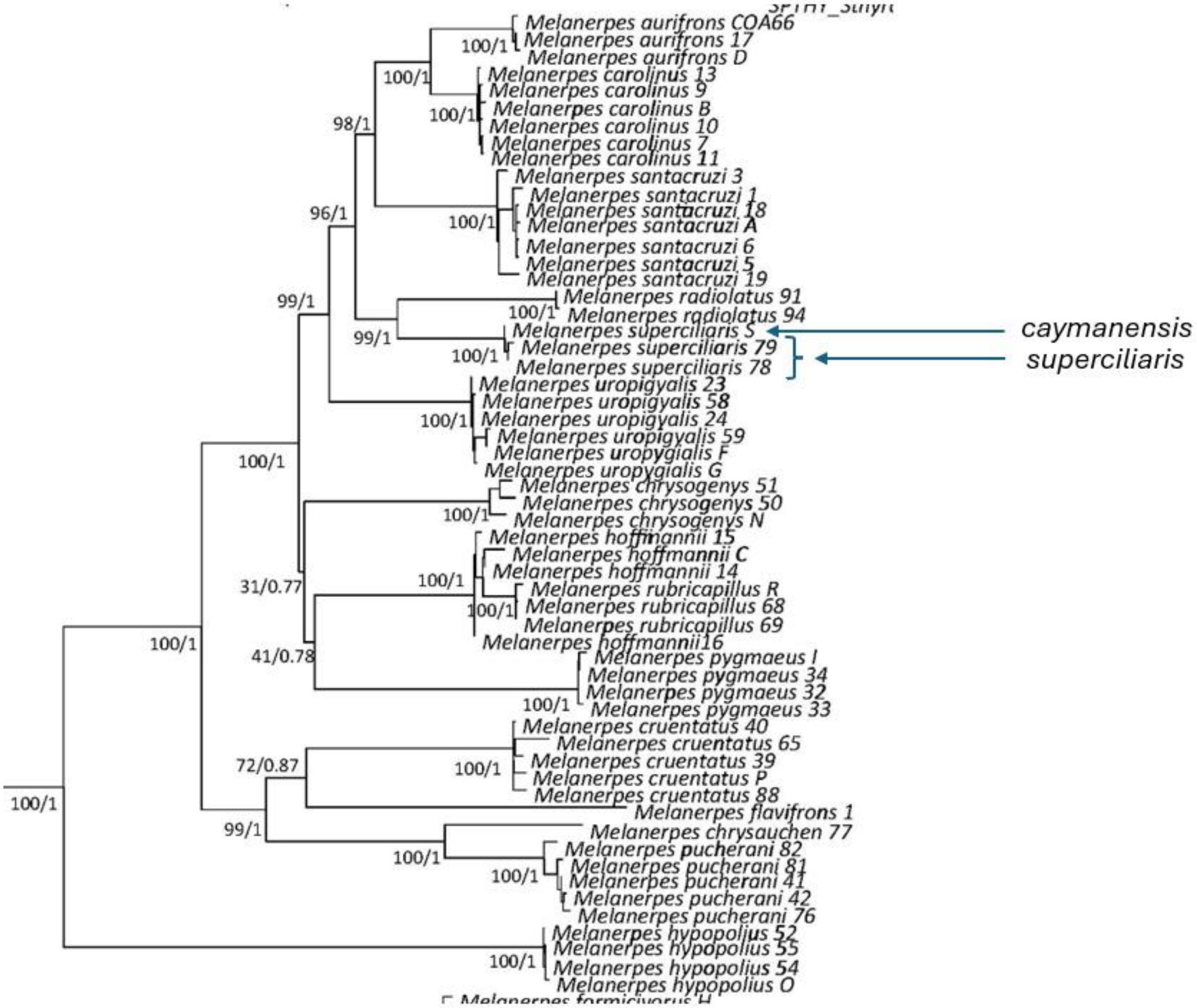
Above, part of Fig. 2 of Shakya et al. (2017).

Navarro-Sigüenza et al. (2017) used mtDNA and nDNA to produce a phylogeny of *Melanerpes*, and in it they included a sample of *caymanensis* (labeled *S* below) and two of the nominate from Cuba (labeled *78, 79*). They also recovered the *superciliaris-radiolatus* sister relationship, as well as finding minimal divergence between *caymanensis* and nominate *superciliaris*, much less than between conventionally recognized species in this group.

Thus far, the limited molecular results do not support a particularly close relationship between the *superciliaris-radiolatus* clade and the *carolinus-aurifrons* clade, as had been postulated by, e.g., Cruz (1974), nor do they suggest deep divergence among the taxa currently united in *Melanerpes superciliaris*.

Ecology:

The Cuban nominate is notably common, conspicuous, noisy, and widespread in all types of wooded and semi-open habitat, especially open plains with palms (Askins et al. 2020), in fact it is one of the most conspicuous Cuban bird species. Habitats of Abaco *blakei* are similar (Hallett 2006), although it is not very common, whereas *caymanensis*, though common, is more of a woodland species, and does not inhabit more open habitats even where scattered trees are present (Johnston 1975, Cruz and Johnston 1984).



Above, part of Fig. 1 of Navarro-Siguenza et al. (2017).

Most specialized of all is *nyeanus* of San Salvador, which seems to be generally inconspicuous and is evidently largely if not entirely restricted to dense coppice (Hallett 2006, Miller et al. 2018), a diverse type of scrub forest, and nests mostly in sabal palm but not in telephone poles, even when these are available. The highly isolated San Salvador *nyeanus* has been the subject of considerable conservation concern, especially given the impacts of hurricanes (Bracey 2005, Akresh et al. 2020), along with development, disturbance, and its naturally tiny range.

Integrative Summary:

Compared with other *Melanerpes* (*Centurus*) species, the only other member of this clade to exhibit similar or greater intraspecific variation in plumage is Golden-fronted Woodpecker *M. aurifrons* as presently constituted (a complex which also surely requires further attention to species limits). The constituent taxa of this complex are all relatively similar in body size, and some are known to hybridize, as do some others not considered conspecific, such as Red-bellied and Golden-fronted woodpeckers (see Bakai et al. 2025b).

Likewise, no other woodpecker species in the West Indies is remotely as variable either in plumage or size as is *Melanerpes superciliaris s.l.* Silva Núñez (2019) emphasized this in a study of bird size in relation to island size: "The only large polytypic species, *Melanerpes superciliaris*, exhibited the most profound intraspecific variation in body size. Males of the largest subspecies averaged 16.3% larger than those of the smallest subspecies (for the larger data set), which far exceeded size differentiation in subspecies of *M. pygmaeus* (9.1%), *M. santacruzi* (8.3%), *M. carolinus* (5.5%), *M. rubricapillus* (4.9%), *M. uropygialis* (2.9%), and *M. chrysogenys* (1.4%)." None of the species pairs known to hybridize listed in Bakai et al (2025b) exhibit such disparity in size (except Downy and Hairy woodpeckers, which as mentioned above hybridize only very rarely). That said, of course there are some highly polytypic species of woodpeckers in which size varies strongly but clinally, notably the Hairy Woodpecker, which also has two Bahamian races (*piger* and *maynardi*) that average smaller than those of the adjacent mainland (Jackson et al. 2025).

In our view, the differences between the Bahamian, Cayman, and Cuban taxa of *Melanerpes superciliaris s.l.* match or exceed those between a large and increasing number of Caribbean taxa split in the last couple of decades by NACC: *Corvus minutus* and *C. palmarum*; *Sitta pusilla* and *S. insularis*; *Troglodytes aedon/musculus*; *T. martinica, T. mesoleuca, T. musicus*, and *T. grenadensis; Ramphocinclus brachyurus* and *R. sanctaeluciae; Euphonia musica, E. sclateri,* and *E. flavifrons; Loxia leucoptera* and *L. megaplaga; Icterus northropi, I. melanopsis, I. dominicensis, I. portoricensis,* and *I. laudabilis; Agelaius phoeniceus* and *A. assimilis; Setophaga adelaidae, S. subita*, and *S. delicata; Spindalis zena, S. dominicensis, S. nigricephala*, and *S. portoricensis; Melopyrrha portoricensis* and *P. grandis*; and *Melopyrrha nigra* and *M. taylori* (and these are just the oscine passerines that have been split!).

It seems that the strongest justification for the lumping of all these woodpecker taxa into *Melanerpes superciliaris* was that of Selander and Giller (1963). The putative bridging of characters from *superciliaris→blakei→bahamensis→nyeanus→caymanensis* might make sense if these were distributed in a more or less linear manner that could be accounted for by gene flow. However, since it seems a virtual certainty that the evolution of the Bahamian taxa has occurred independently since their colonization of those islands, there is only the remotest possibility of any, much less significant, gene interchange with *caymanensis*, or indeed between northern Bahamian taxa and *nyeanus* on remote San Salvador. Thus the evolution of some similarities like smaller size (and as a consequence higher-pitched voices) by convergent adaptation to small-island conditions is not surprising, especially in a group with such a conservative set of plumage features as the *Centurus* clade of *Melanerpes*. In addition, Selander and Giller (1963) only considered the presence and size of the black mark over the eye as indicating bridging between taxa, disregarding the other differences between *nyeanus* and *caymanensis* enumerated above. In fact, *caymanensis* resembles a small Red-bellied Woodpecker or a much paler, buffier Jamaican Woodpecker, and such similarities can also be seen with other taxa of the *Centurus* group (e.g. Red-crowned, Yucatan, and southern forms of Golden-fronted woodpeckers).

We now return to Selander and Giller's (1963) questioning of the ability of *caymanensis* to interbreed with the much larger nominate, should the opportunity arise. Given the sexual size dimorphism in this group, with larger males, it might be difficult for the small female *caymanensis* and large males of the nominate to mate successfully. Even a male *caymanensis* would be small relative to a female *superciliaris*, suggesting that there might be difficulties in mate attraction and mating. Relatively few bird hybrids have been documented between taxa of such different sizes as *superciliaris* and any of the other taxa recognized as species by Cory (1919; these being *nyeanus*, *blakei* + *bahamensis*, and *caymanensis*). For example, despite their very wide co-occurrence, hybrids between deceptively similar-looking Hairy Woodpecker *Leuconotopicus villosus* and Downy Woodpecker *Dryobates pubescens* are extremely rare (Mlodinow et al. 2015, eBird; none listed in McCarthy 2006), although this analogy breaks down as it is now known they are not closely related, whereas the *Melanerpes superciliaris s.l.* taxa clearly are closely related to each other. In another example, this time between sister species, the similarly size-disparate Black-backed Woodpecker *Picoides arcticus* and American Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides dorsalis* have been suspected but perhaps never confirmed to occasionally hybridize, despite sympatry over vast areas (https://groups.io/g/Albertabird/topic/white_eye_line_on/89491909; none in McCarthy 2006, Bakai et al. 2025b). Similarly, the small Yucatan Woodpecker is sympatric over its entire range with the much larger Golden-fronted Woodpecker (subspecies *dubius* and *leei*), but these are not known to hybridize (not listed in McCarthy 2006, Bakai et al. 2025b). In contrast, in the Western Palearctic, for example, the rather similarly sized Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* and the Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* hybridize regularly where their ranges meet (Bakai et al. 2025a), as do other combinations of the genus *Dendrocopos* (Bakai et al. 2025b). And of course flickers and sapsuckers, all relatively similar in size, hybridize to varying extents. In their detailed review (Bakai et al. 2025b) of woodpecker hybridization, the vast majority of documented hybrids were similarly sized; clearly hybridization between woodpecker species of markedly different sizes is far rarer. Although this is not discussed in Bakai et al. (2025b), if premating isolating mechanisms fail, mechanical isolation due to the very different sizes of birds, with their inflexible bodies (especially so in woodpeckers) and no intromittent organs, seems a likely reason. At the very least, it would surely be an impediment that would at least reduce mating success.

In addition, the wing-flashing display so common in Cuban *superciliaris*, with its prominent white wing patches and white underwings, but evidently not described for *caymanensis* (which lacks prominent white wing patches and has buffy underwings) might be pivotal to mate attraction.

Since *nyeanus* has been documented to respond to the vocalizations of other *superciliaris* (subspecies not indicated) and even Red-bellied Woodpecker (Akresh et al. 2020), playback experiments seem unlikely to be especially informative in that taxon, but should be tried at least for *caymanensis*.

Conversely, as of now the limited genetic evidence (Navarro-Sigüenza et al. 2017) suggests a very close relationship between *caymanensis* and the nominate. While this is no bar to speciation, especially where factors such as great size differential are involved, it obviously does not provide additional support to the case.

Caymans biogeography:

It seems clear that the distinctiveness of the Caymans avifauna, especially that of Grand Cayman, the most isolated major island of the group, has long been underestimated. NACC only split Grand Cayman Bullfinch *Melopyrrha taylori* in 2023, and earlier proposals that would have split Caymans taxa *caymanensis* and *hesterna* of *Amazon leucocephala* were not successful.

The form of Yucatan Vireo on Grand Cayman, *Vireo magister caymanensis*, is notably isolated from other populations on and near the Yucatan Peninsula, and is subtly distinctive in plumage, structure, and song (and seemingly more so in calls), and the biogeography is anomalous (a separate proposal under consideration, NACC 2026-A-10, deals with this). The form of Thick-billed Vireo on the Caymans, *Vireo crassirostris alleni*, is also somewhat distinctive and is isolated from all other forms of *crassirostris* by mainland Cuba, which is inhabited by a quite distinct species (*Vireo gundlachi*), although subspecies *cubensis* occurs only on Cayo Paredón Grande off northern Cuba, where it is now threatened. The nearest allies of *alleni* are not obvious, but its song and calls can be quite similar to other taxa of *crassirostris*, although some average differences in song may exist. And the Caribbean Elaenia *Elaenia martinica caymanensis* seems at first glance not particularly distinctive, either morphologically or vocally.

Some Caymans species seem to have Cuban affinities, for example, the form of Loggerhead Kingbird on the Caymans, *Tyrannus caudifasciatus caymanensis* is fairly similar in morphology but less so in vocalizations to the Cuban nominate, and less so to the other *Tyrannus caudifasciatus* forms that are candidates for species status (Worm et al. submitted). The Caymans population of La Sagra's Flycatcher *Myiarchus sagrae* is not currently even considered a separate subspecies from the Cuban nominate, though it was originally described as the species *M. denigratus* Cory, 1886; its validity may or may not require reevaluation. The male of the Caymans subspecies of Western Spindalis *Spindalis zena salvini* is distinctive in plumage, but most similar to that of the Cuban form *S. z. pretrei*. In addition, the Grand Cayman Bullfinch is obviously most closely related to the Cuban Bullfinch *Melopyrrha nigra*, with which it was long considered conspecific.

In contrast, some other Caymans taxa are most similar to Jamaican ones, for example, the Caymans form of Caribbean Dove *Leptotila jamaicensis collaris* is very similar both vocally and in plumage to the Jamaican nominate, and notably less so to the Yucatan *gaumeri* group (van Dort 2025). The Caymans population of [Mangrove] Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia* is now considered the same subspecies as that in Jamaica, *eoa*, although it was described under the now-synonymized name *auricapilla* Ridgway, 1888 (which may perhaps need to be resurrected, if the description in Ridgway 1902:507 holds up). The Caymans Bananaquit *Coereba flaveola* population, subspecies *sharpei*, is most closely related to the Jamaican nominate subspecies (Bellemain et al. 2008), though the latter has a much darker gray throat.

On Grand Cayman, *M. s. caymanensis* is quite common and widespread. It is possible that *caymanensis* once had a wider distribution than just Great Cayman, as Bradley (2000) reported that the species was seen once on Little Cayman, a sight record at Snipe Point, Mar 1997 (observer was John Mulak, a resident on Little Cayman, mainly Nov.-May, from 1984–1993, and nearly all of 1994). In addition, fossil deposits have been found on Cayman Brac (Morgan 1994). Similarly, fossils attributed to *Melanerpes superciliaris* have been found in New Providence (Olson and Pregill 1982), from where it is unknown in modern times.

In summary regarding biogeography, the Grand Cayman avifauna appears to be a mix mainly of taxa allied with Cuban and Jamaican taxa.

Synthesis: As recognized, *Melanerpes superciliaris s.l.* is the most size-variable woodpecker species in the Caribbean and in its genus. Other woodpeckers with major intraspecific size variation show mostly clinal variation in size. In addition, the claimed bridging characters (supraocular patch reduction and smaller body size) are surely a manifestation of convergent evolution in distant, isolated islands, between which genetic interchange must be effectively nil, while other characteristics did not necessarily evolve convergently. Voice too is convergently similar between isolated smaller-bodied populations in comparison to the larger nominate. However, *caymanensis* differs from *superciliaris* in its *kwirr* call, in having fewer elements per strophe delivered more slowly and with a broader frequency range and fewer, well-separated harmonics, as well as at higher overall frequency; in contrast, *blakei* gives a *kwirr* call very like that of *superciliaris* but much higher-pitched. Additionally, the *kwirr* call of *caymanensis* appears to differ more from that of *superciliaris* than does that of *jamaicensis*, which is indisputably a separate species. The few recordings available of *kit* calls differ in note length and rate between *caymanensis* and *superciliaris/nyeanus*. Ecology differs between some of the isolated forms (especially San Salvador *nyeanus*), despite the availability of the same range of habitats. Although the limited genetic data suggests very close relatedness between Caymans and Cuban populations, we strongly question the ability of these medium-small and medium-large woodpeckers to hybridize successfully and regularly (in the most unlikely event that contact would be renewed), given the extreme rarity of hybridization being recorded between woodpeckers differing that much in size, even in species that are broadly sympatric.

Recommendations:

We initially considered *caymanensis* the only likely candidate for elevation to species status. That assessment has changed with further exploration of the issue. We still consider *caymanensis* the only unambiguous candidate, however, and strongly recommend treatment of *caymanensis* as a full species. In the assessment of its strong distinctiveness, we agree with Peters (1948), Cory (1886b), and Short (1982), though the latter nevertheless considered it a subspecies. We emphasize that we consider the published rationale for the lump of *caymanensis*, that of Selander and Giller (1963), to conflict with the available evidence.

The taxonomic status of the Bahamian taxa is less clear, and yet the single-species treatment in which all are included in *superciliaris* is highly problematic. This is especially the case with San Salvador *nyeanus*. One option would be treatment of all Bahamas taxa as a single species apart from *superciliaris*, which would require a First Reviser action (which could be done in the Supplement), as both *nyeanus* and *blakei* were described by Ridgway in 1886 in the same publication. The rationale for this treatment would be on size, voice, the perceived continuum of the size and presence of the black supraorbital mark, and on biogeographic grounds. In addition, the different shape of the palatines described by Olson et al. (1990) for *nyeanus* supports its specific separation, though the palatine condition in *blakei* is not known and this was based on a single skeletal specimen of *nyeanus*. Finally, the argument of the size differential between the large Cuban nominate and the small Bahamian taxa operating as a likely mechanical isolating mechanism holds here as well.

However, the single Bahamian species treatment overlooks the much greater similarity in plumage of Abaco *blakei* with the much larger nominate *superciliaris* than for *nyeanus*. It also overlooks the great geographic isolation of *nyeanus*; no other Bahamian endemic shares such a range. Even the highly polytypic Bahama Yellowthroat, with its scattered distribution in the Bahamas (ssp. *tanneri* in Grand Bahama and the Abacos; ssp. *rostrata* in Andros and at least formerly in New Providence), does not reach San Salvador, but ssp. *coryi* does occur in the nearly as far-flung Eleuthera and Cat islands. And, *nyeanus* is a habitat specialist in dense coppice, unlike *blakei*.

On the other hand, arguments against a split of any Bahamian taxa include their greater overall morphological and (so far as known) vocal similarity to the *superciliaris* group, the inadequacy of knowledge thus far, and the likelihood that a First Reviser action will be required if *nyeanus* and *blakei* are split.

Thus, we see the voting options as:

1) No change; continue to treat all as *Melanerpes superciliaris*.
2) Split *caymanensis*
3) Split *nyeanus*
4) Split *blakei* (with *bahamensis*)
5) Split *nyeanus, blakei*, and *bahamensis* as a polytypic species from the *superciliaris* group (including *murceus*).

PCR recommends NO on 1), YES on 2, a less certain YES on 3), NO on 4), and NO on 5.
JLD recommends NO on 1, YES on 2, NO on 3, NO on 4, NO on 5.
BH recommends NO on 1), YES on 2, YES on 3), NO on 4), and NO on 5.

English names:

Should 2) be successful, we recommend the name Cayman Woodpecker for a monotypic *caymanensis*; this has been used historically, and recently in Kirwan et al. (2019), although as a Grand Cayman endemic, Grand Cayman Woodpecker would also be highly appropriate. If any of options 3-5 would be successful, discussions would be needed on the English names to be applied.

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Submitted by: Pamela C. Rasmussen, Jon Dunn, and Bruce Hallett

Date of Proposal: 11 March 2026

Treat Russet-crowned Motmot *Momotus mexicanus* as two species

Background:

The Russet-crowned Motmot *Momotus mexicanus* is a polytypic motmot distributed from northwestern Mexico to Guatemala, with four subspecies currently recognized (Clements et al. 2025). Within Mexico (hereafter the *mexicanus* group), geographic variation is slight and broadly clinal, and three subspecies have traditionally been recognized on this basis (Ridgway 1914, Moore 1932). The northwestern form, *vanrossemi* (southern Sonora and adjacent Chihuahua to northern Sinaloa), averages the smallest and palest (Moore 1932, Clements et al. 2025). Nominate *mexicanus* (central Sinaloa and western Durango south to Guerrero, southern Puebla, and northwestern Oaxaca) is intermediate in both size and plumage coloration (Ridgway 1914, Moore 1932, Dickinson and Remsen 2013). Farther south, *saturatus* (southeastern Oaxaca to Chiapas and extreme southwestern Guatemala) averages the largest and most deeply colored individuals (Nelson 1897, Ridgway 1914, Dickinson and Remsen 2013). Limited measurements indicate that *castaneiceps*, restricted to the middle valley of the Río Motagua in eastern Guatemala, average larger even than *saturatus*, extending the north–south size cline evident within the *mexicanus* group (Ridgway 1914). Its plumage, however, differs markedly from that of all taxa in the *mexicanus* group (see below).

Momotus castaneiceps Gould, 1855, was described based on size and morphological differences from *M. m. mexicanus* Swainson, 1827. Early authors treating the genus or the regional avifauna generally maintained *M. castaneiceps* as a monotypic species, primarily on the basis of morphological differences from taxa in the *mexicanus* group (e.g., Salvin and Godman 1895, Nelson 1897, Ridgway 1914, Griscom 1932, Moore 1932). Peters (1945), however, subsequently lumped *castaneiceps* into *M. mexicanus* without providing an explicit justification for this treatment. This arrangement has since been followed by most subsequent authors and adopted by all major global checklists (e.g., Dickinson and Remsen 2013, HBW and BirdLife International 2024, Clements et al. 2025).

Despite this long-standing taxonomic treatment, available evidence suggests that *M.* [*m.*] *castaneiceps* differs noticeably both morphologically and vocally from all populations currently included within the *mexicanus* group.

New information:

Little has been published in the peer-reviewed literature that is directly relevant to the taxonomy of *M.* [*m.*] *castaneiceps*. However, thousands of photographs and many sound recordings have been archived in digital libraries such as Macaulay Library and xeno-canto, creating an opportunity to examine the plumage and vocalizations of this taxon in comparison with the remaining taxa of *M. mexicanus*. Howell and Juárez (2025) undertook this task, and their results are summarized here.

Plumage

The plumage characters unique to *M.* [*m.*] *castaneiceps* have already been well-described by Ridgway (1914). However, these differences are perhaps more evident in life or in photographs than in museum specimens. The head pattern of *castaneiceps* differs markedly from that of taxa in the *mexicanus* group: (1) the lores are entirely uniform black; (2) the black suborbital is bordered below by greenish white rather than blue; and (3) the forehead, crown, and nape are darker, bright chestnut rather than tawny or cinnamon-rufous (Figs. 1–2). After examining 161 images of *castaneiceps* and more than 2,000 images of taxa in the *mexicanus* group archived in the Macaulay Library, Howell and Juárez (2025) concluded that these differences are consistent across individuals.

Figure 1. Lateral view of *Momotus* [*m.*] *castaneiceps* (left) and *M. m. mexicanus* (right) (from Howell and Juárez (2025, Figs. 2–3). In *castaneiceps*, the black mask extends farther above and below the eye and is bordered below by a greenish white stripe. In the *mexicanus* group, black in the lores is typically reduced and more diffuse.

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Available measurements (below) suggest that *castaneiceps* is larger than taxa in the *mexicanus* group (Ridgway 1914), although the sample size for *castaneiceps* is modest. To illustrate this difference, we include measurements of adults reported by Ridgway (1914) for *castaneiceps* and *saturatus*, the geographically nearest and largest taxon within the *mexicanus* group.

castaneiceps (n=3) vs *saturatus* (n=14):
total length 351–375 (364) vs. 313–355 (340)
wing 129–134 (131.2) vs. 115–131 (122.2)
culmen from cere 39.5–41.5 (40.7) vs. 37.0–46.5 (42.0)
tarsus 26.0–28.0 (27.0) vs. 25.5–28.5 (28.9)

middle toe 19.5–20.0 (19.8) vs. 17.5–19.0 (19.2)

5 Another comparison of **5a** 'Mexican Motmot' *Momotus mexicanus saturatus*, Chiapas, Mexico, March 2019 (left, Steve N. G. Howell) and **5b** 'Guatemalan Motmot' *Momotus* [*mexicanus*] *castaneiceps*, dpto. Zacapa, Guatemala, April 2023 (right, Otto Alvarado). The face pattern differences are often more obvious when viewed from the front, cf. Fig. 4. The size of the black breast spots varies in both taxa.

Figure 2. Facial pattern of *Momotus* [*m.*] *castaneiceps* (right) compared with *M. mexicanus saturatus* (left), the geographically closest form to *castaneiceps* (from Howell and Juárez 2025, Fig. 5). These taxa differ in the extent and shape of the black mask, particularly in the lores and the lower margin of the mask; these differences are especially apparent in frontal view.

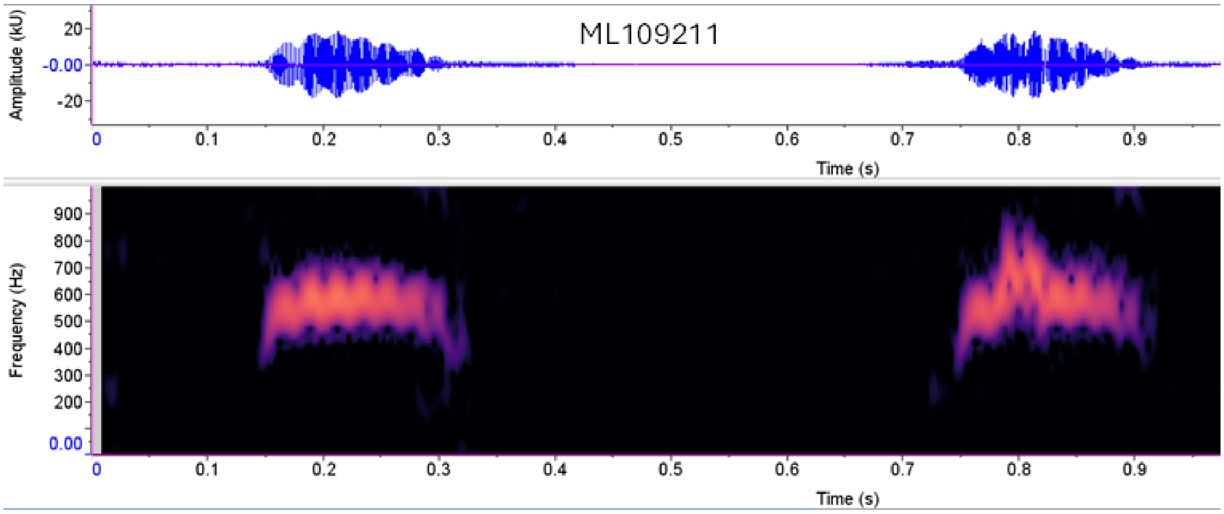
Vocalizations

The vocalizations of motmots are simple, low-pitched hooting or crowing notes that are innate, as in all Coraciiformes (as far as known), and therefore potentially informative for taxonomy. Vocal differences among species can nevertheless be subtle and often require careful comparison of recordings. For example, the vocalizations of Keel-billed Motmot (*Electron carinatum*) and Broad-billed Motmot (*E. platyrhynchum*) are very similar, as are the "primary songs" of Andean Motmot (*Momotus aequatorialis*) and Amazonian Motmot (*Momotus momota*) (Griscom 1932, Stiles 2009, Howell and Juárez 2025).

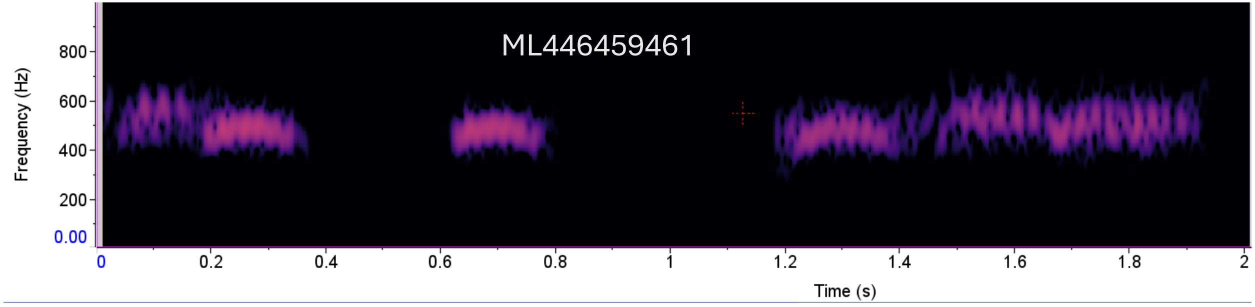
Acoustic communication of *M. mexicanus* has not been studied in detail, and existing information is largely limited to brief phonetic descriptions in field guides (e.g., Howell and Webb 1995, Vallely and Dyer 2018). Howell and Juárez (2025) provided additional details and compared vocalizations across the range of the species using recordings from all taxa. Unless otherwise noted, the following account is based on Howell and Juárez (2025).

The typical vocalization of Russet-crowned Motmot (including both the *mexicanus* group and *castaneiceps*) is a short, overslurred, low rolled hoot given at intervals of 2–6 seconds, sometimes in short rhythmic duets. Although some variation in frequency and duration occurs within the *mexicanus* group, the songs of *castaneiceps* differ consistently from those of the *mexicanus* group. Relative to the *mexicanus* group, the song of *castaneiceps* is (1) typically slightly lower-pitched (mostly <500 Hz vs. mostly >500 Hz; but see below for duets), (2) shorter in duration (0.14 s ± 0.02 SD, range 0.10–0.17 vs. 0.20 s ± 0.02 SD, range 0.18–0.22; unpublished data extracted from two songs per individual pertaining to 10 individuals), and (3) composed of fewer pulses (typically 3–4 longer pulses vs. 7–8 shorter pulses), giving songs of the *mexicanus* group a burrier quality. These differences are illustrated in Fig. 3, which compares recordings of the three *mexicanus* group subspecies with *castaneiceps* from three sites in Guatemala.

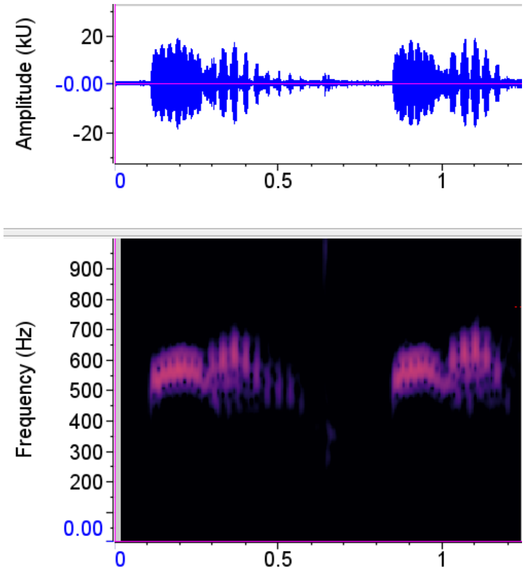
Apparently excited individuals of the *mexicanus* group (e.g., some in ML109211, Keller; below) at least may give a distinctly higher-frequency pulse or two (as in second strophe here) as part of the song strophe.



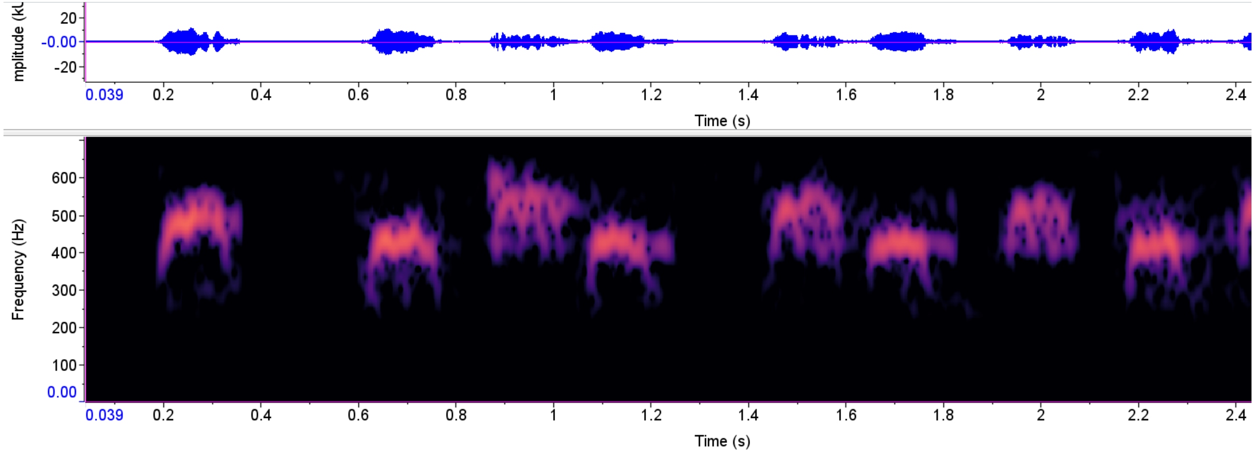
While the above still apply, complications arise in duets of both groups (e.g., *mexicanus* group, ML446459461, Fuentes; below), one individual (female?) may give higher-pitched songs than the other (male), the two song types given more or less alternately, or as extended strophes, and obviously by different individuals.



In the previous and another example, (*mexicanus* group, below, ML472614741, Grosselet), the higher-pitched bird also typically gives fewer pulses, although (as in the first pair below), the higher-pitched song may end with extra, softer purring notes:

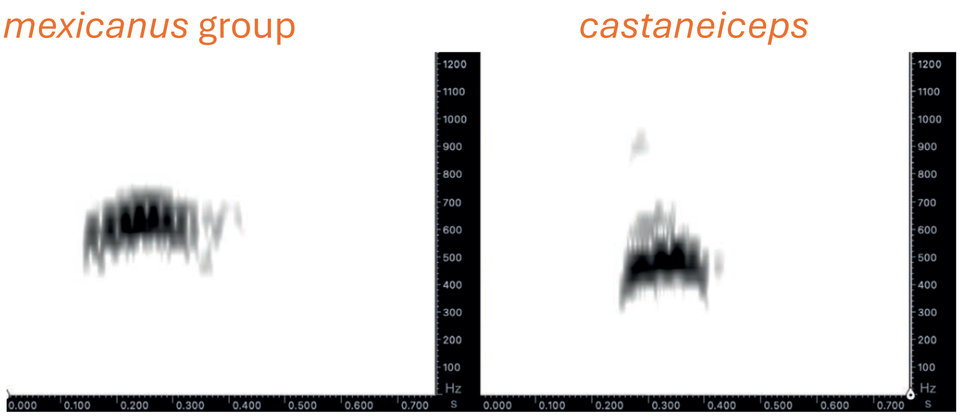


In a similarly excited duet of *castaneiceps* (XC77861, Knapp, a portion below), the higher-pitched songs also typically have fewer pulses than the lower-pitched ones:

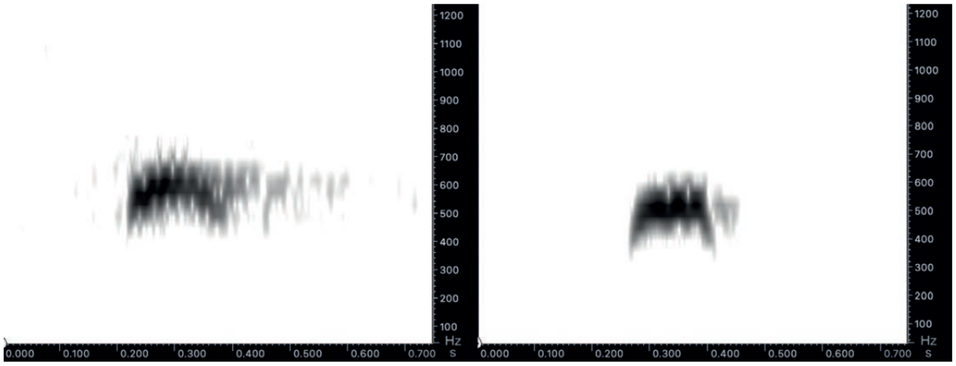


In summary, solo song series are typically more uniform and more clearly different in overall frequency and number of pulses. Duetting individuals show some variation, particularly in the pulse number. However, as expected, since it is the larger taxon, vocalizations from *M.* [*m.*] *castaneiceps* are of lower frequencies 300–600 Hz vs 400–800 for the *mexicanus* group, minimum and maximum frequencies respectively, as illustrated by the sonograms above.

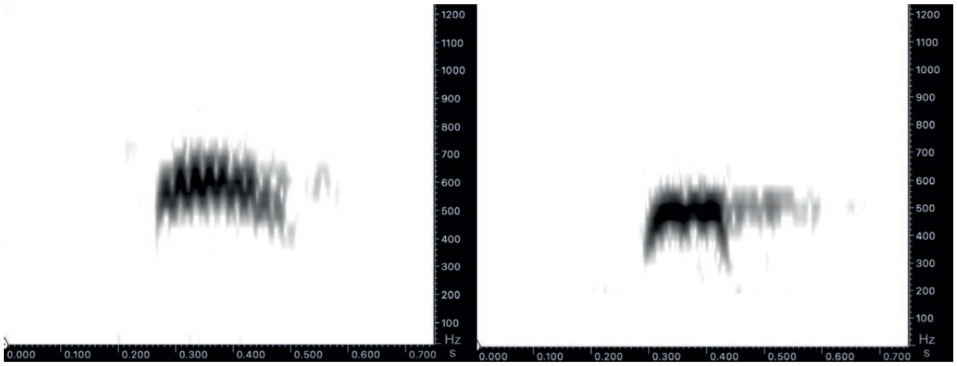
Additional examples of typical vocalizations of both taxa can be heard in the Macaulay Library and xeno-canto archives: *M.* [*m.*] *castaneiceps* (e.g., ML621342125, ML621344180, and ML619336706), *M. m. mexicanus* (e.g., ML109211, ML53686, and ML290083), and *M. m. saturatus* (e.g., ML604113081, ML330552321, and ML6625). In Coraciiformes, including *Momotus*, vocalizations are considered innate and may therefore reflect evolutionary divergence and reproductive isolation among taxa.



6 Sonograms comparing the songs of *Momotus mexicanus vanrossemi* from Sonora, Mexico (left, R. E. Webster; XC499267) and *M.* [*m.*] *castaneiceps* from Dpto. Zacapa, Guatemala (right, R. Juárez; ML623084931). Note the lower and shorter-duration song of *castaneiceps*, with fewer but longer component pulses.



7 Sonograms comparing the songs of *Momotus m. mexicanus* from Nayarit, Mexico (left, F. Lambert; XC352705) and *M. [m.] castaneiceps* from dpto. Zacapa, Guatemala (right, R. Juárez; ML623084950). Note the lower and shorter-duration song of *castaneiceps*, with fewer but longer component pulses.



8 Sonograms comparing the songs of *Momotus mexicanus saturatus* from Oaxaca, Mexico (left, M. Grosselet; XC691914) and *M.* [*m.*] *castaneiceps* from dpto. Zacapa, Guatemala (right, R. Juárez; ML623084969). Note the lower and shorter-duration song of *castaneiceps*, with fewer but longer component pulses.

Figure 3. Sample sonograms of songs of *Momotus* [*m.*] *castaneiceps* and *M. mexicanus* (from Howell and Juárez 2025, Figs. 6–8). These sonograms were generated using the following recordings. In order of appearance, from left to right, top panel: XC499267 (*vanrossemi*) and ML623084931 (*castaneiceps*); middle panel: XC352705 (*mexicanus*) and ML623084950 (*castaneiceps*); and bottom panel: XC691914 (*saturatus*) and ML623084969 (*castaneiceps*).

Genetics

A recent phylogeographic study involving mtDNA of *Momotus mexicanus* included samples only of *M. m. mexicanus* and *M. m. saturatus* (Arbelaez-Cortes et al. 2014). This study found a marked biogeographic break between populations of Guerrero and Oaxaca in these taxa, in common with several other avian taxa, but which does not coincide closely with recognized subspecific divisions. We are unaware of genetic data for *M*. [*m*.] *castaneiceps*, unfortunately.

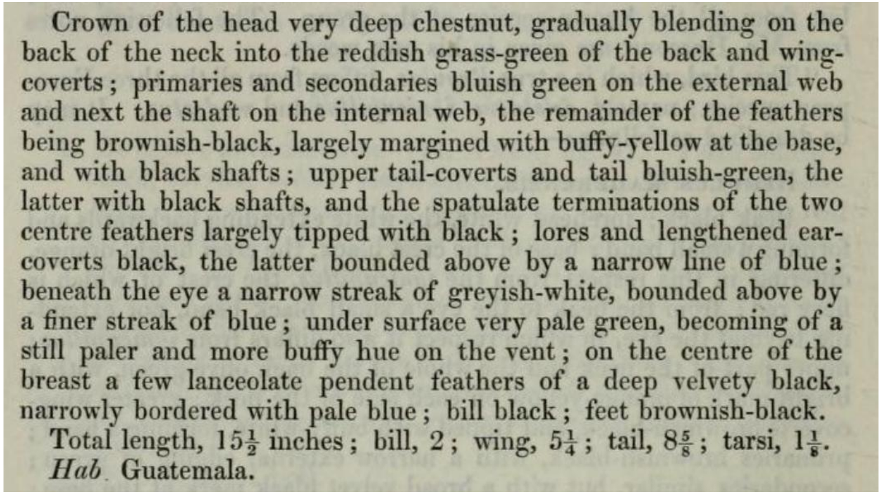
Additional considerations

For convenience, we have included here the taxonomic notes from HBW and BirdLife International Illustrated Checklist (del Hoyo and Collar 2014, HBW and BirdLife International 2024):

"Isolated S population castaneiceps *more distinctive, and may represent a separate species, having darker crown and nape (rufous-chestnut vs rufous) (1), rather more extensive black on lores, sometimes extending above eye in short supercilium (ns1), whitish vs metallic royal-blue moustachial patch (2), greatly reduced blue on (and more attenuated) black rear ear-coverts (2), but apparently no mensural or vocal differences."*

Nomenclature

As the type locality of *Momotus castaneiceps* Gould, 1855, is simply "Guatemala", the issue of whether the name in fact represents the Motagua Valley population arises, as there is a small area in far southwestern Guatemala in which *saturatus* of the *mexicanus* group occurs. The type description seems more consistent with *castaneiceps*, regarding the crown color and facial pattern (Gould 1855):

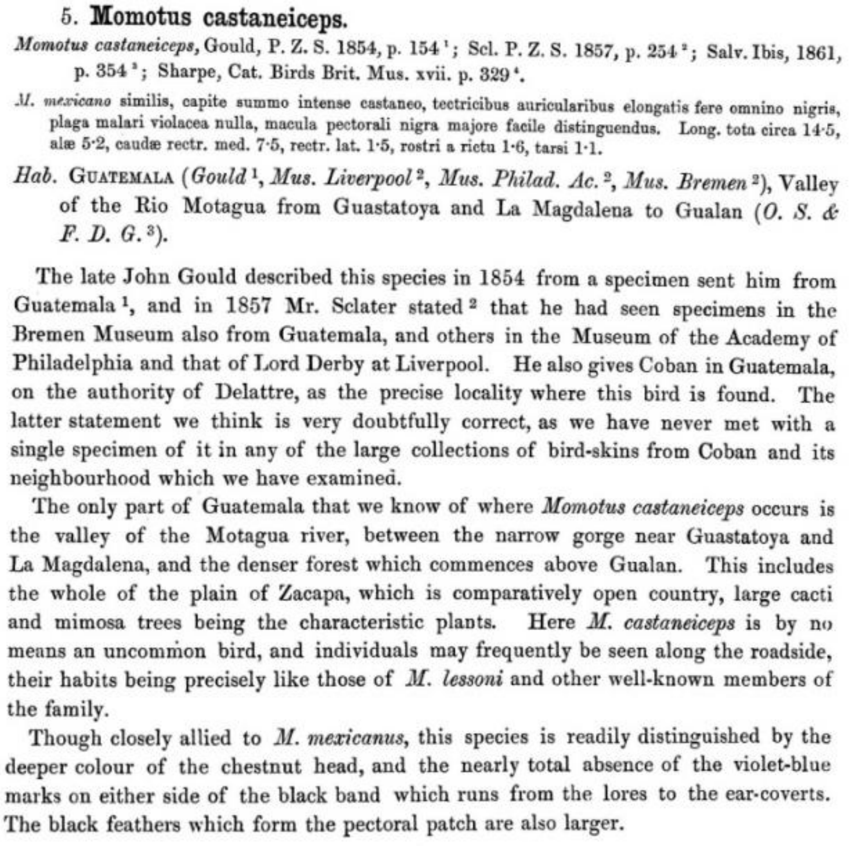


Crown of the head very deep chestnut, gradually blending on the back of the neck into the reddish grass-green of the back and wing-coverts; primaries and secondaries bluish green on the external web and next the shaft on the internal web, the remainder of the feathers being brownish-black, largely margined with buffy-yellow at the base, and with black shafts; upper tail-coverts and tail bluish-green, the latter with black shafts, and the spatulate terminations of the two centre feathers largely tipped with black; lores and lengthened ear-coverts black, the latter bounded above by a narrow line of blue; beneath the eye a narrow streak of greyish-white, bounded above by a finer streak of blue; under surface very pale green, becoming of a still paler and more buffy hue on the vent; on the centre of the breast a few lanceolate pendent feathers of a deep velvety black, narrowly bordered with pale blue; bill black; feet brownish-black.

Total length, 15½ inches; bill, 2; wing, 5¼; tail, 8⅝; tarsi, 1⅛.

Hab. Guatemala.

And indeed it appears that a) *saturatus* (of the *mexicanus* group) was not known from southwestern Guatemala until recently, as it was not mentioned for the country by Griscom (1932); and b) previous authors (e.g., Salvin and Godman 1895; excerpt below from p. 471) have as far as we know all considered Gould's type to be from central Guatemala:



5. **Momotus castaneiceps.**

Momotus castaneiceps, Gould, P. Z. S. 1854, p. 154[1]; Scl. P. Z. S. 1857, p. 254[2]; Salv. Ibis, 1861, p. 354[3]; Sharpe, Cat. Birds Brit. Mus. xvii. p. 329[4].

M. mexicano similis, capite summo intense castaneo, tectricibus auricularibus elongatis fere omnino nigris, plaga malari violacea nulla, macula pectorali nigra majore facile distinguendus. Long. tota circa 14·5, alæ 5·2, caudæ rectr. med. 7·5, rectr. lat. 1·5, rostri a rictu 1·6, tarsi 1·1.

Hab. GUATEMALA (*Gould*[1], *Mus. Liverpool*[2], *Mus. Philad. Ac.*[2], *Mus. Bremen*[2]), Valley of the Rio Motagua from Guastatoya and La Magdalena to Gualan (*O. S. & F. D. G.*[3]).

The late John Gould described this species in 1854 from a specimen sent him from Guatemala[1], and in 1857 Mr. Sclater stated[2] that he had seen specimens in the Bremen Museum also from Guatemala, and others in the Museum of the Academy of Philadelphia and that of Lord Derby at Liverpool. He also gives Coban in Guatemala, on the authority of Delattre, as the precise locality where this bird is found. The latter statement we think is very doubtfully correct, as we have never met with a single specimen of it in any of the large collections of bird-skins from Coban and its neighbourhood which we have examined.

The only part of Guatemala that we know of where *Momotus castaneiceps* occurs is the valley of the Motagua river, between the narrow gorge near Guastatoya and La Magdalena, and the denser forest which commences above Gualan. This includes the whole of the plain of Zacapa, which is comparatively open country, large cacti and mimosa trees being the characteristic plants. Here *M. castaneiceps* is by no means an uncommon bird, and individuals may frequently be seen along the roadside, their habits being precisely like those of *M. lessoni* and other well-known members of the family.

Though closely allied to *M. mexicanus*, this species is readily distinguished by the deeper colour of the chestnut head, and the nearly total absence of the violet-blue marks on either side of the black band which runs from the lores to the ear-coverts. The black feathers which form the pectoral patch are also larger.

Thus, it seems unlikely that nomenclatural problems would be discovered that would impinge on the use of the name *castaneiceps* for the Motagua Valley population.

Recommendation:

We recommend reinstating *Momotus* [*m.*] *castaneiceps* as a species separate from *M. mexicanus*. The taxon *castaneiceps* differs from taxa in the *mexicanus* group in several consistent morphological characters. Acoustic differences are modest, as in other closely related motmots, but are appreciable and provide additional support for treating the two groups as separate species.

English names:

Should this proposal be successful, following Howell and Juárez (2025) we recommend the English name Guatemalan Motmot for *Momotus castaneiceps*, reflecting its restricted distribution and status as the only extant bird species endemic to Guatemala. The name Chestnut-headed Motmot has historically been applied to *castaneiceps* (Ridgway 1914), but the chestnut coloration is largely confined to the crown and is not more extensive than in taxa of the *mexicanus* group. We recommend adopting the English name Mexican Motmot for the *mexicanus* group, which occurs almost exclusively in Mexico (but just makes it into Guatemala) and for which this name was previously used (Ridgway 1914).

Please vote on the following:

A) Treat *castaneiceps* as a species separate from *M. mexicanus*
B) Adopt the English common name Guatemalan Motmot for *castaneiceps*
C) Adopt the English common name Mexican Motmot for the nearly endemic Mexican taxa *Momotus mexicanus sensu stricto*

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Submitted by: Roselvy Juárez and Pam Rasmussen

Date of Proposal: 11 March 2026

Treat Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus* as two or three species

Effect on NACC area: If successful, this proposal would result in the recognition of either one or two additional species for the region.

Summary:

While vocal differences have formed the basis for many recent changes in species limits within Tyrannidae, the striking vocal differentiation within the *Mitrephanes phaeocercus* complex has not yet been formally considered as a basis for revision of species limits, although it has been known for some time (see for example Dyer and Howell 2023). Tufted Flycatchers in northern Middle America have position calls and dawn songs that differ strikingly from those of birds from Costa Rica south, and this division aligns well with plumage differences and is supported by evidence of a strong genetic break between Honduras and eastern Panama. The differences in position note are less striking between Costa Rica/Panama (*M. p. aurantiiventris*) and e. Panama/Colombia/Ecuador (*M. p. berlepschi*), but the differences in primary song, dawn song, and plumage strongly suggest that those should also be recognized at the species level.

This proposal does not give statistical measurements of the songs and calls, in part because the differences are so striking: the position notes are so dissimilar between *phaeocercus* and *aurantiiventris* that it is challenging to find relevant measurements. The Macaulay Library (ML) provides ample audio recordings to support the vocal differences, and supporting links are provided below.

Background:

The genus *Mitrephanes* is thought to be closely related to *Contopus* (pewees) (e.g., Harvey et al. 2020), which includes multiple species that are nearly identical in appearance and differ primarily in vocalizations.

Webster (1968) summarized the taxonomic history within *Mitrephanes* as follows:

> “Ridgway (1907) recognized five species, although he was able to examine only two. Hellmayr (1927) lumped the entire genus in a single species, as did Zimmer (1930; 1938a) in the most thorough revision thus far. Griscom (1932) restated the specificity of *M. berlepschi*, and Sutton and Burleigh (1940), while they did not discuss the South American forms, distinguished *M. aurantiiventris* (of southern Central America) as a species separate from *M. phaeocercus*. It should be noted that Zimmer had only 76 specimens altogether and Sutton and Burleigh only 38 from north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.”

The AOS-SACC has followed the recommendation of Webster (1968), which was to recognize two species within *Mitrephanes*. AOS-NACC considered the genus monotypic until 2018, when it voted to conform with the AOS-SACC interpretation by recognizing *M. olivaceus* (Olive

Flycatcher), which is extralimital to the AOS-NACC area. That 2018 proposal (Chesser 2018; https://americanornithology.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2018-A.pdf) was straightforward and explicitly recommended following Webster (1968) and the AOS-SACC interpretation.

Thus, as of 2018, both AOS-NACC and AOS-SACC follow the recommendations on species limits from Webster (1968) wherein he recommended "A moderate course between the extreme points of view, which recognize four species or one, seems best to express the phylogeny of the genus. I would recognize two species--*M. phaeocercus* and *M. olivaceus*."

Webster (1968) recognized all the taxa below in *Mitrephanes*; eBird/Clements and AviList treat at least four subspecies in synonymy, as below; taxa recognized by eBird/Clements (Clements et al. 2025) and AviList (AviList Core Team 2025) are listed in bold type. Ranges are modified from those in eBird/Clements.

- ***M. p. tenuirostris* Brewster, 1888**: mountains of western Mexico (southeastern Sonora and southwestern Chihuahua to western Jalisco)
- ***M. p. phaeocercus* (Sclater, 1859)**: mountains of eastern and central Mexico (southwestern Tamaulipas, Zacatecas, and central Jalisco to Oaxaca and Chiapas) southward to northeastern Nicaragua
    - *M. p. burleighi* Phillips, 1966: central Jalisco to w. Oaxaca
    - *M. p. phaeocercus* (Sclater, 1859): mountains of eastern and central Mexico (southwestern Tamaulipas and Zacatecas southward to e. Oaxaca
    - *M. p. nicaraguae* Miller & Griscom, 1925: northern Chiapas to northeastern Nicaragua
- ***M. p. aurantiiventris* (Lawrence, 1865)**: highlands of Costa Rica and Panama (eastward to Serranía del Darién*)
    - *M. p. aurantiiventris* (Lawrence, 1865): highlands of Costa Rica and Panama (eastward to e. Chiriquí and Ngäbe-Buglé provinces)
    - *M. p. vividus* Griscom, 1927: central Panama (highlands of e. Coclé and w. Panamá; affinities of birds in Veraguas is unclear); treated as synonym of *aurantiiventris* in eBird/Clements and AviList.
- ***M. p. berlepschi* Hartert, 1902**: far eastern Panama to northwestern Colombia and northwestern Ecuador
    - *M. p. eminulus* Nelson, 1912: eastern Panama (Darién, including Cerro Pirre and Tacarcuna ranges) and presumably far nw. Colombia
    - *M. p. berlepschi* Hartert, 1902: northwestern Colombia and northwestern Ecuador
- ***M. olivaceus* Berlepsch & Sztolcman, 1894**: east slope of Andes of northeastern Peru (Piura) to northwestern Bolivia

*"Serranía del Darién" is evidently incorrectly included in the range of aurantiiventris in Clements et al. (2025 and previous), and will be modified to "(eastward to Altos del Maria area in eastern Coclé and western Panamá provinces)" in the 2026 Clements update.

Thus, eBird/Clements and other authors treat *burleighi* and *nicaraguae* as synonyms of *phaeocercus*, *vividus* as a synonym of *aurantiiventris*, and *eminulus* as a synonym of *berlepschi*. eBird/Clements has long recognized these subspecies groups within the species:

- ***Mitrephanes phaeocercus phaeocercus/tenuirostris* Tufted Flycatcher (Mexican)**
- ***Mitrephanes phaeocercus aurantiiventris* Tufted Flycatcher (Costa Rican)**
- ***Mitrephanes phaeocercus berlepschi* Tufted Flycatcher (South American)**

Below, we refer to these three groups as *phaeocercus* group, *aurantiiventris*, and *berlepschi*; when differences between *phaeocercus* and *tenuirostris* are relevant, the specific subspecies name is used. Note, however, that Webster (1968) treated *nicaraguae* as a distinctive plumage class separate from *phaeocercus*/*tenuirostris*.

Genetics:

We are not aware of a robust genetic study with complete taxon sampling of the key groups within *Mitrephanes*, but Harvey et al. (2020) sampled *M. olivaceus* (San Martín, Peru; La Paz, Bolivia), *M. p. phaeocercus* (Honduras), and *M. p. berlepschi* (Darién, Panama). Their time-calibrated tree (Table 1 in their supplementary material) estimated the divergence times as follows: *Mitrephanes* from *Contopus* (~5.75 mya), *M. phaeocercus/berlepschi* clade from *M. olivaceus* (3 mya), *M. p. phaeocercus* from *M. [p.] berlepschi* (2 mya). The divergence time between *berlepschi* and *phaeocercus* is thus estimated to be older than or in a similar range to several other well-established species pairs in their study, including:

- *Empidonax traillii* and *E. alnorum* (~1.5 mya)
- *E. atriceps* and *E. fulvifrons* (1.75 mya)
- *E. affinis* and *E. oberholseri* (1.5 mya)
- *E. flavescens* and *E. difficilis* (~2 mya)
- *Contopus pertinax*, *C. lugubris*, and *C. fumigatus* (~1.75 mya)
- *C. cinereus* and *C. nigrescens* (1.5 mya)
- *Sayornis phoebe* and *S. nigricans* (~1.75 mya)

The fact that *aurantiiventris* was not sampled leaves a significant question about how divergent it may be from *berlepschi* and the *phaeocercus* group, but it is clear that *M. phaeocercus* and *M. berlepschi* should be treated within different species and more than meet a genetic yardstick for related species in Tyrannidae.

Habitat:

Significant differences in habitat between at least two of these taxa. Webster (1968) described habitat differences as follows:

> “My own field experience with *Mitrephanes* has been confined to México. There *M. phaeocercus* inhabits the more humid parts of the pine-oak forest and cloud (subtropical) forest. In winter it lives in tropical deciduous forest, tropical evergreen forest, and tropical thorn forest as well as in lower-elevation pine forest and cloud forest; it deserts higher elevation pine forest. All that I encountered in pine or pine-oak forests were foraging out from exposed perches at the rims of barrancas or mountain ridges. In cloud forest they were foraging out over openings or low trees and returning to perches 20 to 100 feet above the ground, in the manner of a pewee (*Contopus*).

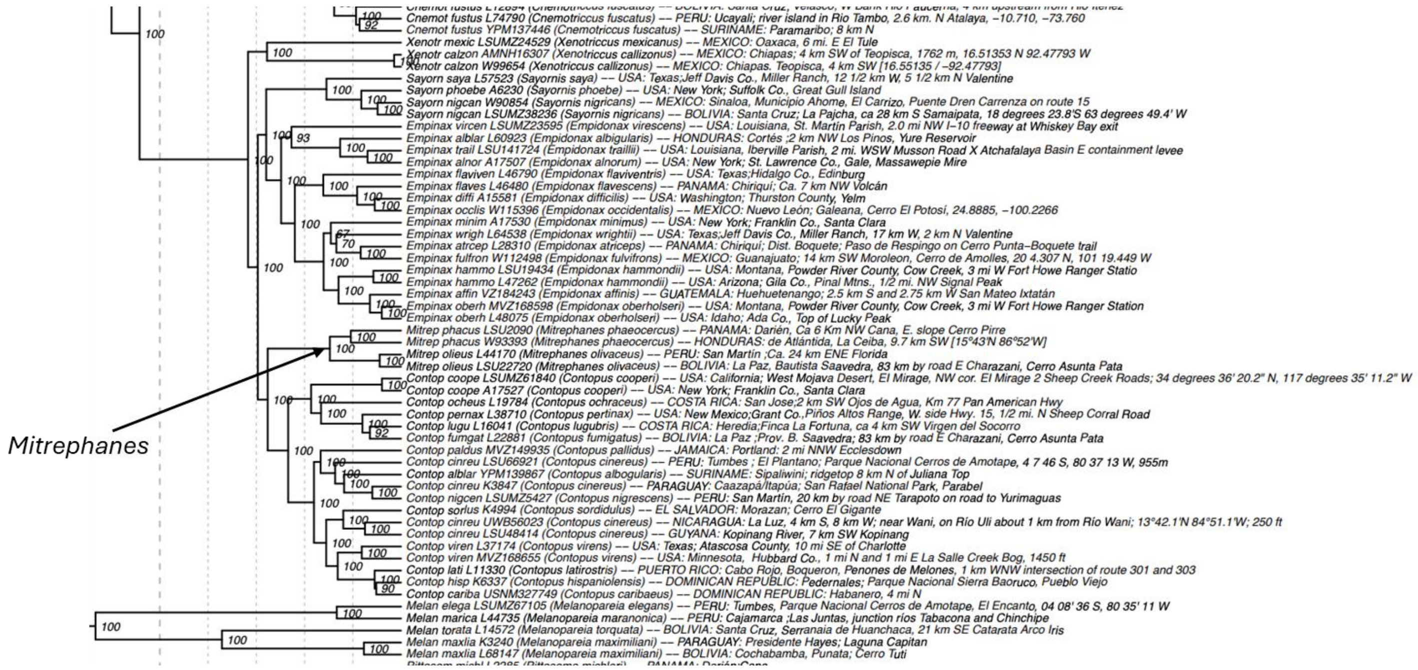

Fig. 2. Table 1 from Harvey et al. (2020) shows a divergence time of ~2 million years ago between *Mitrephanes* in Honduras (*M. p. phaeocercus*) and Darién, Panama (*M. p. berlepschi*), which is consistent with treating these as different species. See also https://tree.opentreeoflife.org/curator/study/view/ot_2015

> Skutch (1960) states that from Guatemala to western Panama the Tufted Flycatcher is a permanent resident of subtropical forest and of temperate pine-oak forest. He describes the behavior briefly, including evidence of a close relationship with the pewees. All localities in central and eastern Panamá reported in the literature and on specimen labels (*M. p. viridus* and *M. p. eminulus*) are from elevations of 2,000 feet or more, apparently in the subtropical zone. But the few localities in which *M. p. berlepschi* has been found, in western Colombia and northwestern Ecuador, are near sea level in the humid tropical zone! On the other hand, *M. olivaceus* in Peru and Bolivia occurs in upper humid tropical and subtropical forests at elevations from 4,000 to 8,000 feet (Zimmer, 1938a)."

Although the habitat differences between the *phaeocercus* group and *aurantiiventris* in part follow the changeover in montane forest type, it does seem notable that *berlepschi* is more of a lowland taxon than *aurantiiventris*.

Morphometrics:

Webster (1968) provided an in-depth phenotypic analysis, working from 728 museum specimens from all named taxa and from all regions throughout the range of *Mitrephanes* (except Ecuador) to quantify plumage and morphology. He provided detailed information on the measurements of the various populations in *Mitrephanes*. In general, these follow Bergmann's Rule, with measurements increasing with distance from the equator. The full tables for measurements are provided in his paper.

Webster noted these specific observations that he considered significant:

- wing length: smooth cline from northeastern Mexico to western Panama, but sharp break between Colombia and Peru with a nonoverlap gap of 4mm (over twice the standard deviation), and lesser breaks (with slight overlap) between Colombia and eastern Panama and between central and western Panama.
- tail length: sharpest break between Honduras-El Salvador and Guatemala
- bill width: two smallest (shortest-winged) populations, *vividus* and *berlepschi*, have the broadest bills

Thus, the morphometrics given by Webster (1968) do not align particularly well with the recognized subspecies groups.

Plumage:

For a group of birds in which plumage differences can be extremely subtle (e.g., Eastern vs. Western wood-pewees, various taxa of Tropical Pewee, Alder vs. Willow flycatchers, etc.), the plumage differences among the four main groups of *Mitrephanes* are striking. Underparts coloration is especially strikingly different between the groups, but differences also exist in upperparts coloration. The composites on succeeding pages show the differences well (see also Appendix A for photo galleries from different regions).

Webster (1968) assessed fresh-plumaged birds (Aug-Feb) and attempted to quantify the differences, and in doing so he identified five classes (which include two classes in the northern group from Mexico south to Nicaragua). [Note that while eBird/Clements and IOC previously recognized *nicaraguae*, these were synonymized with *phaeocercus* around 2005 and that treatment has carried over to AviList v2025. However, the analysis by Webster (1968) would seem to support recognizing *nicaraguae* at least; see below.]

Webster (1968) noted five classes for underparts coloration, with 100% separation: (1) pale tawny--*tenuirostris*, *burleighi*, and *phaeocercus*; (2) dark tawny--*nicaraguae*; (3) buffy yellow--*aurantiiventris* and *vividus*; (4) yellow--*eminulus* and *berlepschi*; (5) lime--*olivaceus*.

Below is a summary of the differences demonstrated by Webster (1968):

***phaeocercus* Group**

- underparts pale tawny (*tenuirostris*, *burleighi*, and *phaeocercus*) to dark tawny (*nicaraguae*)
- moderate and gradual transition between anterior underparts (throat and breast) and posterior (belly, crissum, and undertail coverts)
- Upperparts varying from pale to dark olive and pale to dark brownish olive
- Juvenal plumage: Ventrally a smooth cline from pale buffy brown in Sonora darkening southeastwardly to deep tawny buffy brown to brownish tawny in Chiapas and Nicaragua, while dorsally a smooth cline ran from pale sepia tipped with pale tawny in Sonora, darker southeastward to dark sepia tipped with tawny in Chiapas, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras
- moderate clinal variation detected, with general increasing darkness to the south

Fig. 3. Clockwise from top left: *tenuirostris*, Quinn Diaz, Nayarit, MX, ML 626188382; *aurantiiventris*, Gary Rosenberg, Panamá, PA, ML610105559; *berlepschi*, Eric VanderWerf, ML610105559, Panamá, PA; *olivaceus*, Itamar Donitza, ML646534080, Cusco, PE.

Fig. 4. Clockwise from top left: *tenuirostris*, Dylan Osterhaus, ML632797034, New Mexico, US; *aurantiiventris*, Dubi Shapiro, ML281494981, Chiriquí, PA; *berlepschi*, Guillermo NAGY / ARAMACAO TOURS, ML625759985, Chocó, CO; *olivaceus,* Eric Atwell, ML 612973767, Junín, PE.

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aurantiiventris

- underparts buffy yellow—*aurantiiventris* and *vividus*
- prominent and sharp transition between anterior underparts (throat and breast) and posterior (belly, crissum, and undertail coverts)
- upperparts approximately dark, yellow lime-olive
- Juvenal plumage underparts slightly paler and distinctly yellowish buffy brown, and dorsally the upperparts were paler (than *phaeocercus* Group) and had more yellowish tawny tips

- no geographic variation detected in color

berlepschi
- underparts yellow—*eminulus* and *berlepschi*
- prominent and sharp transition between anterior underparts (throat and breast) and posterior (belly, crissum, and undertail coverts)
- in underparts coloration, two specimens from Cerro Tacarcuna, eastern Panama, are warmer, more orangish on both areas than two specimens from southern Colombia. In this class the anterior underparts are medium, brownish Buffy Yellow; the posterior are pale Yellow. However, note that seven worn old (March-June, 1912 and 1928) specimens from Cana, eastern Panama, show distinct variation; they are colder, less buffy than those from Cerro Tacarcuna, although paler, less greenish anteriorly and less purely yellow posteriorly than specimens from Colombia, either northern or southern.
- upperparts varying from medium to dark olivaceous Yellow-Lime

olivaceus
- underparts lime
- moderate and gradual transition between anterior underparts (throat and breast) and posterior (belly, crissum, and undertail coverts)
- Juvenal plumage tawny buffy brown below, paler and buffier (than *aurantiiventris*), buffy-brown tipped tawny above
- little geographic variation, including between Peru and Bolivia

Webster (1986) furthermore stated:

> "The gap between groups 2 [*aurantiiventris*] and 3 [*berlepschi*] is prominent, with the eastern Panamá birds distinctly greener than those from western and central Panamá.
>
> I see no geographic variation within the 39 specimens from Costa Rica and western Panamá, and the gap from class (2) [*nicaraguae*] is considerable.
>
> Two specimens from Cerro Tacarcuna, eastern Panamá, are warmer, more orangish on both areas than two specimens from southern Colombia. In this class the anterior underparts are medium, brownish Buffy Yellow; the posterior are pale Yellow. Seven worn old (March–June, 1912 and 1928) specimens* from Cana, eastern Panamá, show a distinct variance; they are colder, less buffy than those from Cerro Tacarcuna, although paler, less greenish anteriorly and less purely yellow posteriorly than specimens from Colombia, either northern* or southern."

See Appendix B regarding the possibility of an undescribed taxon on Cerro Tacarcuna.

Regarding the upperparts, Webster (1986) stated:

> "A prominent north to south cline of increasing greenness runs from northwestern Mexico to Peru. In Mexico north of Tehuantepec the trend is from the Pacific slope to the Atlantic slope, but in Central America no Pacific versus Atlantic slope differences are apparent.
>
> A two-way cline of darkness decreases from maximum in Chiapas northwest and southeast to minimum, or pallor, in northwestern Mexico and Peru. This seems to follow Gloger's Rule north from Chiapas, but to proceed almost inversely to, Gloger's Rule from Chiapas southward."

We recommend reading the full text of Webster (1968: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=18739&context=auk).

Webster (1968) assessed juvenal plumage and found marked differences between the *phaeocercus* Group, *aurantiiventris*, and *olivaceus*:

> "Color of juvenal plumage.—A series of 43 specimens from all subspecies except *vividus* and *berlepschi* showed prominent geographical variation. Ventrally a smooth cline from pale Buffy Brown in Sonora darkened southeastwardly to deep tawny Buffy Brown to brownish Tawny in Chiapas and Nicaragua; in Costa Rica and eastern Panamá the underparts were a little paler again and distinctly yellowish Buffy Brown; in Peru tawny Buffy Brown. Dorsally, a smooth cline ran from pale Sepia tipped with pale Tawny in Sonora, darker southeastward to dark Sepia tipped with Tawny in Chiapas, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras; in Costa Rica and eastern Panama the upperparts were a little paler again, and had more yellowish Tawny tippings. In Peru the upperparts were still paler and buffier, Bully Brown tipped with pale Tawny."

Webster's (1968) review focused on measurements, appearance, and habitat, and from that he recommended a two-species treatment. However, his only defense for the treatment as two species is his section on SPECIFIC LIMITS on page 288–289. The entirety of his argument is reproduced below:

> "All the forms of *Mitrephanes* are allopatric. When Zimmer (1930) described the juvenal plumage of Peruvian *M. olivaceus* as more similar to that of the Central American forms than is the adult plumage, he argued that this showed their essential conspecificity. As shown in the section on variation below, present evidence shows distinct discontinuities in variation. The most abrupt break occurs in Ecuador, between the coastal forest of western Colombia and northwestern Ecuador on the one hand and the eastern slope of the Andes in Peru on the other. Lesser breaks occur in Central America--one between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, and another between central and extreme eastern Panama.
>
> A moderate course between the extreme points of view, which recognize four species or one, seems best to express the phylogeny of the genus. I would recognize two species--*M. phaeocercus* and *M. olivaceus*:

	phaeocercus	***olivaceus***
Range	Northern Mexico to northwestern Ecuador	Eastern Peru and Bolivia
Habitat	Temperate pine and pine-oak forest, subtropical forest, and humid tropical forest	Subtropical forest and upper humid tropical forest
Size	Larger to smaller	Larger than adjacent forms
Color	Brown to yellowish green	Green—contrast marked with *phaeocercus* ventrally, but moderate dorsally

> If an intermediate population exists, it may probably be found in the central Andes of Colombia."

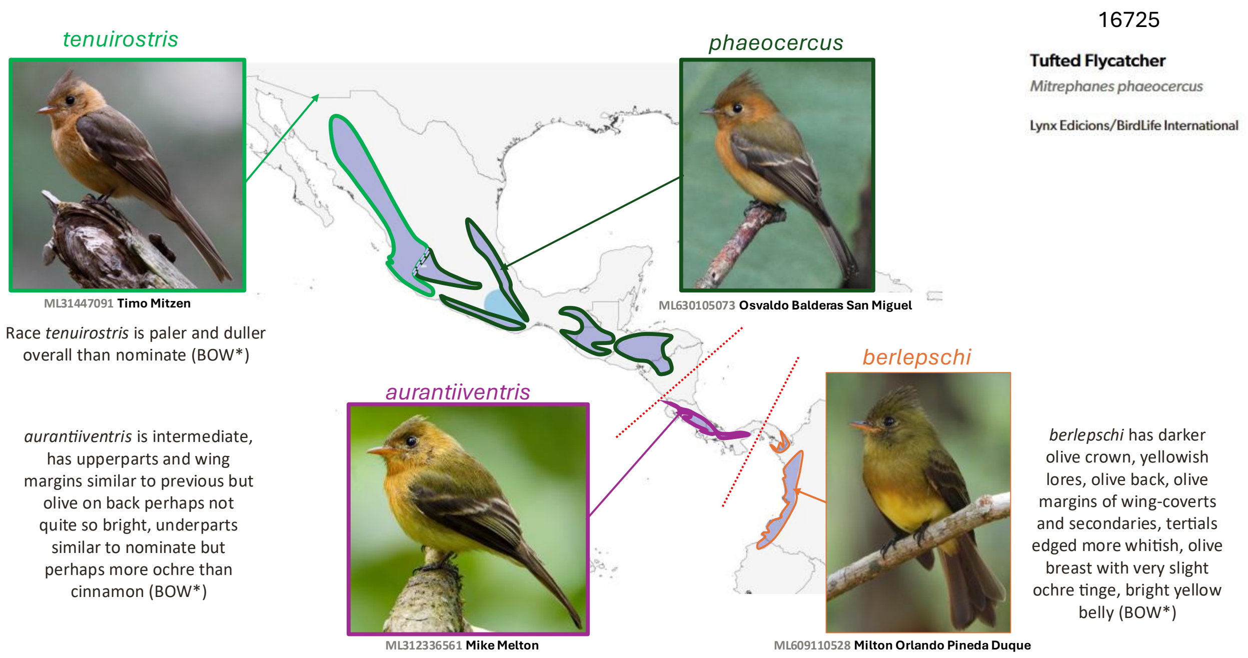
It strikes us that this is an exceptionally weak argument for both AOS-NACC and AOS-SACC to use as the basis for their species-level taxonomy. While we agree that the separation of *olivaceus* as a distinct species is the correct course, we stress that Webster (1968) acknowledged the possible alternate arrangement and made no argument for or against it.

An alternate hypothesis, using Webster's own phenotypic data, might look like this:

	phaeocercus	***aurantiiventris***	***berlepschi***	***olivaceus***
Range	Northern Mexico to Nicaragua	Costa Rica to central Panama	Eastern Panama to n. Ecuador	Eastern Peru and Bolivia
Habitat	Temperate pine and pine-oak forest and subtropical forest	Humid tropical forest in highlands	Humid tropical forest in lowlands	Subtropical forest and upper humid tropical forest
Size	Larger	Moderate-sized	Small	Larger than adjacent forms
Color of underparts	Pale tawny to dark tawny; moderate breast-belly contrast	Buffy yellow; strong breast-belly contrast	Yellow; strong breast-belly contrast	Lime; moderate breast-belly contrast
Color of upperparts	Pale to dark olive or brownish-olive	dark, yellow lime-olive	varying from medium to dark olivaceous yellow-lime	varying from medium to dark olivaceous yellow-lime

An equal, or stronger case, could be made that the populations with the traits above merit recognition as four species, and that when the strong vocal break between the *phaeocercus* group and *aurantiiventris*, and the moderate vocal break between *aurantiiventris* and *berlepschi*, are taken into account, one must arrive at a three- or four-species treatment.

The graphic below shows typical phenotypes on the combined range for the taxa currently lumped as Tufted Flycatcher (*M. phaeocercus sensu lato*). The breaks (red dotted lines) between northern Nicaragua and Costa Rica and between central and eastern Panama are breaks that define numerous other species limits of highland taxa:



Race *tenuirostris* is paler and duller overall than nominate (BOW*)

aurantiiventris is intermediate, has upperparts and wing margins similar to previous but olive on back perhaps not quite so bright, underparts similar to nominate but perhaps more ochre than cinnamon (BOW*)

berlepschi has darker olive crown, yellowish lores, olive back, olive margins of wing-coverts and secondaries, tertials edged more whitish, olive breast with very slight ochre tinge, bright yellow belly (BOW*)

*BOW text excerpts (Farnsworth and Lebbin 2020)

Vocalizations:

Comparing homologous vocalizations is of course of major importance with flycatchers, with their innate vocalizations. Below, we identify six main classes of vocalizations, but focus especially on position note, primary song, and dawn song, which seem to show species-level differences among each of the four groups. See also Appendix A for galleries of sound recordings from different regions.

Position note: repeated, commonly given series either while perched or immediately after landing. These tend to be repeated in rapid succession from 3x to 12x or more
Primary song: short, high-pitched phrases of single, well-spaced notes; these are given primarily in the breeding season
Alternate song: combining elements of the position note and the song, these tend to be phrased a *pip-pip-pip-seeeu* or something similar
Dawn song: given pre-dawn or just after dawn, these are longer and complex series but have well-established phrase patterns
Contact calls: various *pip* notes; occasionally burry interaction calls as well; these do not seem particularly distinctive and are similar among taxa
Other calls: occasionally burry interaction calls and other less consistent vocalizations may be given as well; these do not seem particularly distinctive and are similar between taxa

The vocalizations of the four main groups of Tufted Flycatchers are substantially different and more than exceed the vocal differences between many flycatcher species. We did not detect significant differences across the ranges of any of the taxa, although a quantitative analysis may shed more light on this aspect.

Most striking is the difference in position notes: those of *phaeocercus* are utterly unlike the position notes of any other taxa. The position notes of *aurantiiventris* and *berlepschi* are similar, and while those of *olivaceus* are similar in pattern, they have a very different note shape, being descending vs. ascending. Figure 5 summarizes the differences.

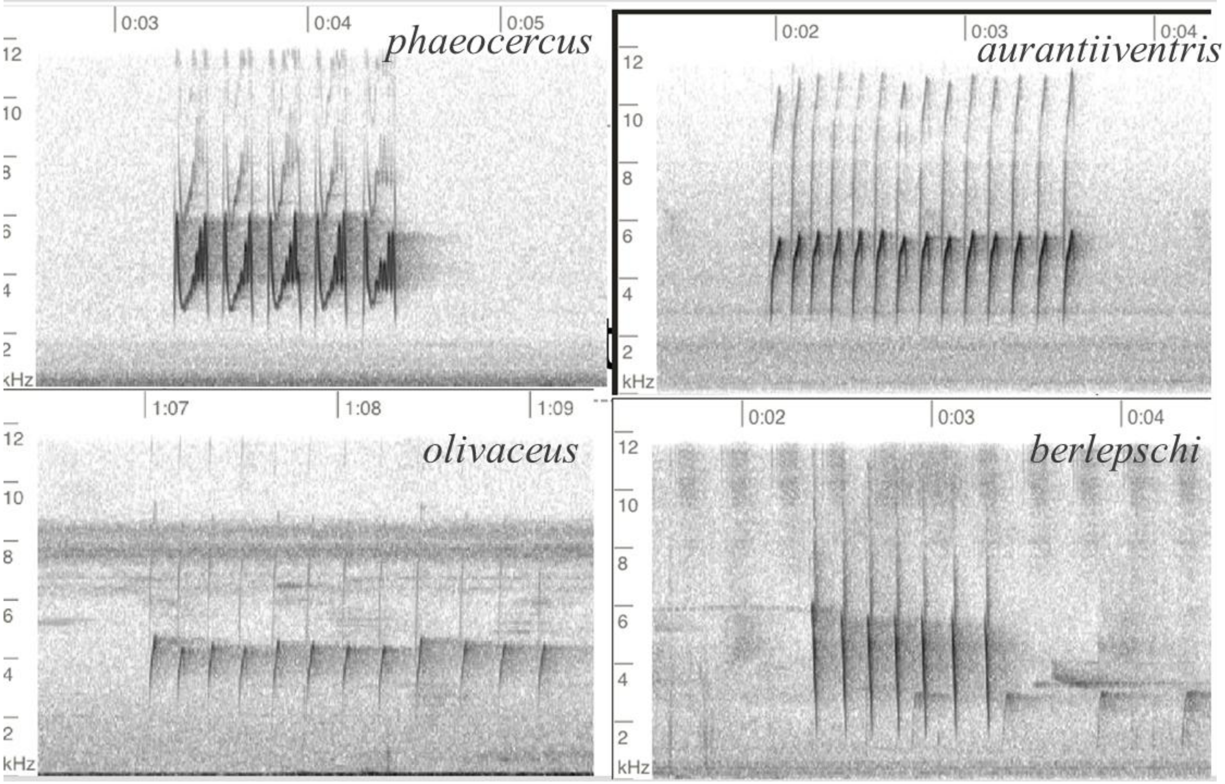
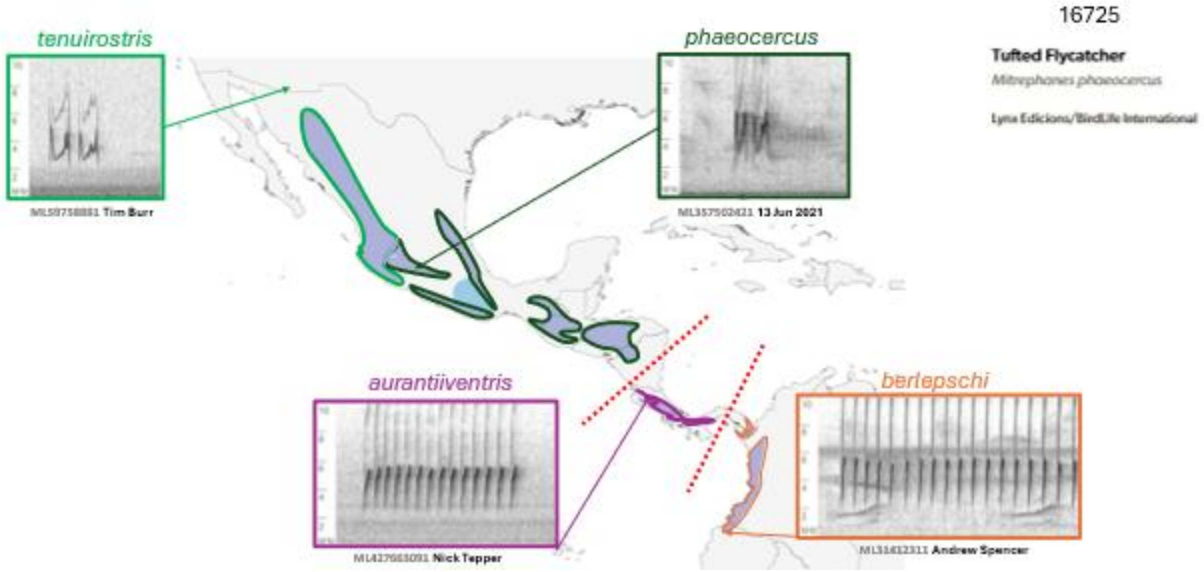


Fig. 5. Position calls. Clockwise from top left: *phaeocercus*, Cd. de Mexico, MX, Miguel Aguilar @birdnomad, ML650288423; *aurantiiventris*, Alajuela, CR, Nick Tepper, ML427663091; *olivaceus*, Amazonas, PE, Guilherme Melo, ML608680193; *berlepschi*, Valle de Cauca, CO, Paula Caycedo, ML264163. NOTE: the labels on the images are incorrect for the bottom two: it is *berlepschi* on the left and *olivaceus* on the right. Below, graphic showing typical position calls of taxa in *M. phaeocercus s.l.*



The primary songs (below) are all a similar short, high-pitched note and reportedly are given primarily in the breeding season. However, the shape of the notes differs substantially between the taxa, with more similarity between *phaeocercus* and *aurantiiventris* (despite the massive differences in position calls), whereas *berlepschi* and *olivaceus* differ substantially both from each other and from the two more northerly taxa.

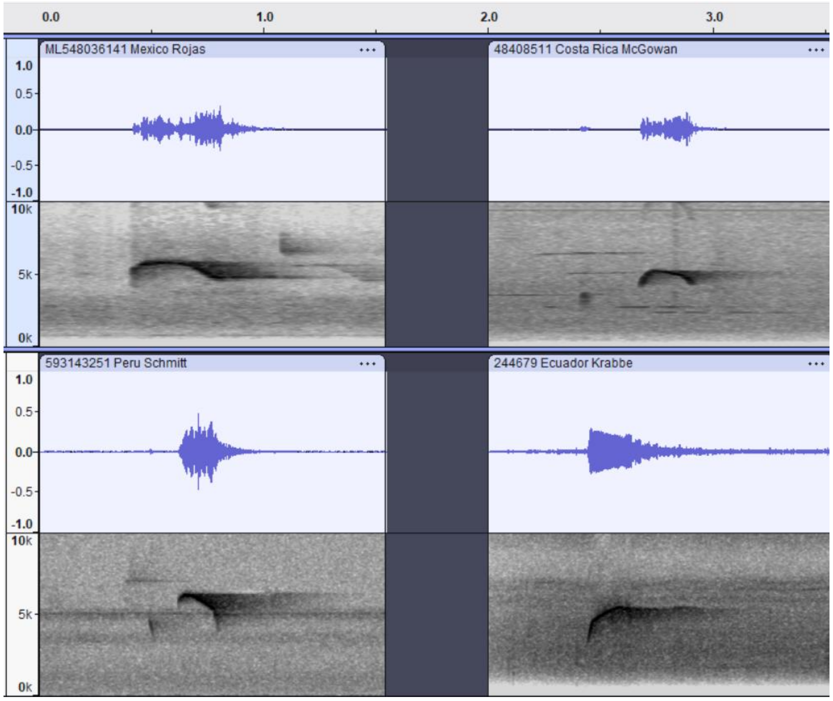


Fig. 6. Primary song. Clockwise from top left: *phaeocercus*, Querétaro, MX, Alvaro Rojas *Qro. Birding Tours*, ML548036141; *aurantiiventris*, Cartago, CR, Jay McGowan, ML48408511; *berlepschi*, Esmeraldas, EC, Niels Krabbe, ML244679; *olivaceus*, San Martín, PE, Fabrice Schmitt, ML593143251.

Vocalizations that we refer to as alternate songs combine elements of the position call and the primary song. They seem not be given frequently in the *phaeocercus* group, or potentially the preceding notes are reduced to a single *pip* with an element of the position call (https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/109246). The other three taxa all have multiple examples of the alternate song, with multiple *pip* notes preceding a high-pitched element that is analogous to the primary song.

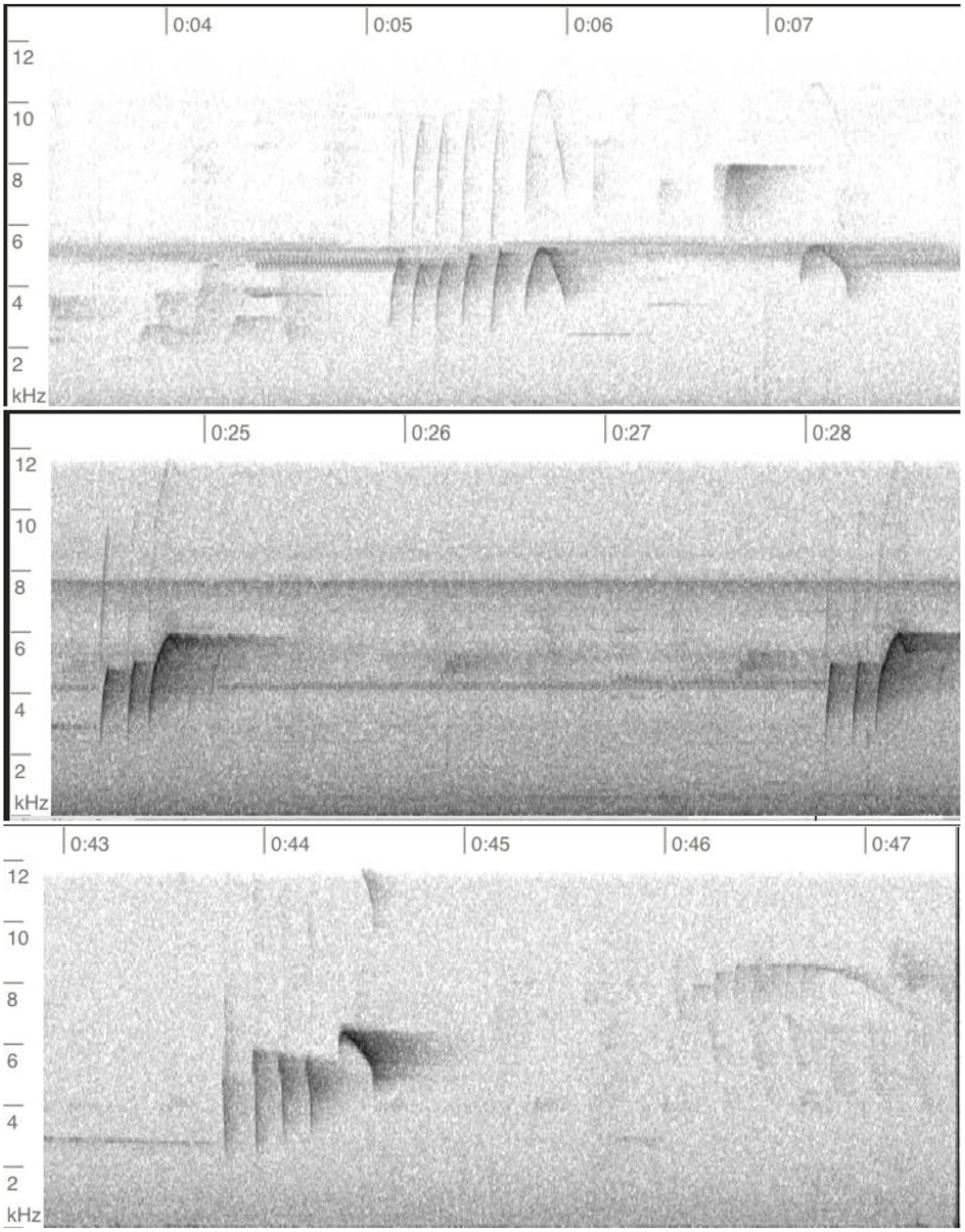


Fig. 7. Alternate song. From the top: *aurantiiventris*, Puntarenas, CR, Thomas Brooks, ML590274961; *berlepschi*, Esmeraldas, EC, Mark L. Robbins, ML63198; *olivaceus*, Amazonas, PE, Nick Athanas, ML288261481.

The dawn songs are audio-recorded much less frequently, but the several examples for each taxon show differences in pattern, speed, and quality of delivery that suggest that each taxon is a species. The final notes for each phrase seem to be an especially important element of the dawn song in these taxa and do not have much similarity between the *phaeocercus* group, *aurantiiventris*, and *berlepschi*.

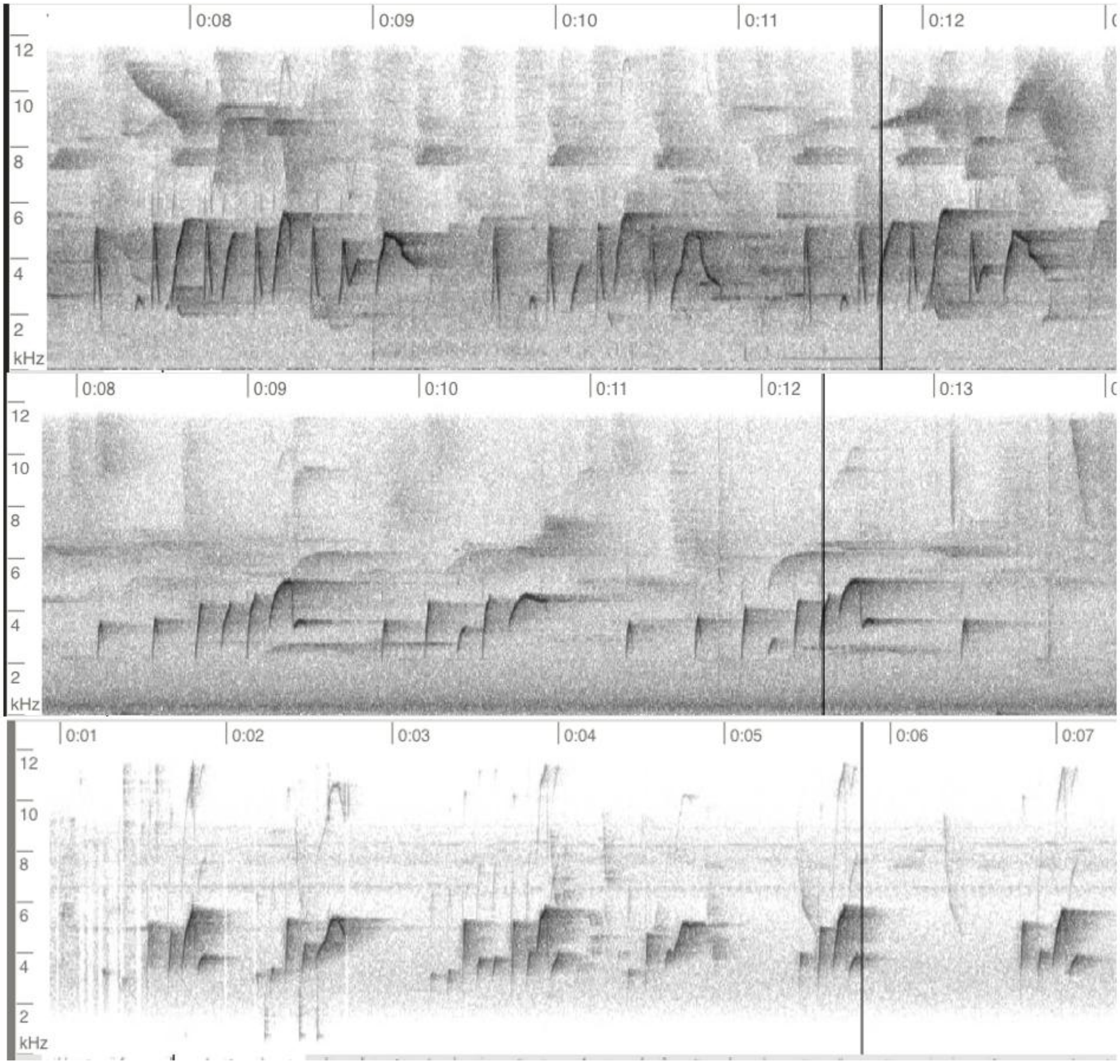
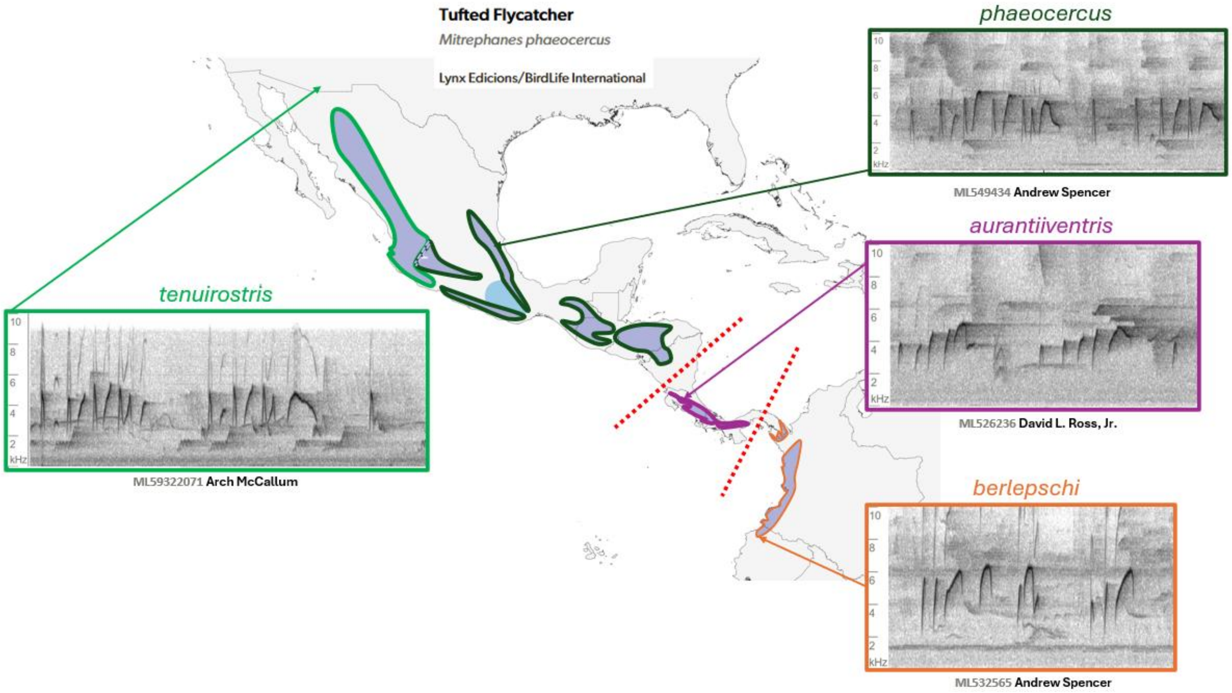


Fig. 8. Dawn song. From the top: *phaeocercus*, Hidalgo, MX, Andrew Spencer, ML277665301; *aurantiiventris*, Puntarenas, CR, David L. Ross, Jr., ML184565; *berlepschi*, Valle de Cauca, CO, Daniel Uribe-Restrepo BIRDING TOURS COLOMBIA, ML90360501. Below, a graphic mapping a different selection of dawn-type songs for the taxa of *M. phaeocercus s.l.*



We found no obvious examples of dawn song of *M. olivaceus* on Macaulay Library or xeno-canto; the one example of a complex song was more like a complex version of the alternate song and was quite unlike the other three taxa: https://xeno-canto.org/20777

The table below summarizes the differences in vocalization. The alphanumeric codes in parentheses refer to the vocal analyses in Appendix C and identify the vocalization type and taxon.

	context	***phaeocercus* grp.**	***aurantiiventris***	***berlepschi***	***olivaceus***
position notes	Loud series given perched or just after landing; elements repeated 3x or up to 10x or more; a very common vocalization in the genus	strident, burry *tchwee-tchwee-tchwee* (A1)	loud and rapid, repeated series *pui-pui-pui-pui…* (A2)	loud and rapid, repeated series *pee-pee-pee-pee…* (A3)	loud and rapid, repeated series *tip-tip-tip-tip…* (A4)
primary song	High-pitched single note that varies in pitch; given in breeding season and often repeated every few	high, thin rising and falling *pseeeu*; dome-shaped spectrogram with peak near front of note (B1)	high, thin rising and falling *seer* or *peew*; symmetrical, dome-shaped spectrogram or sometimes with	*wheep* (B3); rising note that levels off at the end	*sieeuu* (B4); fast peak and then long descending note

	seconds; not unlike like song given by many *Contopus*		peak at the front (B2)		
alternate song	Series that combines short elements from the position call with the primary song or a modified primary song	rarely given, perhaps absent; *pip-weet* (C1)	*pip-weer* (C2)	*tsu-tsu-tseét* (C3)	*tip-tip-tip-tip-seeert*, with strong descending note (C4)
dawn song	Complex series covering a wide frequency range, given primarily at dawn	variable phrases of 4-7 notes, *pit-whit-ooh-whee-ohh… pit-whit-ooh-whit-wheet…* with last element alternating between *whee-ohh* (L-shaped note) and *weeet* (scythe-shaped note)	variable phrases of 4-7 notes, *pit-whit-ooh-whee-weeot… pit-whit-ooh-whit-wheet…* with last element alternating between double-humped *wheeot* (double-humped descending note) and *weeet* (scythe-shaped note)	variable phrases of 4-7 notes, *pit-whit-ooh-whee-weeot… pit-whit-ooh-whit-wheet…* with last element alternating between double-humped *wheeot* (double-humped descending note) and *weeet* (scythe-shaped note)	no examples found
contact calls	Short single "pip" notes, recalling Alder or Hammond's Flycatcher; given frequently and similar in each taxon to a lone element of the position call	*pip*, peaking around 5 kHZ (E)	*pip*, peaking around 4 kHZ (E)	*pip*, peaking around 4 kHZ (E)	*tip*, peaking around 5 kHZ (E)

Field guide descriptions are as follows:

Howell and Webb (1995) - *phaeocercus* group: A burry, bright, rolled *tchwee-tchwee* or *turree-turree*, less often a single *tchwee* or longer series, a sharp, usually fairly quiet *pic* or *beek* suggesting Hammond's Flycatcher, and a bright, slightly emphatic to penetrating *seeu* or *pseeu*, repeated every few s and given mainly in breeding season.

Howell et al. (2014) - *phaeocercus* group: Bright, slightly burry whistled *tch'wee-tch'wee* or *tureee-turee* call is given year-round, as well as quiet *pik*, suggesting call of Hammond's Flycatcher.

Stiles and Skutch (1989): *aurantiiventris* group
A high-pitched, rapid series of liquid, rather confiding notes: *weet weet weet*…or *pui-pui-pui-pui-pi-pi* , often upon returning to perch; a thin *seer* or *peew* or, especially in breeding season, *peew-peew* or *peep-wit wit*; quaint, prolonged dawn song a very rapid series of high, thin notes: *bip-bip-bip-dididi-up-bip-bip-bibibiseer*.

Wetmore (1972): *aurantiiventris* - Eisenmann describes their calls as a piping *pip-pip-pip-pip* varying in the number of notes and occasionally uttered at a faster pace." He remarks that the notes suggest those of the much larger Dark Pewee, but are higher in pitch.

Angehr and Dean (2010): Call a rapid series of high chirping *pip* notes [presumably *aurantiiventris* Group, no distinction made between western and eastern birds]

Ridgely and Gwynne (1989) – *berlepschi* group: Frequently gives a piping whistle, *pee-pee-pee* (up to eight notes).

Ridgely and Greenfield (2001) – *berlepschi* group: Call an often-heard fast series of *pee* or *pik* notes. Song a repeated fast phrase of high, thin notes, e.g., *tsu-tsu-tseét*, with softer notes sometimes interspersed between phrases (P. Coopmans).

Hilty and Brown (1986) – *berlepschi* group: Frequently repeats a spirited bubbly ser. of 4-7 *pee* or *pik* notes as flicks tail; call reminiscent of that of Greater Pewee but faster, weaker, and not as sharp.

Recommendation:

Mitrephanes olivaceus is already recognized as a distinct species, and we recommend no change to that classification; it is included above to allow for yardstick comparisons to the other taxa.

Within the current Tufted Flycatcher *M. phaeocercus* there are three vocal groups that match the described subspecies, show well-defined plumage breaks (as described by Webster 1968), and match well-known biogeographic regions (Mexico to Nicaragua, Costa Rica/western Panama, and eastern Panama to northwest Ecuador, west of the Andes).

The differences in vocalizations (especially contact call and dawn song) are especially striking between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, but are much more similar between central Panama and e. Panama/Colombia. A conservative option would be to recognize *M. phaeocercus* and *M. aurantiiventris*, with *berlepschi* included as a subspecies of *M. aurantiiventris*.

However, it is also clear that *aurantiiventris* and *berlepschi* show fairly strong plumage differences between central and eastern Panama and also have substantial differences in primary song and dawn song (although reduced differences in position calls relative to other taxa). For many other taxa of flycatchers, vocal differences of this magnitude would be sufficient to warrant species status, and we think that given the correlated differences in plumage, and the different elevational preferences and habitat of *berlepschi*, these should be treated as separate species as well.

Therefore, we provide two options:

OPTION A: Recognize three species:

- *Mitrephanes phaeocercus* from Mexico to n. Nicaragua
- *Mitrephanes aurantiiventris* from w. Costa Rica to central Panama
- *Mitrephanes berlepschi* from e. Panama to nw. Ecuador, west of the Andes

OPTION B: Recognize two species:

- *Mitrephanes phaeocercus* from Mexico to n. Nicaragua, including *M. p. tenuirostris* from nw. Mexico as a subspecies
- *Mitrephanes aurantiiventris,* from w. Costa Rica to n. Ecuador, including *M. p. berlepschi* from e. Panama to nw. Ecuador as a subspecies

English names:

If this proposal passes, a separate proposal may be needed to address English names. Dyer and Howell (2023) have used Mexican Tufted Flycatcher for *M. phaeocercus sensu stricto* and Costa Rican Tufted Flycatcher for *M. aurantiiventris*. Cinnamon and Tawny Tufted-Flycatcher could also be used for *M. phaeocercus s.s*. and Isthmian or Yellow-bellied Tufted-Flycatcher could be used for *M. aurantiiventris*, and Choco Tufted Flycatcher for *M. berlepschi* (if split). Habitat-based names would also be possible, with Pinewoods or Pine-forest Tufted-Flycatcher for *M. phaeocercus* and Cloud-forest Tufted-Flycatcher (with Choco Tufted-Flycatcher for *M. berlepschi*). Should the latter two not be split, many of these English name options would not be appropriate, and perhaps Northern and Southern Tufted-Flycatcher should be considered.

However, we strongly recommend adopting as a group name either Tufted Flycatcher or Tufted-Flycatcher, which would align with AviList v2025. IOC (Gill et al. 2025) and AviList have used Northern Tufted Flycatcher for *Mitrephanes phaeocercus s.l.* and Olive Tufted Flycatcher for *M. olivaceus,* whereas AOS-NACC, AOS-SACC, and BirdLife International (e.g., del Hoyo and Collar 2016) have used Tufted Flycatcher for *M. phaeocercus* and Olive Flycatcher for *Mitrephanes olivaceus*. If this proposal passes and *Mitrephanes* expands from a two-species genus to a genus with three or four species, then it would be a good time to consider whether it would be better to follow IOC and AviList and use “Tufted-Flycatcher” for all members of the genus.

Just in the New World, there are 105 species across 31 genera that bear the name of "flycatcher". For the lay birder, it certainly can be hard to keep track of which English name goes with which genus without knowing the bird very well. Only the two Royal Flycatchers have a name that helps tie them together and distinguish from the other tyrannids. If the Old World is considered, yet another 151 species across 22 additional genera are involved, although Crested

Flycatchers, Blue Flycatchers, and Jungle Flycatchers do help to orient birders toward assemblages of congeneric, or at least similar, species. While adopting Tufted Flycatcher would not solve the core problem of too many unrelated birds with the name of "flycatcher", it would help birders to orient correctly on *Mitrephanes* and to transfer familiarity more readily from one species to another.

Tufted Flycatcher is also a highly appropriate name that would be a shame to lose with this revision. While a lot of tyrannids have elongated crown feathers that can be raised as a crest, there may not be any others with such long and pointed crests as *Mitrephanes*. For a notoriously difficult-to-identify family, *Mitrephanes* is wonderfully straightforward to identify precisely because of their sharply pointed crests that are usually fully raised. We strongly feel that maintaining the most distinctive feature of the genus within the name of all its members follows best practices for naming.

As a final point, Olive Flycatcher is an extremely ambiguous and non-distinctive name for *M. olivaceus*—how many tyrannids could be described as olive? Renaming it to Olive Tufted Flycatcher or Olive Tufted-Flycatcher would be a significant improvement, as it is the only *Mitrephanes* that is aptly described as olive, but this is a matter for SACC rather than NACC.

When NACC first recognized Olive Flycatcher as distinct in 2018 (Proposal set 2018-A) six voters opted not to use a compound name Tufted-Flycatcher, most citing the fact that SACC was not doing so. Three voters felt it was important to not use something as ambiguous as Olive Flycatcher and to follow IOC in using Olive Tufted-Flycatcher. Assuming passage of this proposal, there would be 3-4 species in this genus, it feels even more important to use the compound name to tie all *Mitrephanes* together as Tufted-Flycatchers. Therefore, we recommend the use of Tufted Flycatcher or Tufted-Flycatcher for all species of *Mitrephanes.*

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Submitted by: Marshall Iliff and Pamela C. Rasmussen

Date of Proposal: 17 March 2026

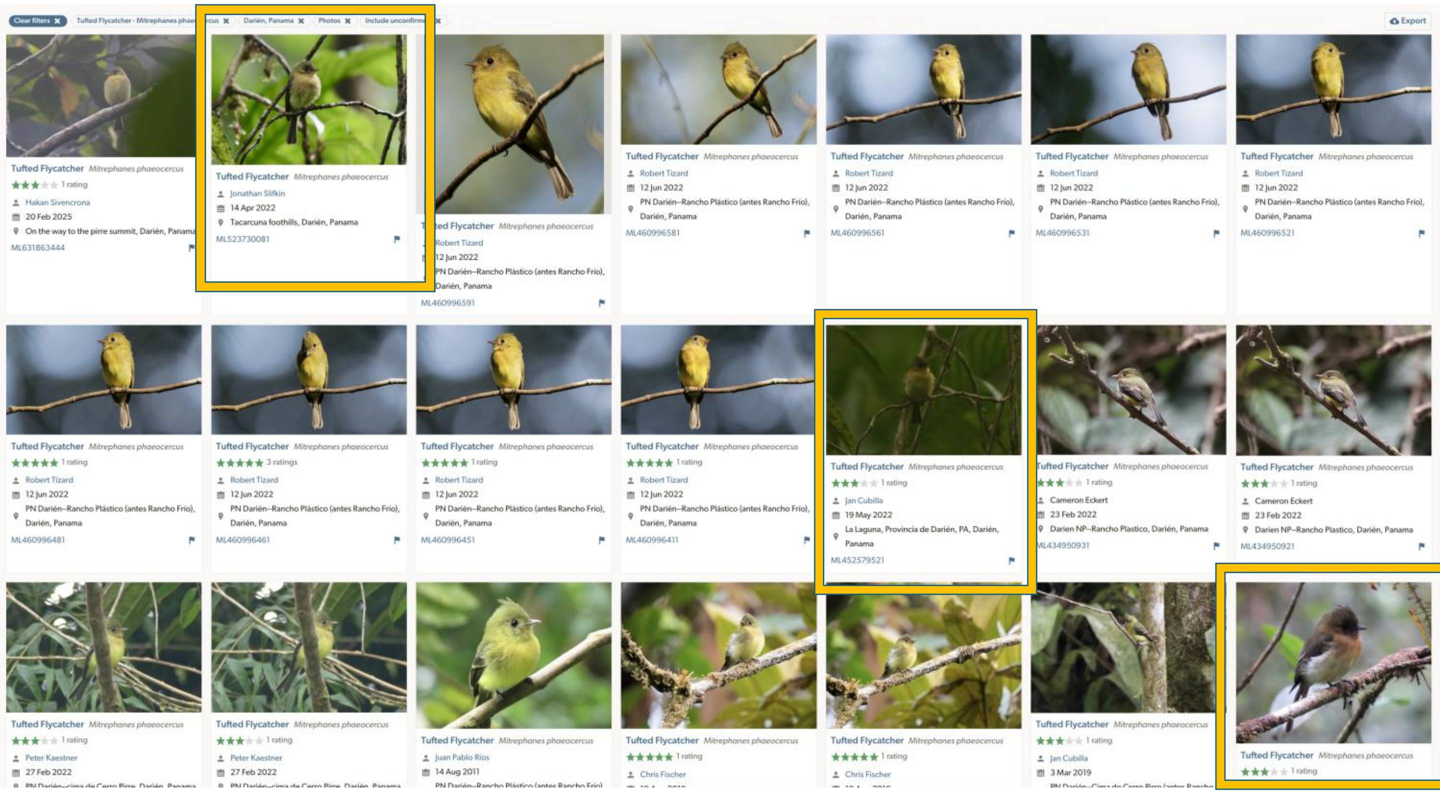
Appendix A: Media galleries

Audio Galleries:
Mexico: https://tinyurl.com/w6e5scm6
Northern Central America + Chiapas: https://tinyurl.com/4rx9evau
Costa Rica and Panama (except Darién): https://tinyurl.com/4s8mk2ur
Darién and Colombia: https://tinyurl.com/msaz8wrs

Photo Galleries:
Tufted Flycatcher (South American): https://tinyurl.com/mrhvthuz
Tufted Flycatcher (South American), Cerro Pirro area, Panama: https://tinyurl.com/34ve4jx2
Tufted Flycatcher, Tacarcuna: https://tinyurl.com/47hpzzzx
Tufted Flycatcher, El Valle: https://tinyurl.com/rdvetx5z, https://tinyurl.com/yc3hecj5, and https://tinyurl.com/mr5ks26d
Costa Rica: https://tinyurl.com/5xvjdrva

Appendix B. Undescribed taxon at Cerro Tacarcuna?

As noted by Webster (1986), birds from Cerro Pirre and Cerro Tacarcuna in Darién show plumage differences that could suggest there is an undescribed taxon on Cerro Tacarcuna.



Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★☆☆ 1 rating
Hakan Sivencrona
20 Feb 2025
On the way to the pirre summit, Darién, Panama
ML631863444

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
Jonathan Slifkin
14 Apr 2022
Tacarcuna foothills, Darién, Panama
ML523730081

…ted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
Robert Tizard
12 Jun 2022
PN Darién--Rancho Plástico (antes Rancho Frio), Darién, Panama
ML460996591

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
Robert Tizard
12 Jun 2022
PN Darién--Rancho Plástico (antes Rancho Frio), Darién, Panama
ML460996581

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
Robert Tizard
12 Jun 2022
PN Darién--Rancho Plástico (antes Rancho Frio), Darién, Panama
ML460996561

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
Robert Tizard
12 Jun 2022
PN Darién--Rancho Plástico (antes Rancho Frio), Darién, Panama
ML460996531

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
Robert Tizard
12 Jun 2022
PN Darién--Rancho Plástico (antes Rancho Frio), Darién, Panama
ML460996521

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★★★ 1 rating
Robert Tizard
12 Jun 2022
PN Darién--Rancho Plástico (antes Rancho Frio), Darién, Panama
ML460996481

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★★★ 3 ratings
Robert Tizard
12 Jun 2022
PN Darién--Rancho Plástico (antes Rancho Frio), Darién, Panama
ML460996461

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★★★ 1 rating
Robert Tizard
12 Jun 2022
PN Darién--Rancho Plástico (antes Rancho Frio), Darién, Panama
ML460996451

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★★★ 1 rating
Robert Tizard
12 Jun 2022
PN Darién--Rancho Plástico (antes Rancho Frio), Darién, Panama
ML460996411

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★☆☆ 1 rating
Jan Cubilla
19 May 2022
La Laguna, Provincia de Darién, PA, Darién, Panama
ML452579521

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★☆☆ 1 rating
Cameron Eckert
23 Feb 2022
Darien NP--Rancho Plastico, Darién, Panama
ML434950931

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★☆☆ 1 rating
Cameron Eckert
23 Feb 2022
Darien NP--Rancho Plastico, Darién, Panama
ML434950921

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★☆☆ 1 rating
Peter Kaestner
27 Feb 2022

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★☆☆ 1 rating
Peter Kaestner
27 Feb 2022

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
Juan Pablo Rios
14 Aug 2011

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★★★ 1 rating
Chris Fischer

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★★★ 1 rating
Chris Fischer

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★☆☆ 1 rating
Jan Cubilla
3 Mar 2019

Tufted Flycatcher *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
★★★☆☆ 1 rating

https://media.ebird.org/catalog?birdOnly=true&taxonCode=tuffly&regionCode=PA-5&mediaType=photo&view=grid&unconfirmed=incl

In the above image, the three images from the Cerro Tacarcuna range (outlined in orange) suggest that there are significant morphological differences between the birds in the Cerro Tacarcuna area (e.g., https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/42900761) and those from Cerro Pirre (e.g., https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/144776101), which match images of *berlepschi* well from nearby areas in Colombia. The birds from the Tacarcuna region appear to have rich cinnamon-rufous breasts, which extends to the nape, and a whitish belly, while typical *berlepschi* (and the Cerro Pirre) completely lack cinnamon or rufous tones, and instead show bright lime green bird with a yellow breast lightly washed with orange and pale yellow belly. Our suspicion is that there exists an undescribed taxon in the Tacarcuna area. The general coloration, with cinnamon breast contrasting with a paler belly best matches *aurantiiventris* (which has a yellowish belly) and we recommend provisionally treating this taxon within that species until the Tacarcuna birds can be described and their species limits assessed with vocalizations, a more detailed study of morphology, and ideally, genetics.

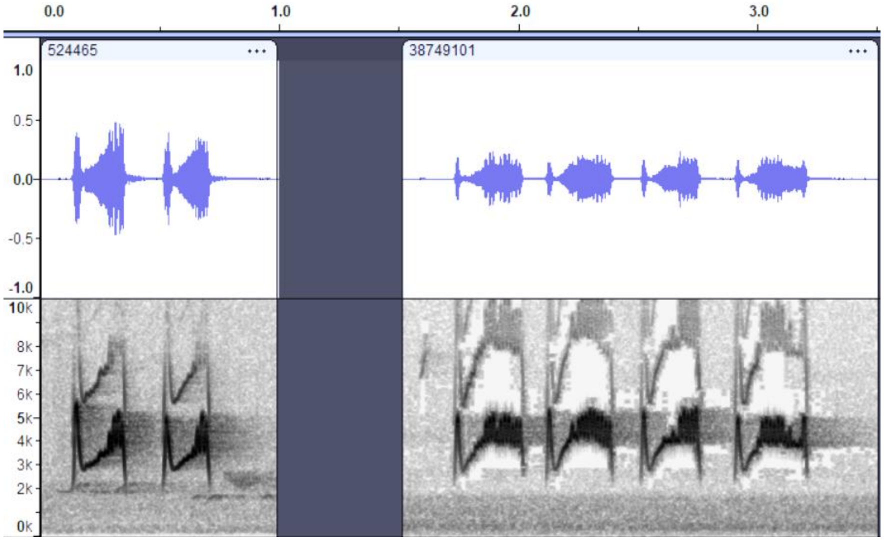
Appendix C. Detailed comparison of vocalizations

The below analysis of vocalizations (by MJI) attempts to use the context of vocalizations to cluster them in analogous groupings. Each vocalizations equates roughly with the songs vs. calls of related taxa (e.g., *Contopus*) which have high pitched simple songs, more complex dawn songs that incorporate elements of the song, and calls that often involve single or repeated *pip* calls. The set of vocalizations termed the position note match the *pip-pip-pip* calls given by Greater Pewee but seem to be given even more frequently.

When vocalizations differ significantly between taxa, I have split those as vocalization 1, 2, 3. Thus, in the example below all examples of Vocalization A are believed to be analogous contact calls. These calls are among the most commonly given, heard year-round, and all are often given immediately after birds return to perches. With the exception of A1 (*phaeocercus* Group), all have obvious audio similarities.

VOCALIZATION A1 – Position calls

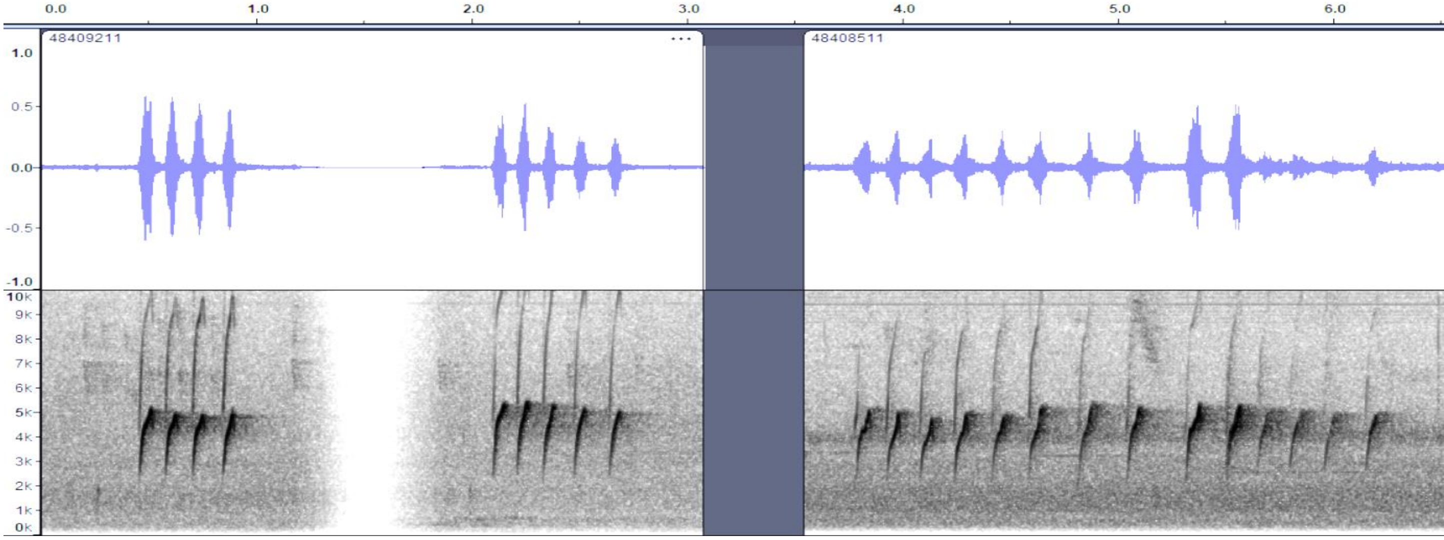
Taxa: Mexican *phaeocercus* Group
Context: position call, given commonly, especially right after landing
Description: burry, *breeep* given singly, (often) doubled, less commonly delivered 3x, 4x or 5x. Howell and Webb (1995) describe this as a "burry, bright, rolled *tchwee-tchwee* or *turree-turree*, less often a single *tchwee* or a longer series" while Howell et al. (2014) describe it as a "bright, slightly burry whistled *tch'wee-tch'wee* or *tureee-turee* call is given year-round"
Discussion: This vocalization is entirely unique within the group and greatly exceeds the vocal differences between many other flycatchers considered different species. The difference here is on par with the vocal differentiation between the *bik* and twitter calls of Couch's and Tropical Kingbirds, for example. The notes are burry, often doubled and rarely given in longer series, and completely unlike the analogous calls (repeated *pip* series) for all other taxa in the genus. It seems hard to argue that this vocalization from a member of Tyrannidae could be conspecific with *aurantiiventris* or *berlepschi*.



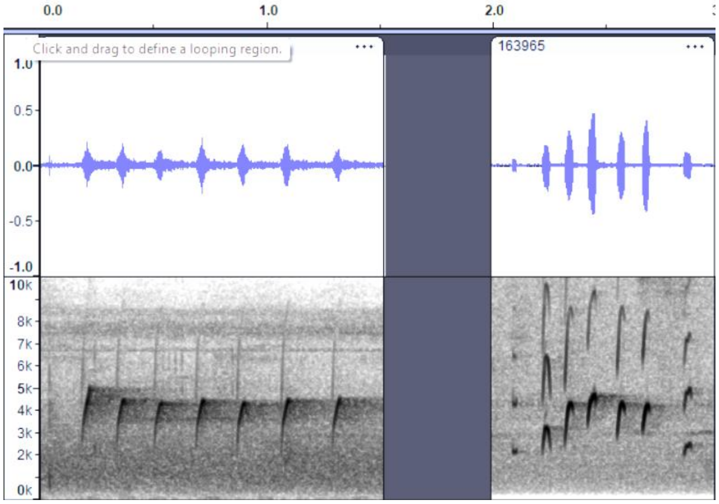
Nayarit, MX https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/524465 Nayarit, MX (delivery 3x or 4x) https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/38749101 or even 5x

https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/130035001
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/64233221
Recordings from the far south of the range of *phaeocercus* (in Nicaragua) are clearly still of this call type:
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/523408

VOCALIZATION A2 – Position calls
Taxa: *aurantiiventris*
Context: position call, given commonly, especially right after landing
Description: repeated *pip* notes, often trailing off a bit at the end (more spacing between notes, descending somewhat in pitch). Described by Wetmore (1972) for *aurantiiventris* as "Eisenmann describes their calls as a piping *pip-pip-pip-pip* varying in the number of notes and occasionally uttered at a faster pace." He remarks that the notes suggest those of the much larger Dark Pewee, but are higher in pitch." Angehr and Dean (2010) "Call a rapid series of high chirping *pip* notes" [no distinction made between western and eastern birds] and Ridgely and Gwynne (1989) say "frequently gives a piping whistle, *pee-pee-pee*… (up to eight notes)." Stiles and Skutch (1989) give the best description of vocalizations "a high-pitched, rapid series of liquid, rather confiding notes: *weet weet weet*…or *pui-pui-pui-pui-pi-pi*, often upon returning to perch. Hilty and Brown (1986) state: **"**Frequently repeats a spirited bubbly ser. of 4-7 *pee* or *pik* notes as flicks tail; call reminiscent of that of Greater Pewee but faster, weaker, and not as sharp."

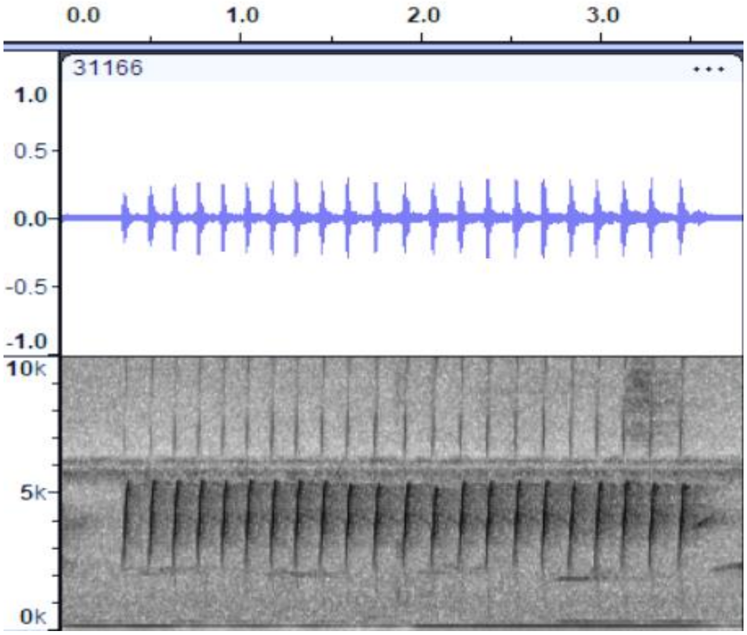


repeated 4x or 5x, https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/48409211 (Cartago, CR) or up to 14x https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/48408511 (Cartago, CR)



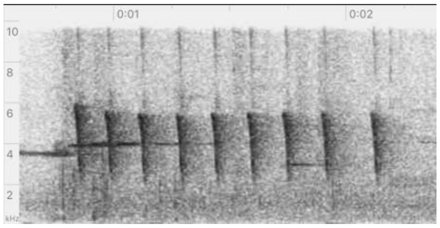
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/264163 (Valle de Cauca, CO) 7x-12;
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/163965

VOCALIZATION A3 – Position calls
Taxa: *berlepschi*
Context: position call, given commonly, especially right after landing
Description: repeated *pip* notes, often trailing off a bit at the end (more spacing between notes, descending somewhat in pitch). Described by Hilty and Brown (1986) as "frequently repeats a spirited bubbly ser. of 4-7 *pee* or *pik* notes as flicks tail; call reminiscent of that of Greater Pewee but faster, weaker, and not as sharp." [not clear what Greater Pewee vocalization is referred to here."] Ridgely and Greenfield (2001) describe as "call an often-heard fast series of *pee* or *pik* notes."
Discussion: The only vocalization from eastern Panama are Cerro Pirre recordings of this call type (A3) in Macaulay Library with up to 11 notes https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/25779, up to 22 notes (see below), and on Xeno-canto https://www.xeno-canto.org/360141 with up to 22 and 31 notes in a series. This sounds generally like *aurantiiventris*, but the number of notes in each series are markedly longer. Others also sound similar but also tend to give longer series, such as 12 notes https://www.xeno-canto.org/108571 or up to 24 notes https://www.xeno-canto.org/85120. This distinction seems to be enough to potentially consider this vocalization to be different, although the quality of the *pip* notes is quite similar.



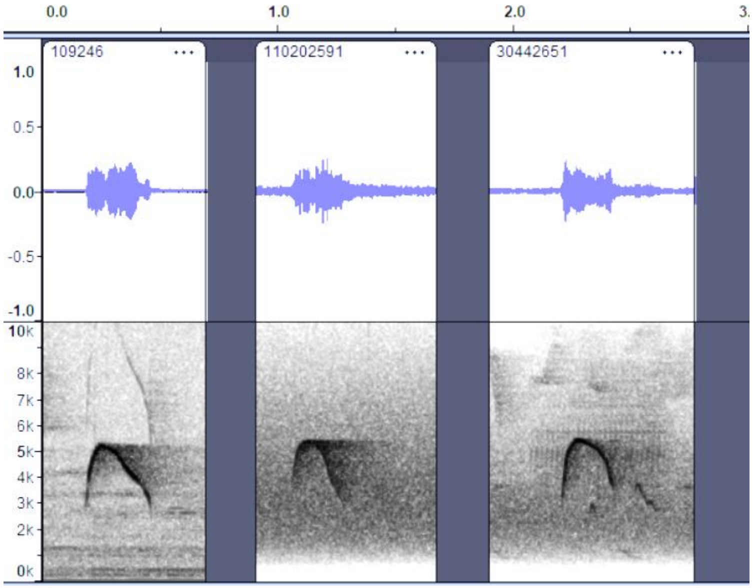
Cerro Pirre, Panama https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/31166

VOCALIZATION A4 – Position calls
Taxa: *olivaceus*
Context: position call, given commonly, especially right after landing
Description: repeated *tup* notes, often trailing off a bit at the end (more spacing between notes, descending somewhat in pitch)
The quality of these notes is markedly different from examples in Vocalization A2, with each note more like a *chup* or *tup* than a *pip* or *peep*. These differences seem to equate to species-level differences in vocalizations.



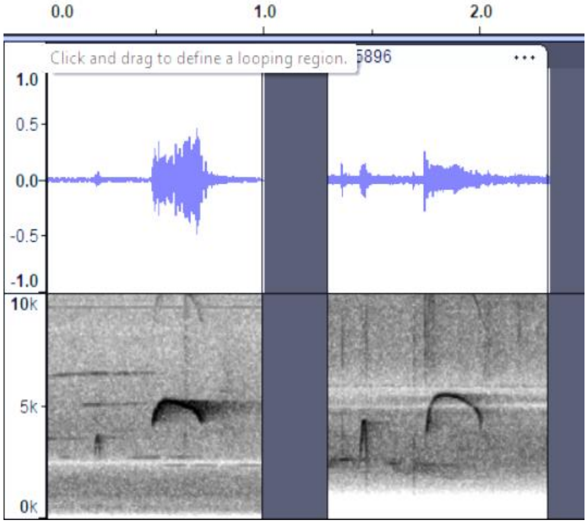
olivaceus, Peru https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/519282

VOCALIZATION B1 – primary song
Taxa: *phaeocercus* Group
Context: Primary song
Description: Clear, high-pitched whistled song, vaguely recalling some *Contopus* (e.g., Tropical Pewee (Tumbes) *Contopus cinereus punensis*) (MJI). Howell and Webb (1995) describe a bright, slightly emphatic *seeeu* or *pseeeu*, repeated every few s and mainly in breeding season.
Discussion: This high, whistled note appears to be the song and this is quite similar to the songs of several pewees. There appear to be subtle but noticeable differences between all four groups, so these are separated here.



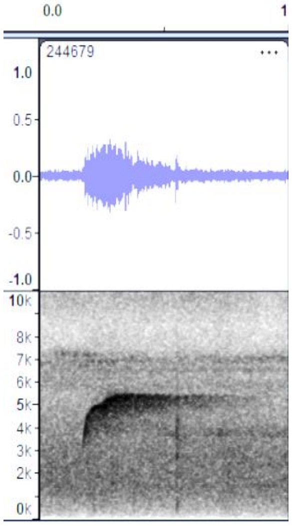
Sinaloa, Mexico https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/109246; Chiapas, Mexico https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/110202591; Quetzaltenango, Guatemala https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/30442651

VOCALIZATION B2 – primary song
Taxa: *aurantiiventris*
Context: Primary song
Description: Clear, high-pitched whistled song, vaguely recalling some *Contopus* (e.g., Tropical Pewee (Tumbes) *Contopus cinereus punensis*) (MJI). Stiles and Skutch (1989) describe "a thin *seer* or *peew*, especially in breeding season"
Discussion: This high, whistled note appears to be the song and this is quite similar to the songs of several pewees. There appear to be subtle but noticeable differences between all four groups, so these are separated here. In addition to the obvious differences in the shape of the sonogram, Mexican birds sound more like a *peaaar* vs. Costa Rican *wheeeerr*.



Cartago, Costa Rica, https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/48408511; Heredia, CR https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/165896

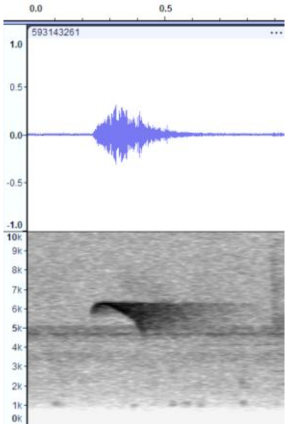
VOCALIZATION B3 – primary song
Taxa: *berlepschi*
Context: Primary song
Description: Clear, high-pitched whistled song, vaguely recalling some *Contopus* (e.g., Tropical Pewee (Tumbes) *Contopus cinereus punensis*) (MJI).
Discussion: This high, whistled note appears to be the song and this is quite similar to the songs of several pewees. There appear to be subtle but noticeable differences between all four groups, so these are separated here. In addition to the obvious differences in the shape of the sonogram, the song of South American birds sounds like *Sweet!* as compared to *peaaar* or *wheeeerr*, for Mexican or Costa Rican birds. It is too bad that we don't have a comparable example of this from eastern Panama.



Esmeraldas, Ecuador https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/244679

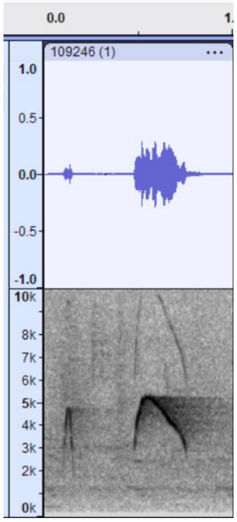
VOCALIZATION B4 – primary song
Taxa: *olivaceus*
Context: Primary song
Description: Clear, high-pitched whistled song, descending more than in other taxa and thus quite different.
Discussion: Species-specific and quite distinct high song.

High *sieeuu* song: Bolivia https://www.xeno-canto.org/44221



olivaceus, San Martín, Peru https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/593143261

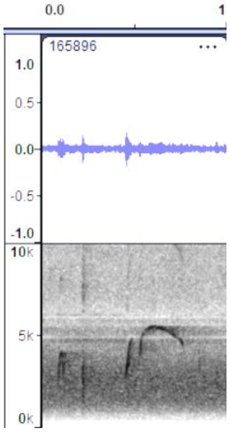
VOCALIZATION C1
Taxa: *phaeocercus* Group
Context: Alternate song; *pip-weet* song
Description: Similar to the high, whistled note but with introductory pip notes. This is sort of a combination of vocalization A (introductory notes) and vocalization B (primary song). It may serve as a dawn song or a variation on the primary song; note however that a more complex dawn song is clear in some other examples (see Vocalization D below). Stiles and Skutch (1989) describe *peew-peew* or *peep-wit wit*, although it is not clear that this is the same vocalization in examples below.
Discussion: I found no good examples that equate to *berlepschi* or *olivaceus*, but this taxon does seem to occasionally add a pip note before the song in a semi-structured way. Here is one example:



Sinaloa, Mexico https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/109246

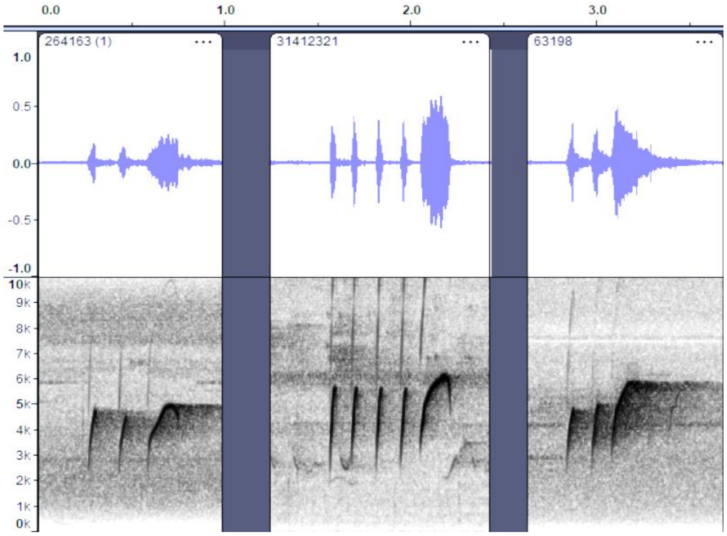
VOCALIZATION C2
Taxa: *aurantiiventris*
Context: Alternate song; *pip-weet* song

Description: Similar to the high, whistled note but with introductory pip notes. This is sort of a combination of vocalization A (introductory notes) and vocalization B (primary song). It may serve as a dawn song or a variation on the primary song; note however that a more complex dawn song is clear in some other examples (see Vocalization D below). Stiles and Skutch (1989) describe *peew-peew* or *peep-wit wit*, although it is not clear that this is the same vocalization in examples below.
Discussion: In *aurantiiventris*, this may or may not equate to the examples for *berlepschi* and *olivaceus* below, which seem like more structured, more regular, and probably more commonly given vocalizations. Still, the short pip notes before the song so match the general structure of the examples C3 and C4.



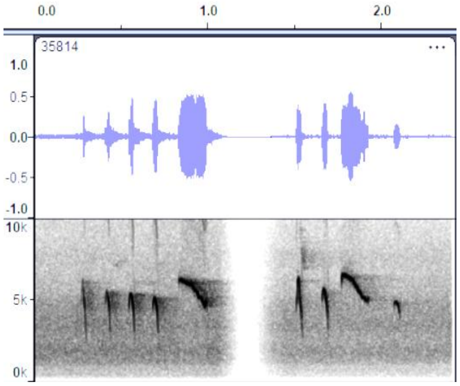
Heredia, Costa Rica https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/165896

VOCALIZATION C3
Taxa: *berlepschi*
Context: Alternate song; *pip-weet* song
Description: Similar to the high, whistled song but with introductory pip notes. This is sort of a combination of vocalization A (introductory notes) and vocalization B (primary song). It may serve as a dawn song or a variation on the primary song; note however that a more complex dawn song is clear in some other examples (see Vocalization D below). Ridgely and Greenfield (2001) describe “song a repeated fast phrase of high, thin notes, e.g., *tsu-tsu-tseét*, with softer notes sometimes interspersed between phrases (P. Coopmans).”
Discussion: In *berlepschi*, this seems like a well-structured and very intentional song. It is not totally clear how its significance differs from vocalization B3 and is perhaps just a variation.



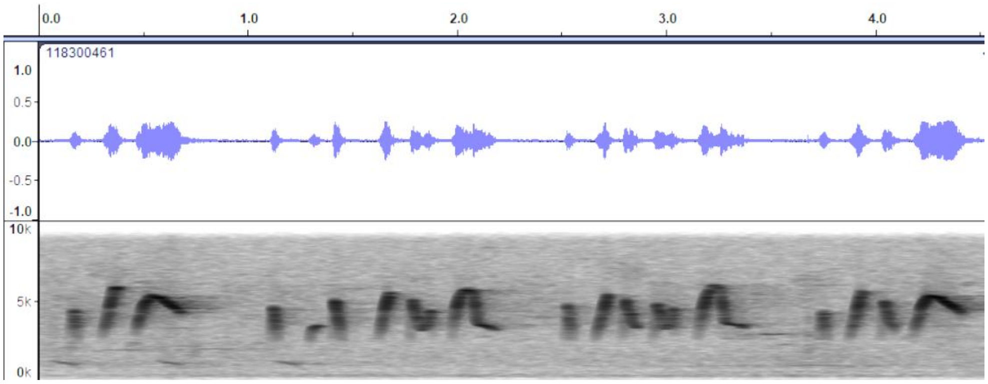
Valle de Cauca, Colombia https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/264163; Esmeraldas, Ecuador https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/31412321; Esmeraldas, Ecuador https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/63198

VOCALIZATION C4
Taxa: *olivaceus*
Context: Alternate song; *pip-weet* song



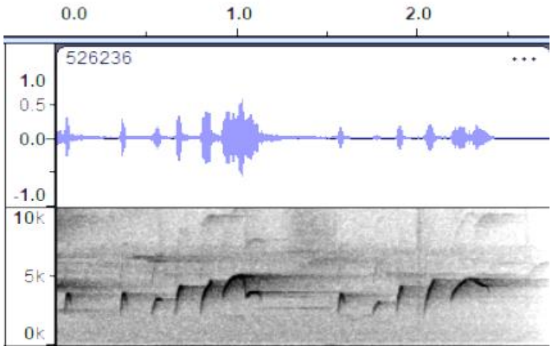
Peru, https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/35814 (both)

VOCALIZATION D1
Taxa: *phaeocercus* Group
Context: Dawn song
Description: *pit-whit-ooh-wheer… pit-whit-ooh-whit-wheer… pit-whit-ooh-wheer*
Notes: Quite similar to Costa Rica recording, with some minor differences in the shape of the notes and delivery.



Sololá, Guatemala https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/118300461

VOCALIZATION D2
Taxa: *aurantiiventris*
Context: Dawn song
Description: *pip-pip-pip-pip-pip-pip-WHEEooo pip-pip-pip-pip-wheEEE*
Notes: Markedly slower delivery in Costa Rican birds compared to Colombia recording. Stiles and Skutch (1989) describe quaint, prolonged dawn song a very rapid series of high, thin notes: *bip-bip-bip-dididi-up-bip-bip-bibibiseer*



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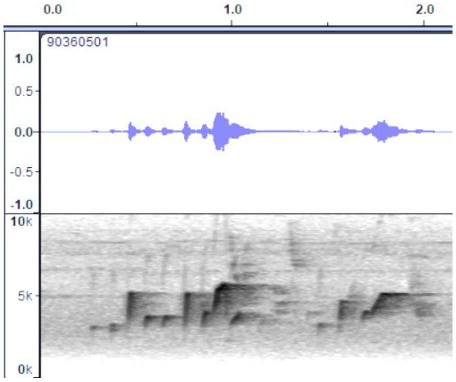
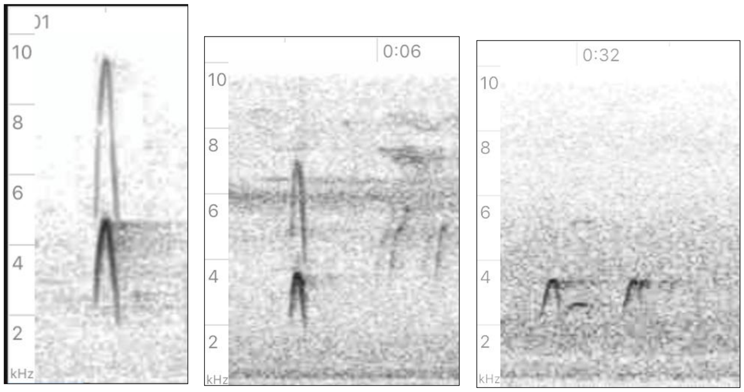
VOCALIZATION D3
Taxa: *berlepschi*
Context: Dawn song
Description: *pi-pit pi-pi-pit pi-wheoo….pi-pit wheer…*



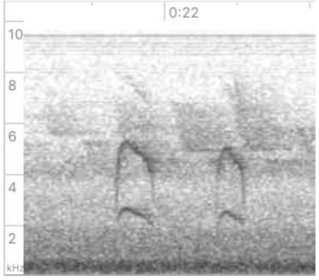
Valle de Cauca, Colombia https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/90360501

VOCALIZATION E
Taxa: all subspecies groups (except no examples found for *berlepschi*)
Context: short contact call
Description: Short, abrupt "*pip*", recalling Alder Flycatcher *Empidonax alnorum* (MJI). Howell and Webb (1995): a sharp, usually quiet *pic* or *beek*, suggesting Hammond's Flycatcher



Left: *phaeocercus* Group, https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/524464 (Sinaloa, MX). Multiple examples on this cut vary in strength and are sometimes given in advance of Vocalization D (see below). See also https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/216981; center: *aurantiiventris*, https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/72888 (Costa Rica); right: *olivaceus*, https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/35814 (Peru).
Probably sounds fuller and lower in *olivaceus* and maybe diagnosably different from the other taxa. I did not find examples for *berlepschi*, so it is unclear if they have a similar note, but it seems likely. A single note given in https://xeno-canto.org/85120 at 0:11 is likely analogous to this note. Given that the strength and stridency of this note varies according to how excited the individual is, I did not detect obvious differences between the taxa in this note. They may exist, but it would require a larger sample to confirm this. To my ear, in the examples I heard, this note seems similar across the genus, even between the two taxa currently treated as separate species (*phaeocercus sensu lato* and *olivaceus*).

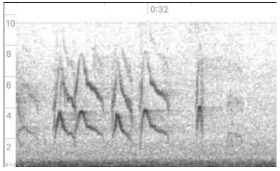
VOCALIZATION F
Taxa: Costa Rican *aurantiiventris* only [likely all?]
Context: aggression calls
Description: *kew…kew*



https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/48408511

VOCALIZATION G
Taxa: Costa Rican *aurantiiventris* only [likely all?]

Context: aggression calls
Description: *kew…kew*



note "*pip*" at end
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/48409211

Subsume *Leiothlypis* into *Oreothlypis*

Effect on the NACC:

If this proposal passes, the genus *Leiothlypis* would no longer be recognized, and all its species would instead be placed in the genus *Oreothlypis*.

Background:

Species from both *Leiothlypis* and *Oreothlypis* were historically recognized as part of the genus *Vermivora*, comprising nine species. However, a taxonomic revision by Sangster (2008), based on molecular phylogenies (Avise et al. 2008; Klein et al. 2004; Lovette & Hochachka 2006), demonstrated that the genus was polyphyletic. This revision resulted in the recognition of three genera: *Vermivora* was retained for the three colorful North American species; *Oreothlypis*—originally described by Ridgway (1884)—was revived for the two bright Central American species; and a new genus, *Leiothlypis*, was proposed for the remaining, more plain North American species.

The genera *Oreothlypis* and *Leiothlypis* are sister taxa and could be merged into a single clade; however, Sangster (2008) maintained them as separate based on differences in song structure and plumage pattern. An alternative classification proposed by Lovette et al. (2010) also recognized these two clades but favored combining them into a single, well-supported genus, *Oreothlypis*.

Several proposals concerning this group were submitted to the NACC. The committee initially voted to recognize *Oreothlypis* (2009-B-04) but rejected *Leiothlypis* (2009-B-03; 7–3 vote). Consequently, the 51st Supplement to the AOU Checklist (AOU 2010) treated all eight species within *Oreothlypis*. More recently, however, the AOS adopted *Leiothlypis* (2019-B-02; 6–2 vote), following Sangster's (2008) rationale and citing the deep divergence reported by Lovette et al. (2010), in part to align with other taxonomic authorities (e.g., SACC and Clements).

New Information:

Zhao et al. (2025) used a genomic approach (UCEs and mitogenomes) to reconstruct evolutionary relationships among New World warblers. The resulting topology is consistent with the phylogenetic hypothesis of Lovette et al. (2010), in which *Oreothlypis* and *Leiothlypis* are reciprocally monophyletic sister taxa with full node support (Figure 1). Based on the UCE data, the authors noted that:

> "given that the internal branch between *L. peregrina* and other *Leiothlypis* was very similar in length to the internal branch connecting *Oreothlypis* spp. and the most recent common ancestor (MRCA) of Clade IV […], it is reasonable to simplify the taxonomy and subsume *Leiothlypis* Sangster, 2008 in *Oreothlypis* Ridgway, 1884, although continued treatment as two separate genera is also valid."

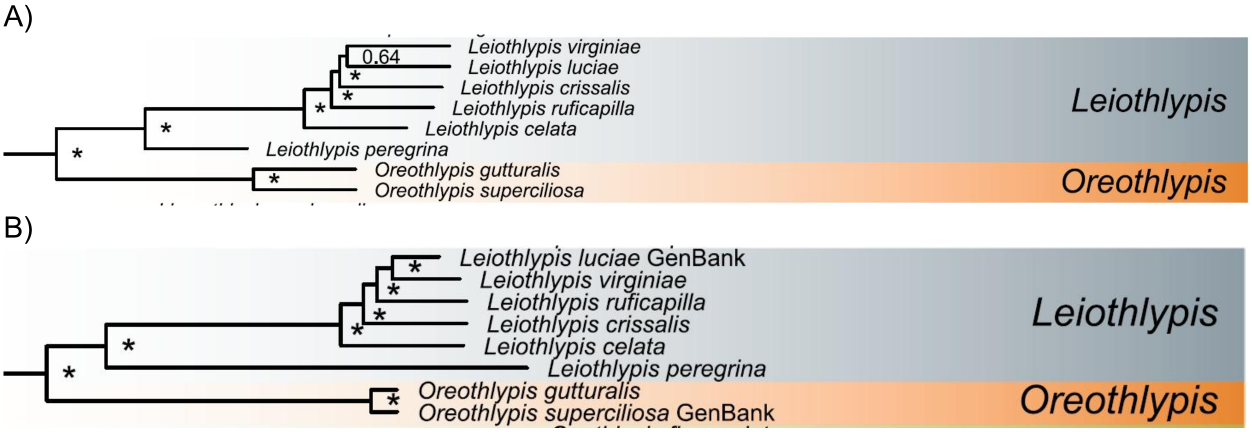


Figure 1. Fragments from the phylogenies from Zhao et al. (2025): analysis from A) weighted ASTRAL tree based on gene trees from Ultra-Conserved Elements. B) Mitogenomes. Asterisks depict full node support.

Recommendation:

I recommend voting **NO** on subsuming *Leiothlypis* into *Oreothlypis*. *Oreothlypis* remains a clearly recognizable clade that is distinct in plumage pattern, migratory behavior, song structure, and biogeographic distribution, and shows substantial genomic divergence relative to other *Leiothlypis* species. Current phylogenomic evidence supports both taxonomic treatments but does not provide compelling justification for altering the existing classification. Reverting to a single genus would therefore introduce unnecessary taxonomic instability.

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Submitted By: Diego Ocampo

Date of Proposal: 17 March 2026

Treat Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae* as two species

Effect on NACC:

If both parts a and b of this proposal pass, then *Pterodroma deserta* [Matthews, 1934. Bull. Brit. Orn. Club 54:179—Deserta Islands] would be split from and replace *P. feae* on the NACC checklist with subsequent changes in the geographic distribution and inclusion of a note on this split.

Background:

The three taxa of Macaronesian *Pterodroma* (*maderia*, *feae*, and *deserta*) were long considered conspecific with southern hemisphere breeding Soft-plumaged Petrel *P. mollis*; however, following Bourne (1983) *maderia* and *feae*/*deserta* were split from *mollis*, which is not closely related to *maderia/feae/deserta* (Jesus et al. 2009). For a detailed history of the complex see Zino, et al. (2008). Although *madeira* and *feae* have been widely recognized, *deserta* was considered a junior synonym of *feae* as recently as 1992 (Carboneras 1992). With studies on vocalizations and genetics there has been an increase in interest in these two with a trend towards considering them separate species.

New Information:

Recently the WGAC/AviList voted (6-1) to split the two based largely on different timing of breeding, vocalizations, and genetics.

Range and timing of breeding:

The two differ in breeding location and timing with temperate *deserta* breeding only on Bugio Island of the Deserta Island chain, which is off the island of Madeira where *P. madeira* breeds. Egg laying for *deserta* begins in July with fledging in December (Ventura et al. 2025). Tropical breeding *feae* breeds on at least four islands in the Cape Verde Islands (and as such has a larger population size) and lays eggs in January with fledging in late May/June (Militão et al. 2025). As a comparison, the already split *P. madeira* lays eggs in late May/June with fledging in September/October (Carboneras et al. 2020). The breeding range of *deserta* is far closer to *P. madeira*, being only ~30km apart as opposed to *feae* which breeds ~1800km away. Individual *deserta*/*feae*, likely *deserta* (Robb and Mullarney 2008), have been found visiting burrows in the Azores (Monteiro et al. 1999), and a calling *deserta*/*feae*/*madeira* has been recorded from the Selvagens, ~230km south of Madeira. Given the difficulties of at-sea identification the full extent of their ranges at sea is currently unknown. However recent tracking studies have started to elucidate differences between the two, with *deserta* occurring more widely in the Atlantic Ocean (Fig. 1). From tracking data, *deserta* occurred around the breeding grounds during the breeding season but also used a large area between the Canary and Azores Islands. During the non-breeding season individuals were found in four main areas: the Gulf Stream off the United States, around the Cape Verde Islands, and in the northern and southern Brazilian Current (Ramírez et al. 2013; Ramos et al. 2016, Ramos et al. 2017). That some spend their nonbreeding season around the Cape Verde Islands is significant as this overlaps with breeding *feae*. In contrast, tracking indicated that *feae* was resident around the Cape Verde Islands, although it has been tracked as far as off Madeira Island and the Deserta Island chain. Average movement away from colonies was 682 km for *feae* compared to 5136 km for *deserta* (Ramos et al. 2017). Although both taxa have been proposed to occur in the Gulf Stream off North America based on flight feather molt (Howell 2012), only *deserta* has been confirmed in North American waters via tracking (Ramírez et al. 2013; Ramos et al. 2016). Nothing is known about the at-sea ranges of immatures. Although all three Macaronesian petrels overlap at sea, including around each other's breeding islands, and there are records of likely *deserta* visiting potential nesting sites on other islands, there are no records of each taxa visiting the other taxa's colonies (Jesus et al. 2009).

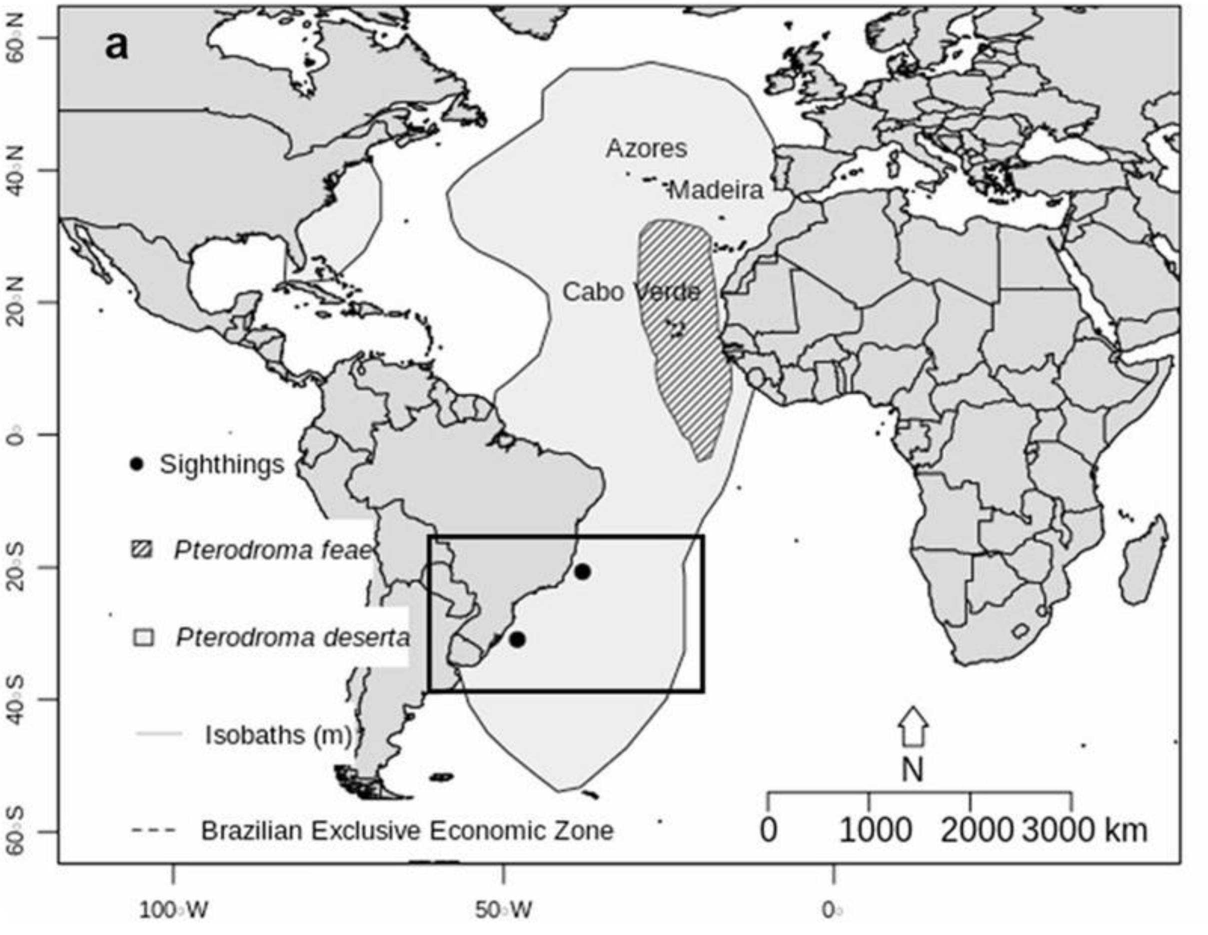

Figure 1: Year round ranges of *deserta* and *feae*, from Brusco et al., (2021).

Although this is the current range of this complex, the genus *Pterodroma* within the past 1000 years was far more widespread in the northeastern Atlantic, with bones believed to be from individuals in this complex found across northern Europe (Robb and Mullarney 2008), and the genus, including an extinct species *Pterodroma zinorum* (Rando et al. 2024), formerly occupied at least 16 islands in Macaronesia. Several islands in the Azores and islands around Madeira both had at least two species of *Pterodroma* breeding on them (Rando et al. 2024) and the

Azores have had records of the western Atlantic of *P. cahow* and *P. hasitata* (Robb and Mullarney, 2008). Furthermore, an extinct species, *P. rupinarum*, from St. Helena Island in the South Atlantic, is apparently a part of this complex. This gives a more complicated picture of the history of this complex than what we now see.

Morphology:

The three Macaronesian *Pterodroma* taxa are all very similar in plumage and, though most individuals can be identified to taxon by a PCA using morphometrics, there is some overlap between *feae* and *deserta* (Bretagnolle 1995). There is also a statistically significant difference in bill size and tarsus length between *deserta* and *feae*, but the two still overlap extensively (Jesus et al. 2009). Although on average *deserta* has more white in the underwing coverts, there is extensive overlap such that this character alone cannot be used to identify an individual, and other proposed characteristics have even more overlap (Flood and Fisher 2013). As such, on current knowledge only large male *deserta* are identifiable at sea.

Genetics:

The three Macaronesian taxa form a clade with other north Atlantic breeding *P. cahow* and *P. hasitata* (Figure 2; Jesus et al. 2009; Welch et al. 2014). All three are recently diverged with a difference of 1.58% between *deserta* and *feae* and 2.3-2.4% between *deserta*/*feae* and *P. maderia* in cyt-b (Jesus et al. 2009). Although these divergences are relatively low, they are in line with those of some other *Pterodroma* species (e.g., *P. lessoni* and *P. macroptera*/*gouldi*, 1.2% and *P. lesson* and *P.* magenta, 1.7%). Although Jesus et al., (2009) suggested that *deserta* and *feae* diverged 1.75 million years ago, Gangloff et al. (2012), using both mtDNA and nuclear DNA genes, found divergence between the three extant Macaronesian petrels to be around 150,000 years ago. Gangloff et al. (2012) used two mtDNA markers (cyt-b and CO1) and three nuclear markers (bFibint7, CSDE1, and PAXIP1), and with the mtDNA they found population structure within their haplotype networks, whereas no structure was found in the nuclear makers (Fig 3). They considered this to be because of incomplete lineage sorting, a pattern also found in the "Dark-rumped" (*sandwichensis*/*phaeopygia*) Petrel complex (Welch et al. 2011), although the split between that pair is older. Dispersal in *Pterodroma* is largely female-based rather than male-based, making a stronger case for incomplete lineage sorting. In a test for Isolation with Migration the posterior distributions of migration parameters all peaked at zero, indicating that the three petrel populations differentiated without gene flow. Gangloff et al. (2012) estimated the split between *feae* and *deserta* to be around 32,000 years ago (Figure 4). Using cyt-b for a study on the taxonomic placement of the extinct *P. rupinarum* (bones of which are distinctive enough to have previously been hypothesised to be a *Pseudobulweria*), Welch et al., (2014) found *rupinarum* to be sister to *feae* with a 1.1% pairwise genetic distance and the two in turn to be sister to *deserta* with a 1.8% pairwise genetic distance. Their results indicated that cyt-b diverged between *feae* and *rupinarum* approximately 260,000 years ago. The results from these three papers give different stories in terms of divergence times but do all share the same topology.

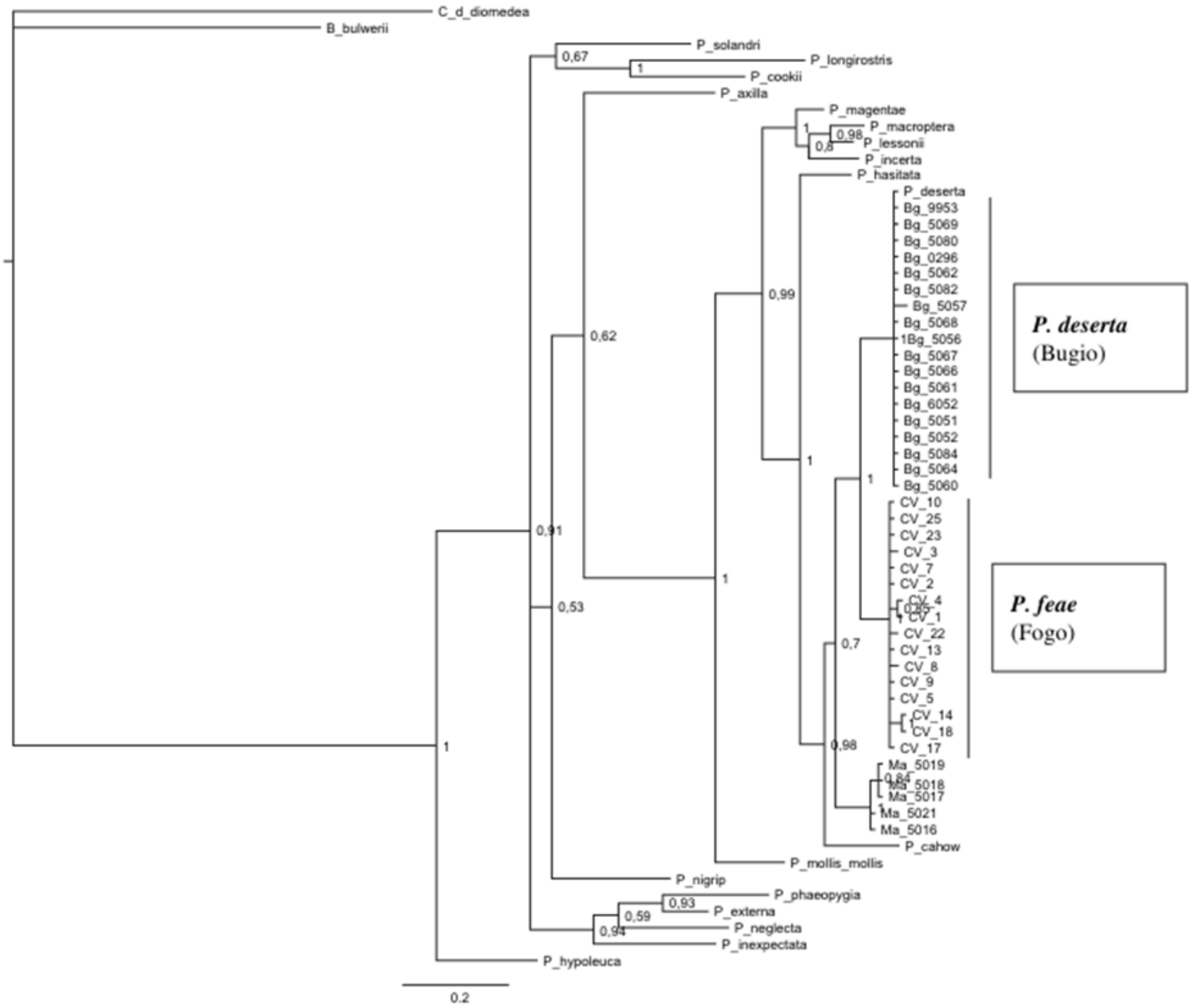

Figure 2. Tree derived from Bayesian analysis of cytochrome b fragment, using a GTR1G1I approximation (from Jesus et al. 2009).

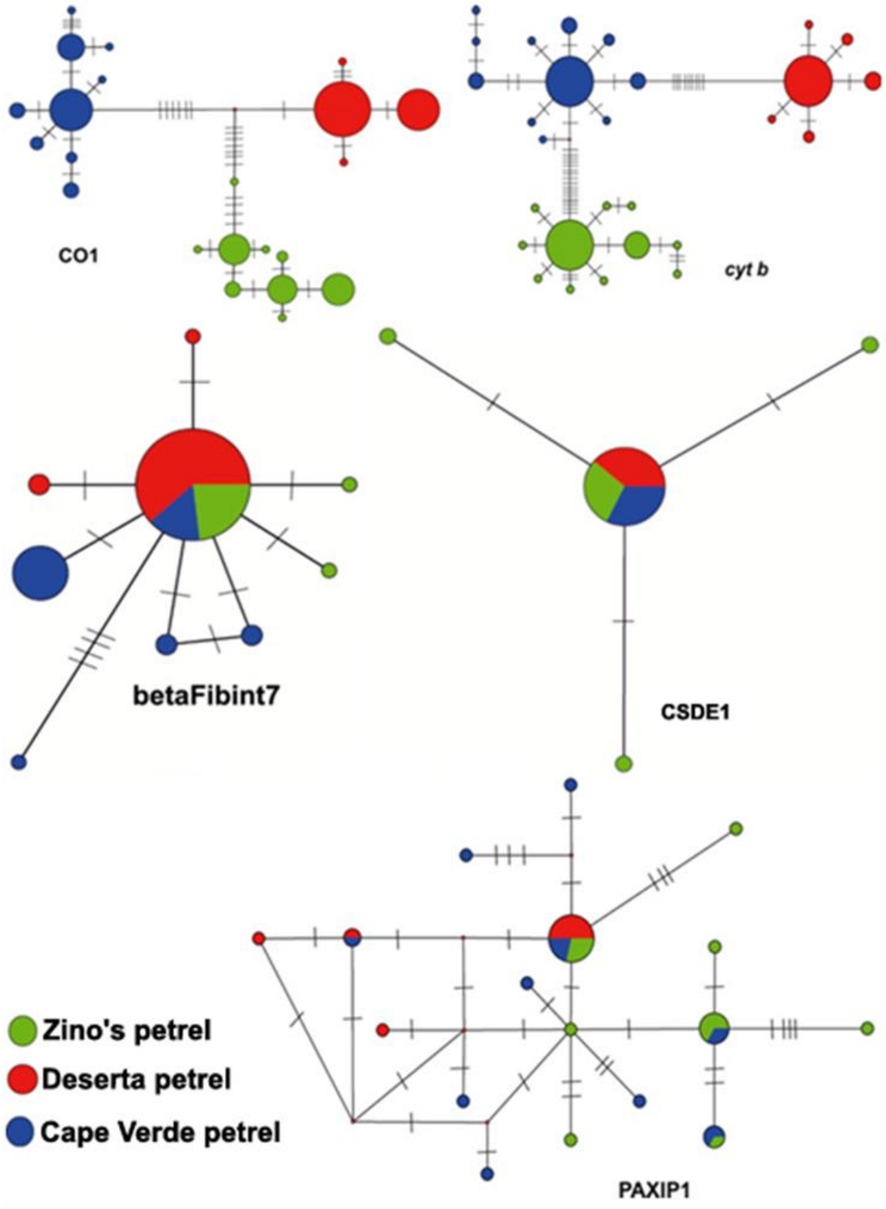

Figure 3: Haplotype networks obtained with CO1, cytb, PAXIP1, bFibint7 and CSDE1 loci with Macaronesian *Pterodroma* petrels. Size of circles is proportional to the number of individuals possessing this haplotype (from Gangloff et al. 2012).

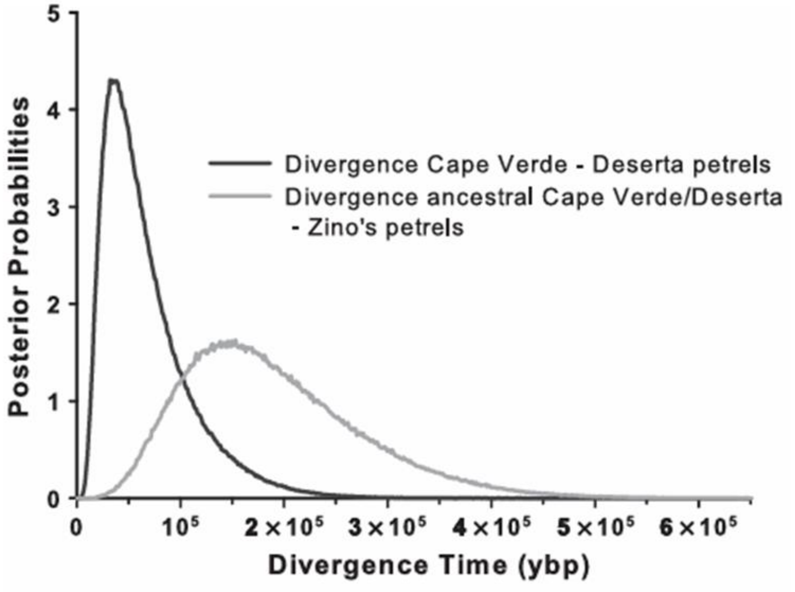

Fig 4: Population divergence time estimation under IM model with IMa2 for the three populations of Macaronesian petrels (from Gangloff et al. 2012).

Vocalizations:

All of the extant north Atlantic petrels of the genus *Pterodroma* share a similar "moaning" call as their primary song with the three Macaronesian taxa having a "high" and a "low" moan likely representing males and females (Robb et al. 2008). The three Macaronesian taxa are especially close, although *feae* and *P. madeira* are more similar whereas *deserta* is slightly more similar to *P. cahow* (Robb and Mullarney, 2008). Earlier analyses which lacked recordings of *feae* were unable to distinguish *madeira* from *deserta* (Bretagnolle, 1995). Alhough there are not a lot of recordings of *deserta*/*feae* available online (I wasn't able to access The Sound Approach's online recordings) sample recordings can be found below, along with a recording of *P. cahow*. Compared to *feae*/*madeira*, *deserta* commonly has a distinctive rapidly rising "wik" call at the end and a small drop in pitch over the main part of the call (Robb and Mullarney, 2008), and differs more in fundamental frequency than the other two taxa (Robb and Mullarney, 2008).

cahow (many recordings online): https://xeno-canto.org/738388
madeira (many recordings online): https://xeno-canto.org/806563
feae: https://xeno-canto.org/718734
deserta: https://xeno-canto.org/508124

English Names:

Because Fea's Petrel has long been used for the combined *feae*/*deserta*, new names are recommended for each taxon. Recently both have proposed names after their respective breeding ranges that have become widely established with Desertas Petrel for *deserta* and

Cape Verde Petrel for *feae* and I recommend these names should the committee accept this proposal.

Recommendation:
Though this is a borderline case with the two being very similar morphologically, the two do differ in timing of breeding, slightly in vocalizations, and in genetics, with no indication of hybridization (per banding on Bugio and the IM model). As the two both breed and largely occur outside of our area and have been split by world authorities, I recommend a YES vote on this proposal.

Both taxa may occur in North American waters but based on current knowledge only *P. deserta* has been accepted by the American Birding Association as occurring in the United States and Canada. The ABA checklist follows both the NACC and AviList separately. Should this proposal pass I recommend only including *P. deserta* on the NACC list until there is an accepted record of *P. feae*.

Thus I recommend

a. Yes to accept *P. deserta* as a separate species from *P. feae*
b. Yes to replace *P. feae* with *P. deserta* on the NACC list.

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Submitted By: David Vander Pluym, Louisiana State University, Museum of Natural Science

Date of Proposal: 26 March 2026

Treat Yellow Warbler *Setophaga aestiva* as two species

To say the *Setophaga petechia* complex has had a complicated history is an understatement. With upwards of 43 taxa variously spread across up to seven species (e.g., Ridgway 1902), the complex is more typically arranged into three primary taxonomic groups (which have sometimes been treated as three separate species) that are defined largely by plumage, as well as migratory behavior and in some cases vocal differences, with the migratory northern birds belonging to one group ("Northern" *aestiva*), the tropical sedentary red-headed birds belonging to another group ("Mangrove" *erithachorides*), and the tropical red-capped birds belonging to the final group ("Golden" *petechia*) (e.g., AOU 1931, Hilty 2003, Dickinson and Christidis 2014, Clements et al. 2024).

Morphology:

Largely following Hellmayr (1935) and Aldrich (1942), most taxonomic authorities began treating the *Setophaga petechia* complex as a single species, a treatment that has largely been maintained until the current time (e.g., AOS 1957, Dunn and Garrett 1997, Dickinson and Christidis 2014, Chesser et al. 2018, Clements et al. 2024). Both Hellmayr (1935) and Aldrich (1942) recognized two species, but their arguments for lumping two groups together eventually led to all three being lumped, as they included different sets of taxa together in their two-species treatments. For example, Hellmayr (1935) grouped all of the tropical sedentary taxa together into one species, largely based on their "more rounded wing, shorter wing tip, and proportionately longer tail, although he acknowledged that these traits may just be due to their sedentary behavior, and that grouping all taxa together (including the northern migratory taxa) into a single species may be the best approach. Aldrich (1942), on the other hand, argued that the Golden *petechia* group largely occurring in the Caribbean and the Northern *aestiva* group should be considered conspecific, while Mangrove *erithachorides* should be considered separate. Supporting his arrangement, Aldrich (1942) argued that many characters that supposedly separate *aestiva* from *petechia* in fact intergrade substantially: 1) populations of *petechia* nearest to *aestiva* lack a chestnut crown patch, while some individuals of *aestiva* may show chestnut on the crown, 2) habitat differences are not consistent, with many *petechia* populations nesting away from mangroves, 3) bill and foot size differences show more of a continuum, with interior Mexico subspecies being intermediate between "Golden" and more typical "Northern" birds, 4) the "primary formula" shows intermediates, with southern populations of *aestiva* having variable primary formulas, intermediate between *petechia* and northern populations of *aestiva*; typical *petechia* populations show a primary formula where p9 is smaller than p6, while typical *aestiva* populations have a primary formula where p9 is larger than p6. Aldrich (1942) also pointed out that the members of the *petechia* group that are most similar to the *aestiva* group are those that are geographically closest, namely *gundlachi* of Cuba and *flaviceps* of the Bahamas. Interestingly, one of the reasons Aldrich (1942) decided not to lump the *erithachorides* group with the *petechia* group is the presence on Martinique of an isolated population of chestnut-headed birds that do not appear to intergrade with *petechia* birds on other nearby islands. Hellmayr (1935) pointed out that *ruficapilla* of Martinique is most similar in mensural characters to adjacent chestnut-capped populations, rather than to the larger mainland birds of the *erithachorides* group, thus lending credence to *ruficapilla* being an independent gain of the chestnut-headed phenotype. Likewise, *aureola* of the Galapagos Islands shows the chestnut-capped phenotype typical of the *petechia* group, despite being geographically closest to the chestnut-headed *erithachorides* taxa on the Central and South American mainland.

Although Hellmayr (1935) and Aldrich (1942) found evidence that morphological differences between groups were not consistent, Wiedenfeld (1991) and Luther and Greenberg (2014) found important differences between tropical sedentary populations and temperate migratory populations. Wiedenfeld (1991) found that tropical taxa were larger (overall body size) than temperate taxa, with an overall trend across both groups of increasing size from north to south (although *gundlachi* in the Florida Keys were found to be the largest across both groups); bill width showed a similar pattern. Temperate populations generally had shorter tarsi than tropical groups (with some variation). Like Aldrich (1942), Wiedenfeld (1991) found conflicting measurements related to primary formula, with the longest p9 measurements coming from birds near the Equator and Mexico, although proportional to body size, the longest winged birds were in the far north, whereas the shortest winged birds were in the south (strong correlation with migratory behavior). However, Wiedenfeld did find sharp breaks in most morphometric variables that correspond to the proposed species boundaries (see figure below, and other figures in the original paper: https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1368203)

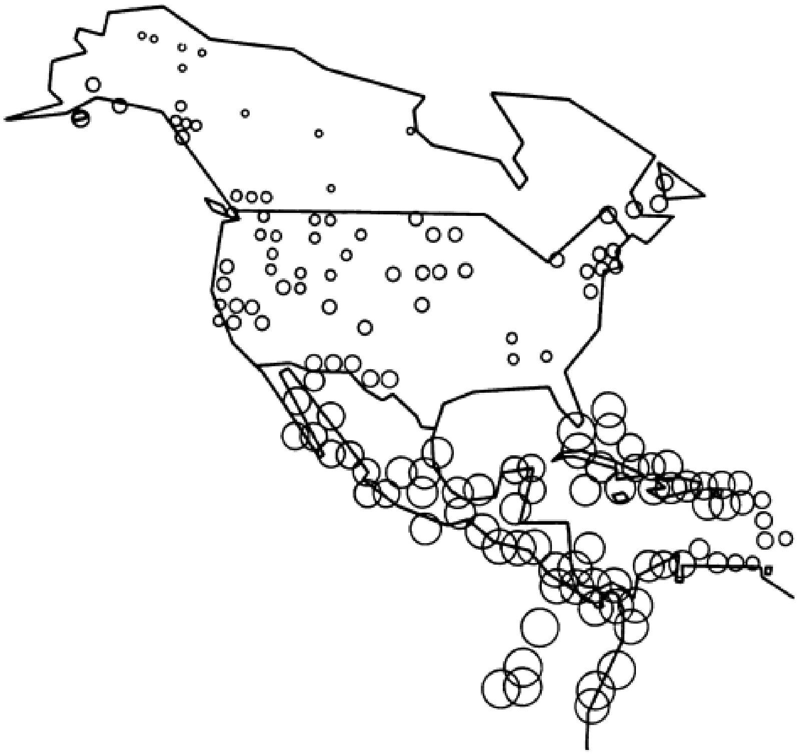

FIGURE 2. Variation in geometric mean of all six characters. Bill length and bill width follow the same pattern, so separate maps were not drawn for those characters. Points mark the centers of two-degree blocks; because of this, especially in the Caribbean and Middle America, some points are over water. All warblers, however, were collected on land. The points were smoothed across latitude and longitude simultaneously using LOESS (f = 0.45). The range of values of the geometric mean then was divided into ten equally-spaced categories, and diameters of the circles correspond to those categories.

Luther and Greenberg (2014) went deeper and investigated how the variation in morphology in the complex was related to ecology and habitat. They found that birds in mangrove habitats had larger bills and longer tarsi than those in inland habitats in North America, and that bill size for temperate inland populations increased with increasing temperature during the breeding season. Bill size for birds in mangroves did not vary with region, such that mangrove birds in the Caribbean and Central and South America all had similarly sized bills. In addition to these differences, they also found that temperate populations showed sexual dimorphism in bill size, whereas mangrove populations did not. Luther and Greenberg (2014) hypothesized that the larger bills of mangrove populations likely relate to the salinity of the habitat, matching a pattern in other birds that show increased bill sizes in saline habitats compared to terrestrial relatives, whereas the increasing bill size with temperature for temperate likely relates to thermal regulation. Luther and Greenberg (2014) hypothesized that the sexual dimorphism in bill size only for temperate populations may be due to competition at high population densities, whereas the mangrove populations do not occur at such high densities.

Genetics:

Subsequent genetic work has further contributed to our understanding of the complex. In the first phylogenetic study of the group, Klein and Brown (1994) used mitochondrial DNA and found that migratory North American birds (*aestiva* group) were sister to all other tropical sedentary taxa (*petechia* and *erithachorides* groups), with the exception of a single bird from the Baja Peninsula identified as *castaneiceps* (of the *erithachorides* group), which grouped with the migratory northern birds. This is especially odd result, since *castaneiceps* has a chestnut head, so it grouping with the Northern birds is odd; this result is based on a single specimen of *castaeniceps*, and so it is possible it was mislabeled or misidentified. This subspecies does not appear to have been sampled in other molecular phylogenetic studies, so this grouping could be real (albeit supported by a single locus). Outside of this odd relationship, Klein and Brown (1994) found that the tropical, sedentary birds formed a clade, but within this clade, Caribbean taxa did not all group together, nor did all Central American or South American individuals group together, suggesting a complex pattern of evolution. Some of these relationships were further explored by Chaves et al. (2012), who also used mitochondrial DNA to investigate patterns of colonization history and population history, with a focus on Galapagos birds (*aureola*). In their study, they also found a complex pattern of relationships among traditional *petechia* and *erithachorides* groups, with plumage not being an accurate predictor of relationships: chestnut-headed (*erithachorides* group) birds did not all group together, with chestnut-headed birds embedded within clades of chestnut-crowned birds (*petechia* group). These did cluster by geography, however, suggesting that the outlier Galapagos *aureola* and Martinique *ruficapilla* are independent gains of these phenotypes. Only two northern migratory birds (*aestiva* group) were included in this study, and they were found to be sister to the tropical sedentary birds.

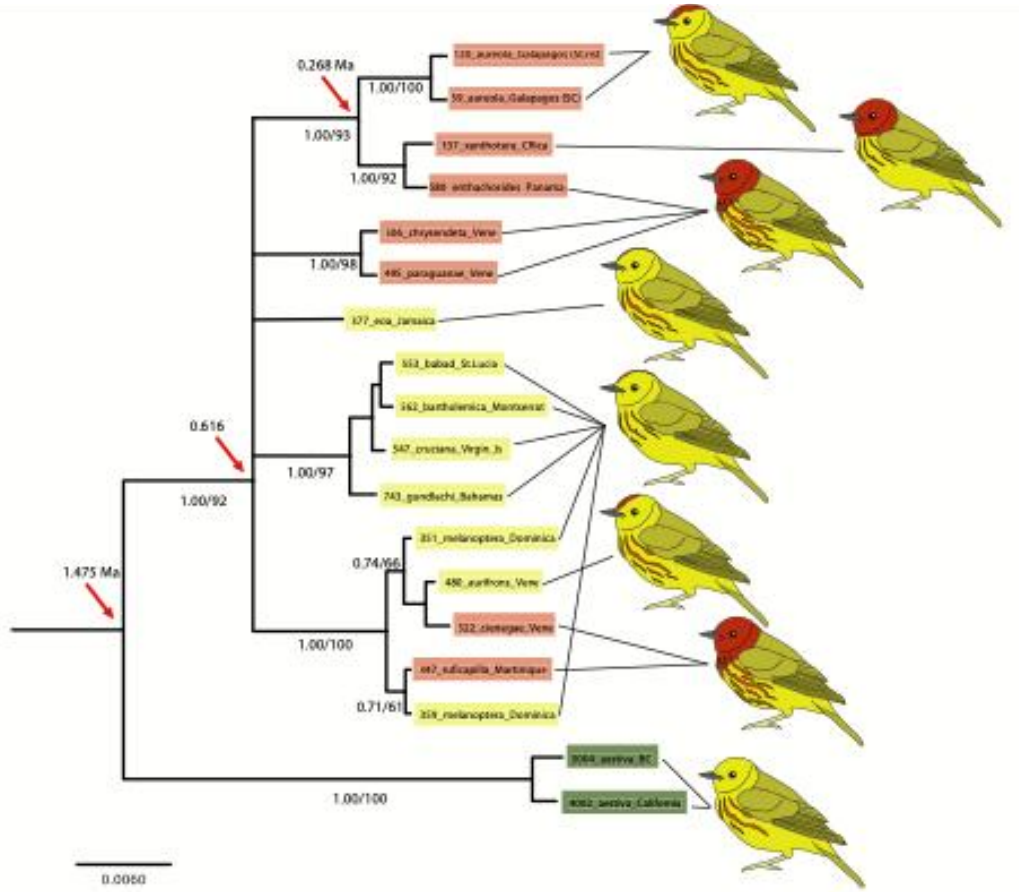

Figure 1. Phylogeny from Chaves et al. (2012) based on mtDNA (ATPase, ND2, control region) constructed using BEAST. Note especially that chestnut-headed and chestnut-capped birds do not form monophyletic groups, but are instead scattered throughout the phylogeny, and that Northern migratory birds are sister to the tropical sedentary birds. The arrows indicate estimated age of divergence (in millions of years) using only ND2 and ATPase.

<u>Vocalizations:</u>

There are relatively few quantitative studies of vocal differences between taxa in this complex. Many sources mention that “Mangrove” and “Golden” groups are different from “Northern” birds, but most of this is either anecdotal or qualitative (e.g., Ficken and Ficken 1965, Morse 1966, Curson 2017). Mennill (2001) evaluated the songs of one subspecies of the “Mangrove” group (*bryanti*), and found that in this population (135 songs from 7 individuals), number of syllables and syllable types were significantly greater than in the “Northern” group (754 songs from 45 individuals); mean maximum and minimum frequency were also significantly lower in *bryanti*, and the frequency of the maximum amplitude (FMA) of the song, first syllable, and last syllable were all also significantly lower. A principal components analysis found that the first three axes explained 75% of the variation between two groups, with *bryanti* and “Northern” songs clustering separately (see Fig. 2).

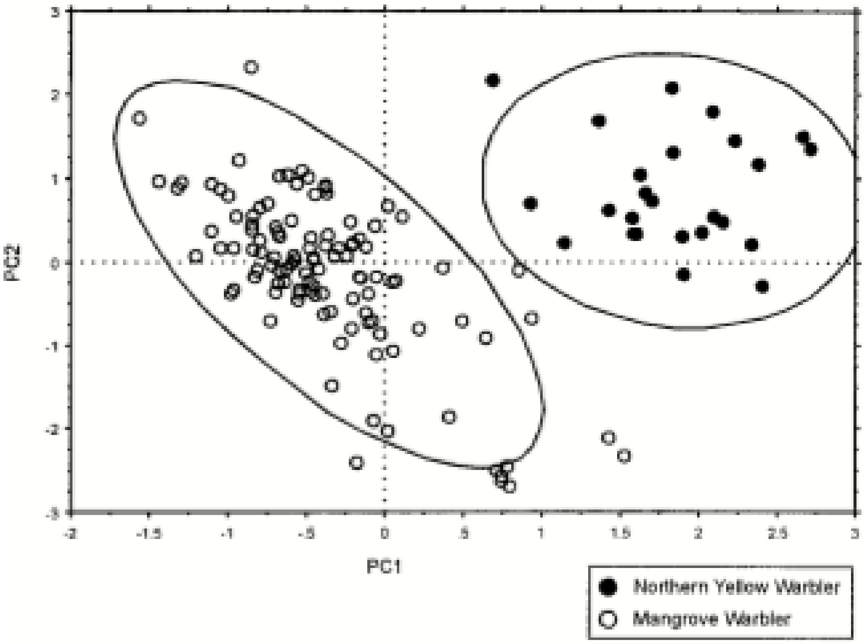

FIGURE 2. Plot of PC1 vs. PC2 scores for song characteristics of the Mangrove Warbler (open circles) and the Northern Yellow Warbler (closed circles) generated from eigenvectors of PCA. Ellipses represent 95% confidence spaces for each subspecies. See Table 2 for contributions of each song measure to each axis.

Figure 2. PCA from Mennill (2001) showing the 95% confidence interval space for songs of *bryanti* (“Mangrove”) and “Northern” migratory birds.

Natural History:

As the name “Mangrove Warbler” suggests, many of the tropical sedentary populations of this complex are closely tied to mangrove habitats, although some certainly do occur in upland habitats (e.g., birds in the Galapagos occur in many terrestrial habitats on the islands). The northern migratory populations, on the other hand, are found in a wide variety of habitats, often in second growth, riparian, or shrubby wet habitats (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Machkour-M’Rabet et al. 2023). Within these habitats, the tropical sedentary groups tend to build their nests over water (often in mangrove), whereas the northern migratory populations tend to build their nests over land (Dunn and Garrett 1997). In addition to nest placement, the breeding biology of the two species is quite different: Salgado-Ortiz et al. (2008) undertook a detailed study of the breeding biology of one population from the Baja Peninsula (“Mangrove” group) and also compared it with other tropical and temperate populations of the entire complex. They found that tropical taxa have longer incubation and nestling periods and smaller clutch sizes, similar to many other tropical passerines. Territories of birds studied from the Baja Peninsula were stable and maintained year-round, and pair bonds were maintained; territory size was also much larger than temperate populations, resulting in a much lower population density (1.1 pairs/ha versus 3.4-14.5 pairs/ha). In defending these year-round territories, at least one subspecies (*bryanti*) was found to use calls and songs, whereas nonbreeding territories for migratory “Northern” birds were defended only using call notes (Mennill 2001). These results all suggest that the tropical sedentary populations have adopted a life history strategy consistent with other tropical passerines and are quite different from temperate populations.

In addition to overall differences in aspects of their breeding biology, temperate and tropical populations also appear to have difference responses to brood parasitism. Tropical populations are known to be frequent hosts of cowbirds (e.g., Friedmann 1963, Wiley 1985), just as temperate populations are (e.g., Friedmann 1963, Sealy 1995). However, the responses to cowbird parasitism are different, with tropical populations likely to abandon a nest (Wiley 1985), whereas temperate populations are well-known to frequently build a new nest on top of the old, burying the cowbird egg (e.g., Berger 1955, Sealy 1995); this behavior has not been documented in tropical populations.

New Information:

There is relatively little actual “new” information available to inform the taxonomic treatment of the *Setophaga petechia* complex. In a study of warblers on Cozumel, Machkour-M’Rabet et al. (2023) assessed the status of birds showing intermediate traits between the resident “Golden” type bird (subspecies *rufivertex*) and the coastal Yucatan “Mangrove” type bird (subspecies *bryanti*) from the mainland. In that study, which combined morphological, genetic, and acoustic data, the authors found that the “new” intermediate population on Cozumel, which occupied mangroves, was distinct from both *rufivertex* and *bryanti*, and appeared to be a hybrid of the two. The new population was genetically closer to the resident *rufivertex* but was also genetically distinct. In both acoustic and morphometric space, the “new” population was closer to the resident *rufivertex* but was still distinct. Figures from this paper are pasted below, showing the intermediate morphologies.

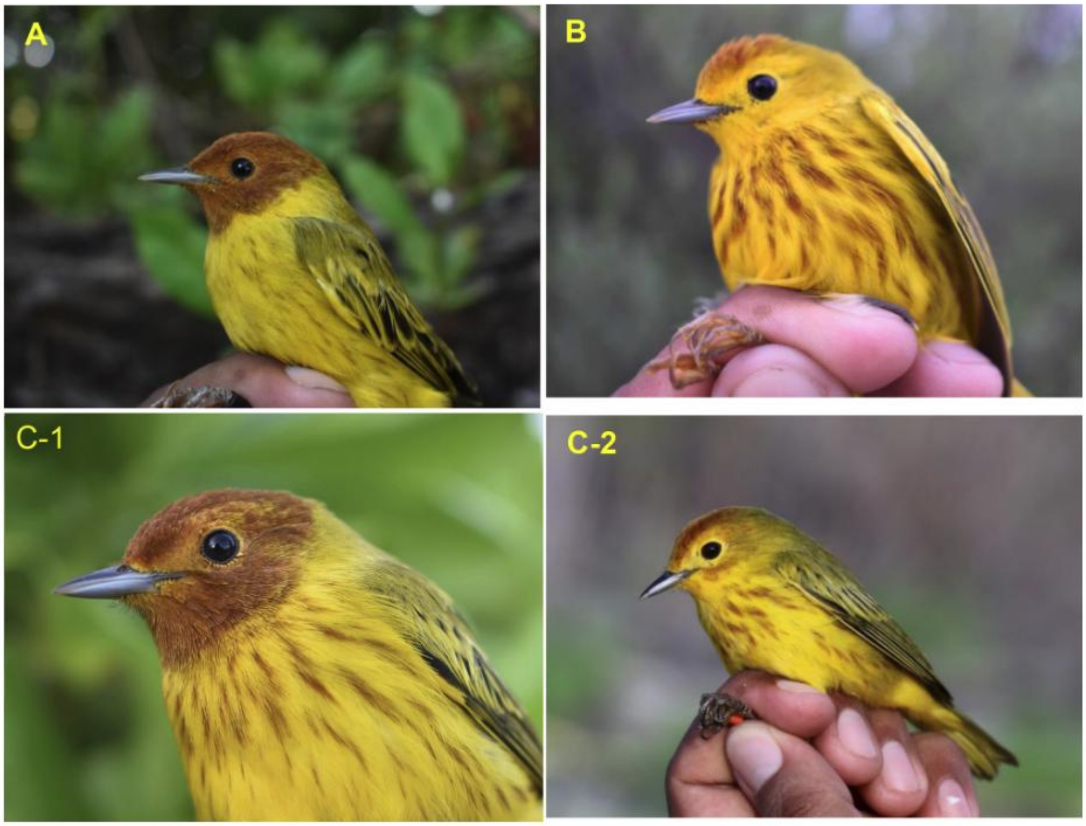

Fig 2. Variation of head coloration and streaked breast of adult male *Setophaga petechia* encountered in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico. (A) Mangrove Warbler, *S. p. bryanti*, with its characteristic complete chestnut-colored head and thinly streaked breast, found in mangrove on the mainland coast, (B) Golden Warbler, *S. p. rufivertex*, with only chestnut-colored crown, heavily streaked breast, yellow lores and faint throat streaks, found in deciduous forest and dune scrub on Cozumel Island, and (C) the island mangrove population, with two examples of coloration of head: C-1 almost complete chestnut colored head, yellow lores and broadly streaked breast, and C-2 with partially chestnut-colored head and throat, yellow lores and broadly streaked breast. Photo credit: Waldemar Santamaria-Rivero.

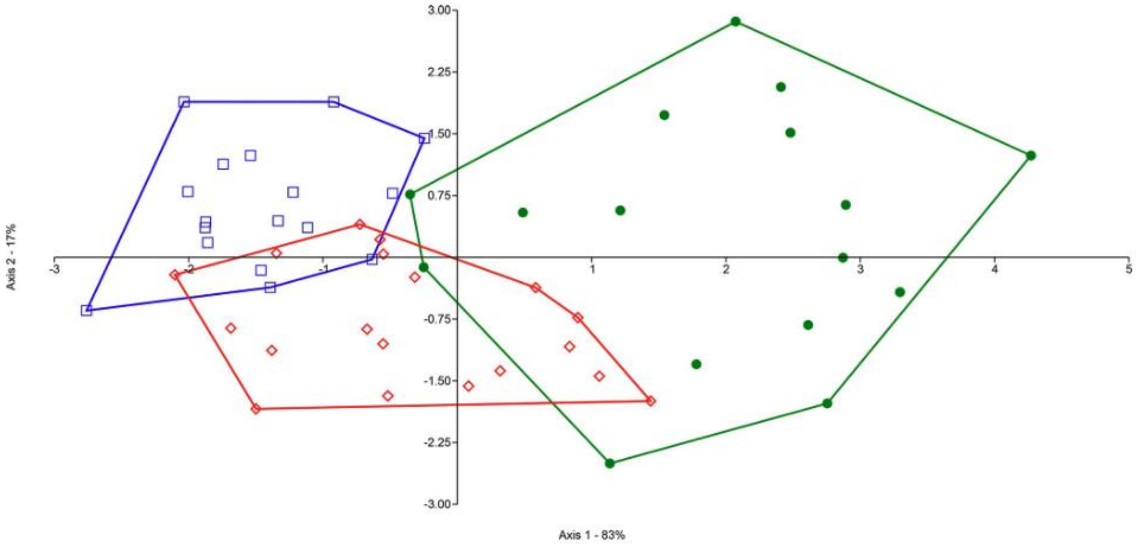

Fig 3. Linear discriminant analysis (LDA) based on seven morphometric traits for the Yellow Warbler complex, *Setophaga petechia* in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico. *Setophaga petechia bryanti* from mainland (green color), *S. p. rufivertex* (blue color) and the new mangrove population (red color) from the Island.

In comparing the acoustic data from Machkour-M'Rabet et al. (2023) to Mennill (2021), there were some similarities and some differences (with the caveat that the recordings were processed differently, and so all stats may not be directly comparable). Overall, the number of syllables were greater for all three taxa in Machkour-M'Rabet et al. (2023) compared to *bryanti* in Mennill (2001), but they were still consistently higher than the number of syllables reported for "Northern" birds; similarly, the minimum frequency of all three taxa in Machkour-M'Rabet et al. (2023) was higher than the minimum frequency reported for *bryanti* in Mennill (2001), but still consistently lower than that of "Northern" birds. Maximum frequency of *bryanti* in Machkour-M'Rabet et al. (2023) was higher but similar to the maximum frequency of *bryanti* in Mennill (2001), but the maximum frequency of *rufivertex* and the "new" population on Cozumel were much higher not only than *bryanti* but also the maximum frequency reported for "Northern" birds in Mennill (2001). While still not a comprehensive study of vocalizations across the entire complex, these comparisons continue to support the idea that there are consistent differences between the tropical sedentary taxa and the northern migratory taxa, even if the tropical taxa are more variable than first reported.

The stereotypical "Sweet, sweet, sweet, I'm so sweet" mnemonic of the primary song of *aestiva* is broadly consistent across its wide range, with populations across its range sounding broadly similar. In contrast, songs of the *petechia* and *erithachorides* groups are more variable, and qualitatively distinct from those of *aestiva*. See exemplar songs from around its range, highlighting this variation. Note that even birds from the far north of the range are quite distinct from *aestiva*.

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One wrench in this inconsistency is that *dugesi* of the Mexican plateau (of the *aestiva* group) has a somewhat different song. The primary formula and wing/tail ratio is also more like the tropical forms (Aldrich 1942). The plumage, however, is quite typical of the *aestiva* group. See links below:

https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/458970661
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/622054235
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Although no vocal playback trial studies have been conducted that we know of, one of us (O.J.) has conducted a handful of trials in Michigan, where *aestiva* did not respond to songs of *petechia*.

Recommendation:

Although more work is sorely needed to determine if the vocal differences are consistent across the range of each taxon, if species respond to vocal differences with playback trials, if genetic differences are supported by nuclear data, and determine rates of gene flow, we think that the available data support species status for *aestiva* separate from the resident tropical forms. Thus, we recommend a YES to considering *S. aestiva* as a species separate from *S. petechia*. This would bring NACC in line with the global AviList, which now treats these as separate species.

The newly established hybrid population on Cozumel Island provides evidence that the *erithachorides* and *petechia* groups are conspecific, a treatment also supported by the *petechia*-like birds in the Galapagos Islands and *erithachorides*-like birds on Martinique. Thus, we do not endorse separating the *erithachorides* and *petechia* groups at the species rank.
Regarding the English common names, AviList adopted Northern Yellow Warbler for *aestiva* and Mangrove Yellow Warbler for *petechia*. This is in line with NACC policy to avoid retaining the "parent" name for the "daughter" species after a split and retains connection to "Yellow Warbler". It also avoids the long-standing confusion with the Yellow-Warblers of Africa in the genera *Iduna* and *Calamonastides*. One of us (S.B.) prefers this option.

Older authors (e.g., Ridgway 1902, Hellmayr 1935), although adopting English common names for each subspecies, generally gave the name Yellow Warbler to taxa from the *aestiva* group, and Golden Warbler to those of the *erithachorides* and *petechia* groups, or (Bond 1930) Golden Warbler for the *petechia* group and Mangrove Warbler for the *erithachorides* group. These English names are used informally even by more recent authors (e.g., Wiedenfeld 1991). Thus, in reverting to a similar taxonomic treatment to that of pre-lump authors (sensu Hellmayr 1935), one of us (O.J.) prefers this option. Using Mangrove Warbler and Yellow Warbler also keeps names simpler and avoids the recent trend of using long compound English common names.

Please vote on the following:

1) Consider *aestiva* as a species separate from *petechia*.
2) Adopt English names for the two species:
    a. Northern Yellow Warbler for *aestiva* and Mangrove Yellow Warbler for *petechia*
    b. Yellow Warbler for *aestiva* and Mangrove Warbler for *petechia*

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Submitted by: Shawn Billerman and Oscar Johnson

Date of proposal: 1 April 2026

2026-B-14 N&MA Classification Committee pp. 564-565

Change the group name of species of *Myioborus* from Redstart to Whitestart

__Note:__ A similar proposal will be considered concurrently by SACC. Most species of *Myioborus* occur in South America, whereas only three species occur in North America, although the only consistently red species, *Myioborus pictus*, is found only in North America (the underparts of *M. miniatus* are red only in the northern part of its range).

Background:

Consistent with the use of “Amazon” for *Amazona* and “Flatbill” for *Tolmomyias*, this recommendation is an attempt to bring about greater agreement between global bird lists, and presents an opportunity to have a unique name (“Whitestart”) apply to a single well-defined genus (*Myioborus*). This name has been popular with field guide authors for more than two decades, and claims that “Slate-throated Redstart” is the clear name choice based on prevailing usage are no longer correct. In fact, it seems that momentum favors Whitestart, with four major global checklists, multiple regional field guide authors, and even opinions of past “no” voters shifting towards Whitestart in recent years. The publication of AviList v2025 presents an opportunity for consensus on English names where possible—and the names of *Myioborus*

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Figure 1: Species within the genus *Myioborus*, using English name preferences from AviList v2025 (within eBird and *Birds of the World*, users can select their preferred English names, including eBird/Clements names which would use “Redstart” here in alignment with AOS-NACC and SACC). https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/paruli1/cur/species#genusMyioborus

would be an easy place to find agreement if NACC and SACC (along with eBird/Clements) agree to align around Whitestart.

Previous NACC and SACC proposals

Proposals on this issue have been raised four times before: twice for AOS-SACC and twice for AOS-NACC. Perhaps no other English name issue has been voted on so frequently without being changed, indicating strong preferences by many regarding the use of Whitestart.

The previous proposals are as follows:

- October 2003, SACC 63: https://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCprop63.htm
- 2004, NACC (Banks et al. 2004)
- March 2005, SACC 171: https://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCprop171.htm
- March 2016, NACC 2016-A: https://americanornithology.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2016-A.pdf and comments: https://americanornithology.org/about/committees/nacc/current-prior-proposals/2016-proposals/comments-2016-a/#2016-A-2

SACC 63: failed 3/6, but Jaramillo (in Proposal 171) and Schulenberg (pers. comm.) both changed their minds on this issue.

SACC 171: failed 5/5; Robbins voted against but had voted for Whitestart in SACC 63.

NACC 2016: 2 voted for Whitestart, 8 voted against (one indicating openness to a proposal that reframed the issue)

Most previous proposals and commentors have acknowledged the problems with the name Redstart, including:

1) The tails of *Myioborus* show flashes of white, not red;
2) 10/12 species in *Myioborus* are strikingly yellow and gray and only one (Painted Redstart), sometimes two (northern populations of Slate-throated Redstart), show red plumage (Fig 1);
3) Although all *Myioborus* are closely related and congeneric, they are no longer considered closely related to the other redstart in Parulidae (*Setophaga ruticilla*) and obviously are much more distantly related to Old World redstarts in Muscicapidae (Fig. 2)

The first SACC proposal acknowledged:

> If we were "starting from scratch, I'd vote for "Whitestart." It is more accurate, and it nicely emphasizes that *Setophaga* and *Myioborus* are not sister genera.

But that proposal recommended a “no” vote on the change, citing Ridgely and Tudor (1989) “we feel that the name “Redstart” is simply too well entrenched to be changed at this late date.” Those voting for Whitestart noted:

> **Stiles**: Whitestarts - definitely a better name, the question is whether it is worth changing. This name has been around since a Nuttall monograph on social behavior of Andean birds by Moynihan (1980?) [1979], if not before. Redstart is definitely inappropriate for most *Myioborus* in a literal sense (not only no red in the tail, but no red anywhere), but finds its justification in the superficial similarity with *Setophaga* and in the fact that *M. pictus*, the only one to reach the US, does have a red breast. Redstart is the classic name, but a number of important new works do incorporate Whitestart.
>
> **Nores**: Si. Este parece un problema más sentimental que ornitológico. Redstart es evidentemente inapropiado para especies que no tienen color rojo y por eso es mejor "Whitestart". Sin embargo, hay opiniones como la de Stotz que evidentemente están más relacionado con la costumbre de usar un nombre y con no ofender a las especies."

Furthermore, two of the voters (Zimmer and Jaramillo) mentioned that Painted Redstart would be hard to change, presumably because it is the one truly red *Myioborus* and because it is the most familiar one to US/Canadian birders.

The second proposal to SACC did not provide new arguments and seemed vituperative in tone. Notable comments were:

> **Jaramillo**: YES - I still do not like the sound of Painted Whitestart, but my mind has changed on this subject. Yes, I do want name stability, but that is balanced by certain name changes here and there when the name is truly misleading. Calling something a Little Nightjar is fine even though it may not be the smallest Caprimulgid in the world. There is the other extreme where the name really is dead wrong or misleading, the more I sit back and think about this one, the more comfortable I am in putting it in that category. In effect this is the equivalent of calling *Bubo scandiaca* the Sooty Owl -- it is just incorrect. There is no red on the tail, so Redstart is not appropriate. *Setophaga* is the American Redstart and that is appropriate, the name Redstart for *Myioborus* is misleading and confusing. One of the reasons we want name stability is to minimize confusion, I would argue that a grossly incorrect English name provides confusion. So if we are in the mindset of minimizing confusion, maybe the name change in this case wins over the stability issue, it does for me.
>
> **Pacheco**: YES. Por razões óbvias, não é confortável para mim opinar acerca da "propriedade" e conveniência dos nomes em Inglês. Logo, o meu voto aqui tem caráter meramente opinioso. Após ler o extenso arrazoado, alinho-me com a opinião do Álvaro."

Also notably, one voter (Robbins) preferred Whitestart but voted no, apparently out of principle and in part because of the tone of the proposal.

The NACC proposal in 2016 (NACC 2016-A-02) raised these points:

- "Whitestart" means "white tail" and is more appropriate than Redstart for birds with white in the tail
- "Redstart" implies a taxonomic connection to *Setophaga ruticilla* (and potentially to Old World Redstarts in the genus *Phoenicurus*).

- Whitestart is “accepted by multiple authorities”

That proposal concluded with this recommendation:

> This change has three advantages: (1) it eliminates misleading names from North American birds, (2) it prevents widespread confusion on naming conventions, and (3) it increases knowledge of correct species taxonomy and emphasizes its importance in bird identification. If we keep the names as they are, we would thus continue to misappropriate and perpetuate the ignorance of the general public. Likewise, we already have the English name “Whitestart” for the genus *Myioborus*, already accepted by multiple authorities, of which the structure of the English name would be familiar, pronounceable, and far more accurate.

In 2016, NACC voters opted for Redstart 8-2, with one Yes voter stating:

> YES. Although I am generally for stability the English names, the use of “Redstart” for species in *Myioborus* by the NACC is no longer stable. Rogue field guide authors and alternative checklists have embraced the far better name “Whitestart,” such that the NACC and its adherents are nearly alone in using “Redstart.” It is time to face the inevitable and adopt the better name. Not doing so makes us look like anachronistic old cranks. Most sources not affiliated with the NACC or SACC use “Whitestart.” Google *Myioborus* for instance.
>
> A few of you have remarked that passing this proposal would leave the problem of “American Redstart.” I think very few ornithologists/birders have any problem with the name “American Redstart.” We are “stuck” with all sorts of new-world species sharing a the [*sic*] same group name as a similar species and acting but unrelated Old World species (Robin, Flycatcher, Bunting, Oriole, Warbler etc.), and those names are with us for the long haul. The red in the American Redstart is not that different in tone from the red in many Old World Redstarts. At least one *Phoenicurus* has no red at all. “Orangestart” would have been a better name, but there is no more problem calling *Setophaga ruticilla* American Redstart than there is calling *Turdus migratorius* American Robin.
>
> The problem is with species in *Myioborus*. These are not related at all to *Setophaga* (or *Phoenicurus*). Because *Myioborus* and *Setophaga ruticilla* share a common faunal region (the New World) and family, it is confusing having unrelated species sharing a distinct name like “Redstart” (unlike the more generalized names warbler, sparrow, flycatcher or bunting). The twelve or so species of *Myioborus* are monophyletic, share a distinct foraging behavior, and a distinct plumage character related to that foraging (white in the tail, which is used to flush (=start) insect prey. As such, the name “Whitestart” could not be more fitting, and it clears up a confusion regarding relationships. Only two of the 12 species (Painted and Slate-colored) have more than a little red. A few others have brownish red in the caps. Most species have no red at all.

New Information:

Historical usage of Redstart and modern phylogeny
The species in *Myioborus* were once placed in *Setophaga*, along with American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*, which created an assemblage that was presumed to have been monophyletic.

The first SACC proposal (63) summarized some of the history behind the use of “Redstart”:

> The warblers in the genus *Myioborus* were known as "Redstarts" for all of their history until last decade or so. This presumably derives first from the very superficial resemblance of North American *Setophaga ruticilla* to the "real" Redstarts of Europe in the genus *Phoenicurus*, which share orange-red coloration in the rectrices and tail movements that accentuate it. Second, the Painted Redstart was given that English name when incorrectly placed in *Setophaga*, even though it had white where the "real" *Setophaga* had orange, and the species of *Myioborus*, by implication considered the sister genus to *Setophaga* by Ridgway (1902), were also called "Redstarts." Widespread *M. miniatus* was described in *Setophaga*, so it was only logical to use "Redstart" for it and relatives. Thus, *Myioborus miniatus* and Middle American *M. torquatus* have been called "Redstarts" for over a century. Coues (1872) used "Redstart" for both *M. pictus* and *M. miniatus*.

It was only in 1976, with the publication of the 33rd supplement to the AOU Check-List (AOU 1976), that the genus *Myioborus* Baird, 1865 (with type species *Setophaga verticalis* Swainson), was resurrected and at that time, the name “Redstart” was carried over for all included species without question. More recently, *Setophaga ruticilla* was found to be embedded within the large genus *Dendroica*, resulting in the genus *Dendroica* being subsumed into *Setophaga*. The usage of Redstart for *Myioborus* appears to be a legacy of when *Myioborus* and *Setophaga ruticilla* were believed to be closely related, which we now know is not the case. Modern phylogenetic information (e.g., Zhao et al. 2025; Fig. 2) shows that the *Myioborus* assemblage is closer to *Cardellina* (e.g., Wilson’s Warbler) and *Basileuterus* (e.g., Golden-crowned Warbler) than to American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*.

When is usage prevailing?
Voters on past proposals in 2002 and 2004, considered that “Redstart” was well-entrenched for the genus. But is that still the case?

Googling *Myioborus* lands on a Wikipedia page that is entitled “Whitestarts”. The other Wikipedia pages mostly use Whitestart but do use Painted Redstart for *M. pictus*. eBird and Cornell Lab hits still defer to Redstart, in observance of the NACC and SACC name, but almost all other sources use Whitestart. Even articles in the *Wilson Journal of Ornithology* use “Whitestart” https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1676/09-030.1. Neither name is now clearly “prevailing”.

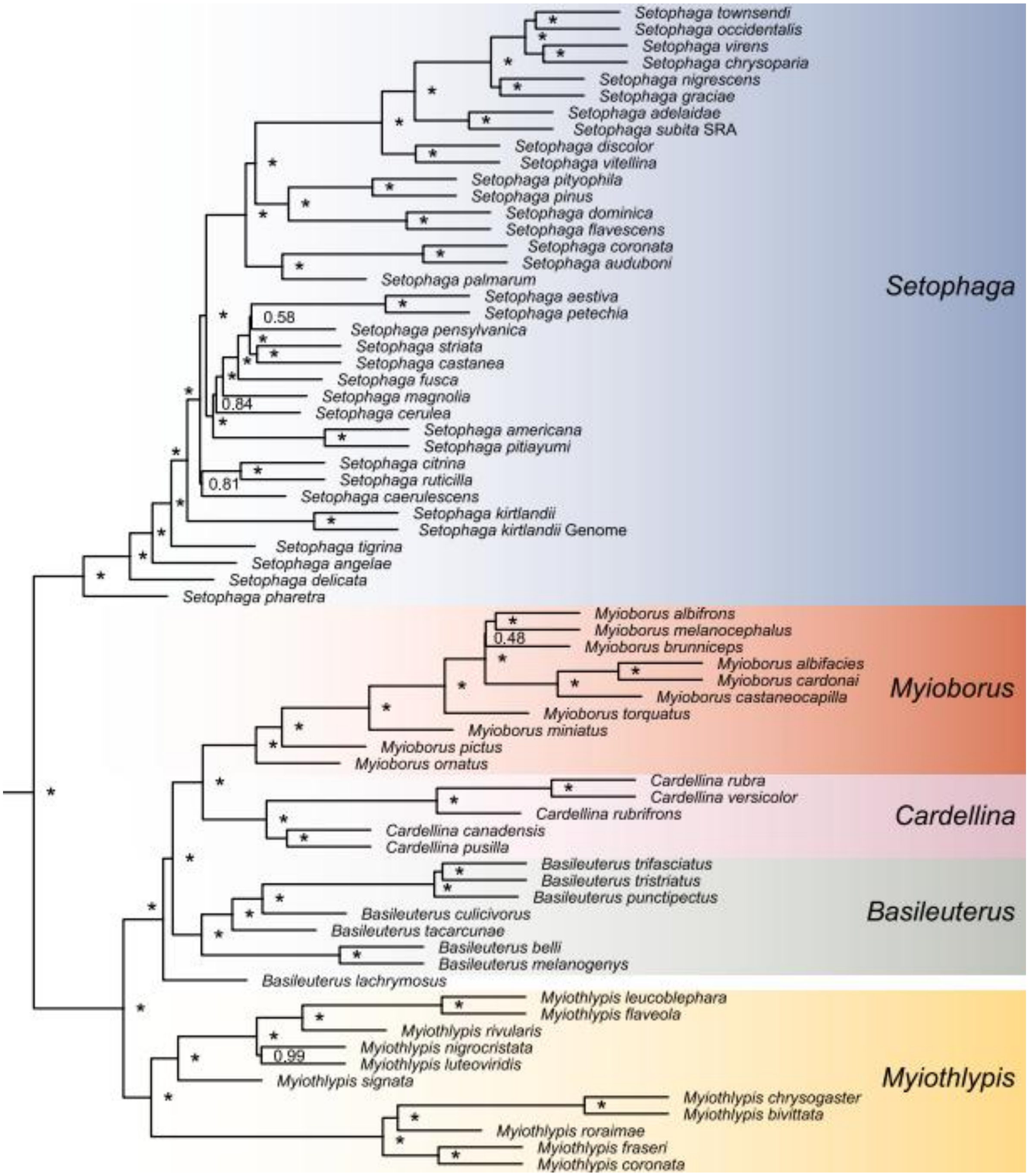

Figure 2. Relationships of selected species and genera of Parulidae, showing the lack of a close relationship between *Myioborus* and *Setophaga ruticilla* (from Zhao et al. 2025).

Major global checklists increasingly use Whitestart for *Myioborus*. Below is a summary of the use of Redstart and Whitestart across major regional or global checklists. Note that these are not entirely independent: NACC and SACC were both formerly committees of the AOU/AOS. Clements has explicitly followed NACC/SACC names, to the extent feasible, whereas AviList has explicitly followed IOC names.

- The **AOU Checklist** has consistently used “**Redstart**” for all *Myioborus* from 1886 to present
- The **SACC Checklist** has consistently used “**Redstart**” for all *Myioborus* from its inception to present
- The **Clements Checklist** has consistently used “**Redstart**” for all *Myioborus* from its first edition to present (although it has explicitly tried to align with English names of AOS-NACC and SACC). However, the undersigned authors of the eBird/Clements Checklist hereby recommend the use of “**Whitestart**” for all *Myioborus.*
- The Howard & Moore Checklist (4th edition) uses “**Whitestart**” for all *Myioborus*, but used “Redstart” in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd editions.

- The IOC Checklist has used “**Whitestart**” for all *Myioborus* since its inception to the present day (v15.1)
- AviList v2025 uses “**Whitestart**” for all *Myioborus* because almost all English names are aligned with IOC 15.1
- The HBW/BirdLife International Checklist uses “**Whitestart**” for all *Myioborus*, but used “Redstart” through version 08 (Oct 2015).

Despite the lack of independence between the various lists, the momentum has been towards increased usage of Whitestart for *Myioborus*. Both HBW/BirdLife and Howard & Moore 4th edition have changed from Redstart to Whitestart in recent decades, and the eBird/Clements team also recommends this change. NACC and SACC are the primary players that continue to advocate for Redstart for *Myioborus*.

Field guides similarly have used both names. Some authors commit to one or the other, whereas others express the alternate name in parentheses. Either way, an incomplete selection of guides shows inconsistency on the names chosen, and it is clear that both names are in use.

Name for *Myioborus miniatus*	**Field Guide**	**comments**
Slate-throated **Redstart** (Whitestart)	Colombia – Hilty and Brown (1986)	
Slate-throated **Redstart**	Mexico – Howell and Webb (1995)	
Slate-throated **Whitestart**	Ecuador – Ridgely and Greenfield (2001)	“they were formerly usually called “Redstarts”
Slate-throated **Whitestart**	Venezuela – Hilty (2003), 2nd ed	“called Redstarts by most previous authors”
Slate-throated **Redstart**	Peru – Schulenberg et al. (2007)	*Myioborus* Redstarts have prominent white outer tail rectrices (source of alternate name “Whitestarts”)
Slate-throated (Redstart or) **Whitestart**	Brazil - Von Perlo (2009)	

Slate-throated **Redstart**	Panama – Angehr and Dean (2010)	
Bolivia: Slate-throated **Redstart** (Whitestart)	Bolivia – Herzog et al. (2019)	
Brown-capped **Whitestart** (for *M. brunniceps*)	Argentina – Pearman and Areta (2020)	no mention of “Redstart” as alternate name
Slate-throated **Whitestart** (Redstart)	Costa Rica – Dyer and Howell (2023)	

Note that SACC proposal 171 lists an additional 14 works that also used Whitestart, including several CD sound compilations.

Regardless, Redstart is certainly no longer the overwhelmingly used name for *Myioborus*, and it looks much more like NACC and SACC have been swimming against the tide, especially given the number of field guide authors who generally align with names endorsed by NACC and SACC, except in the case of this genus.

Evolving opinions

In addition to global lists and field guides, the opinions of a number of individuals have been evolving on this question. For example, MJI has long felt attached to the name Redstart for this genus, and especially for Painted Redstart (as mentioned by Zimmer and Jaramillo in their 2002 SACC votes). (However, we feel that sentimental attachment to the name of one North American species, for a mainly Tropical American genus, is not the best approach in deciding on names for this 12-species genus.) But with more travel and broader experience of the genus *Myioborus*, the name Redstart has felt less and less appropriate to MJI for this assemblage of yellow parulids with white tail flashes, and it is apparent that many birders in Central and South America simply know these birds as Whitestarts. Whitestart now clearly feels like a better, easier handle for this genus.

Others have similarly changed their opinions similarly:

- Robert Ridgely recommended sticking with Redstart in Ridgely & Tudor (1989), but then used Whitestart in *Birds of Ecuador* (2002).
- Steve Howell used Redstart in Birds of Mexico (1995), but Whitestart in *Finding Birds in Mexico* (1999) and subsequent works such as *Birds of Costa Rica* (2020).
- Tom Schulenberg voted for Redstart in two prior SACC votes, but now strongly prefers Whitestart (pers. comm. to Iliff on 2 Apr 2026).
- Alvaro Jaramillo voted for Redstart in his initial SACC vote (2002), but for Whitestart in his second vote (2004).
- Steve Hilty used Redstart in *Birds of Colombia* (1986), but Whitestart in *Birds of Venezuela* (2003)

- Gary Stiles used Redstart in *Birds of Costa Rica* in 1989, but clearly expressed preference for Whitestart in his 2002 and 2004 SACC votes.

The case to retain "Redstart" for *Myioborus*

With four previous proposals, there has been a lot of ink spent in defense of retaining "Redstart" for *Myioborus*, despite the acknowledgment that it is not an appropriate name and is misleading about relationships.

Across those three proposals, the "no" votes have consistently expressed three philosophies:

1. If we tried to "fix" cases where incorrect relationships are implied, then not only would American Redstart also need to change, so too would many tanagers, warblers, flycatchers, robins, etc.
2. Stability in English names is important and so we should not change when we can avoid it
3. Many bird names are imperfect or even inappropriate; we should not be in the business of "common name improvement"

Point 1 above is not the point of this proposal. We are not recommending changing the name American Redstart or any other species. This proposal is limited to *Myioborus*.

Also, although we do believe that Whitestart is a better name for many reasons, the main reason for this proposal is in the name of consistency and long-term stability of names. The widespread adoption of Whitestart, which is so much more descriptive, has destabilized the English names for these birds. Also modern genetic information has clarified relationships and showed clearly that a close relationship between *Setophaga ruticilla* and *Myioborus*, as believed at the time of the 5th edition of the AOU Check-list, does not exist.

Why change now?

As summarized above, Whitestart has been used by the IOC, AviList, HBW, BirdLife International, and multiple field guide authors (e.g., Steve Hilty, Steve Howell, Bob Ridgely, and others). Redstart has been primarily in use by NACC, SACC, and those that explicitly follow those sets of names.

It seems to be unanimously acknowledged that Whitestart is a better name, given that it is both a more accurate reference to the white flashes in the tail of *Myioborus* and a unique name that is applied to a single genus and that does not imply a non-existent close relationship with *Setophaga ruticilla*. The argument to retain "Redstart" for *Myioborus* thus rests primarily on a feeling that the name is well-established and in prevailing usage.

Field guides have now established a familiarity with the usage of Whitestart among birding communities in the Neotropics, where this genus predominates. Most birders and serious students of ornithology are aware that Whitestart and Redstart are interchangeable names for *Myioborus*. The names Whitestart and Redstart are memorable enough and similar enough that there will be little confusion if Slate-throated Redstart becomes Slate-throated Whitestart—even for those unfamiliar with this issue or the reasons for the change. Also, new birders who encounter Painted Whitestart in Arizona and Brown-capped Whitestart in Bolivia will have the advantage of the immediate association that the English name provides. No one will be confused about why 11 birds with yellow plumage end up with a name implying that they are red or have red tails. We are seeing a huge surge in birding interest in recent years, and recent decisions to use Mountain-gem for *Lampornis*, Amazon for *Amazona*, and Flatbill for *Tolmomyias* have helped bring better alignment between common names and diverse clades and better understanding to field birders that encounter them. There remain a great many English names that differ between the global checklists, many of which will not have easy resolution. However, we view this as a case where alignment can easily be achieved, and where change is not overly disruptive, toward a name that is objectively better.

The alternative would be for the Whitestart contingent to adopt Redstart. Past voters for NACC and SACC have acknowledged that, if this issue were to be looked at with a clean slate, the name Whitestart would be preferable for *Myioborus*. To ask AviList to change would require arguing that Redstart is a better name for *Myioborus*, because prevailing usage of that name can no longer be established. Many field guides within the range of *Myioborus* already use Whitestart. The name Redstart implies non-existent relationships with other genera. And no one can argue that the name Redstart is more descriptive of *Myioborus* species than Whitestart. Thus, it is unlikely that alignment will be achieved around Redstart.

To recap, we believe that this proposed change deserves fresh consideration, especially since the issue has not been reconsidered since 2016 (and SACC has not considered it since 2004), for the following main reasons:

1. There are very real benefits of aligning English names across existing global lists.
2. Applying Redstart to *Myioborus* implies relationships that do not exist.
3. There is considerable benefit to aligning English names around phylogeny and scientific names.
4. The incorrect nature of “Redstart” to refer to a genus of birds with white outertails that they flash (“start”) to hunt prey; Whitestart is correct for all members of the genus.
5. Changing Redstart to Whitestart is unlikely to be particularly disruptive.

On the other hand, continuing to use the name Redstart for *Myioborus* would:

- Miss an opportunity to align English names for all major world lists
- Align with most regional field guide usage in the Neotropics
- Miss an opportunity to use a distinctive name for a distinctive genus
- Imply relationships that don’t exist between *Myioborus* and three other genera across two other families
- Continue to use an inappropriate name, since these species have no red in the tails

On the other hand, if NACC (and SACC) were to adopt Whitestart, we would instantly have nearly complete global alignment around an acknowledged better name for the birds in this genus.

Recommendation:

We recommend a YES vote to adopt Whitestart for all members of *Myioborus*. If accepted, this would result in these new names for the NACC region:

If adopted, the below names would change as shown:

Scientific Name	**English Name**	**Revised Name**	**NACC**	**SACC**
Myioborus pictus	Painted Redstart	Painted Whitestart	x	
Myioborus miniatus	Slate-throated Redstart	Slate-throated Whitestart	x	x
Myioborus brunniceps	Brown-capped Redstart	Brown-capped Whitestart		x
Myioborus castaneocapilla	Tepui Redstart	Tepui Whitestart		x
Myioborus pariae	Paria Redstart	Paria Whitestart		x
Myioborus cardonai	Saffron-breasted Redstart	Saffron-breasted Whitestart		x
Myioborus albifacies	White-faced Redstart	White-faced Whitestart		x
Myioborus torquatus	Collared Redstart	Collared Whitestart	x	
Myioborus flavivertex	Yellow-crowned Redstart	Yellow-crowned Whitestart		x
Myioborus ornatus	Golden-fronted Redstart	Golden-fronted Whitestart		x
Myioborus melanocephalus	Spectacled Redstart	Spectacled Whitestart		x
Myioborus albifrons	White-fronted Redstart	White-fronted Whitestart		x

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Submitted by: Marshall J. Iliff, Pamela C. Rasmussen, and Andrew Spencer

Date of Proposal: 3 April 2026

Treat Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* as five species

Effect on NACC:

If this proposal passes, *Fringilla coelebs* would be split into multiple species and we would need to determine which taxa are known from the NACC area.

Background:

The Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*) *sensu lato* is an Eastern Hemisphere lineage of finches in the family Fringillidae. It is one of Europe's most common and recognizable songbirds, but also exists across much of Asia and in northern Africa, as well as the Azores, Madeira, and Canary Islands. Geographic variation within the lineage is pronounced, with three main geographic groups: a Eurasian group comprised of the nominate *coelebs* and related subspecies; a North African group that includes the subspecies *africana, spodiogenys*, and *harterti* (Svensson 2015); and a Macaronesian group that includes *moreletti* in the Azores, *maderensis* from Madeira, and four subspecies on the Canary Islands: *canariensis* on Tenerife and La Gomera, *palmae* on La Palma, *ombriosa* on El Hierro, and *bakeri* on Gran Canaria. These subspecies differ in color, morphometrics, and vocalizations (Lynch and Baker 1993, Lachlan et al. 2013, Illera et al. 2018). Based on the findings of Recuerda et al. (2021a) and previous work, the WGAC voted to split the Chaffinch into five species, which has since been adopted by Clements et al. (2025). This proposal synthesizes new information from Recuerda et al. (2021a) and votes from WGAC to solicit input from the NACC.

This is largely an extralimital complex that occurs outside of the NACC jurisdiction. Occasionally, *F. coelebs* has been reported in easternmost Canada (Newfoundland, Nova Scotia), and the northeastern United States as a vagrant. These are presumably from the European subspecies group, *F. coelebs coelebs*, but I did not have time to review those vagrant records.

New Information:

Recuerda et al. (2021a) conducted an integrative taxonomic assessment of the *F. coelebs* lineage to consider support for alternative species delimitation scenarios. The authors employed a genotyping-by-sequencing (GBS) approach, in which a single restriction enzyme, *PtsI*, was used to generate reduced-representation libraries in combination with a reference-level genome (Recuerda et al. 2021b). From those sequenced libraries, variants were called and a panel of SNPs for 81 individuals was compiled (Fig. 1). The used a full panel of ~160,000 loci to compare nucleotide diversity (π), observed and expected heterogyzosity (H_o and H_e), and F_{ST} among all populations. Recuerda et al. (2021a) also sequenced portions of mitochondrial gene regions—*atp8*, *atp6*, and *nad2*—for further comparisons, including haplotype and nucleotide diversity, pairwise genetic distances, and Fu's neutrality test. Using these summary statistics, they found signatures of population bottlenecks associated with founder events and colonization of different islands in Macaronesia, including lower nucleotide diversity and heterozygosity in the island populations compared to the mainland (Table 1).

Recuerda et al. (2021a) constructed a phylogeny based on the SNP Data set using RAxML (Fig. 2). They also build a time-calibrated mtDNA gene tree and a species tree using SNAPP (Bouckaert et al. 2014). They then used BioGeoBEARS to estimate ancestral ranges using the dispersal-extinction-cladogenesis model with the founder-event speciation parameter included (DEC + j). The authors also used the program STRUCTURE (Pritchard et al. 2000) to quantify population assignment probabilities for individuals under scenarios with differing numbers of populations (K = 2-5).

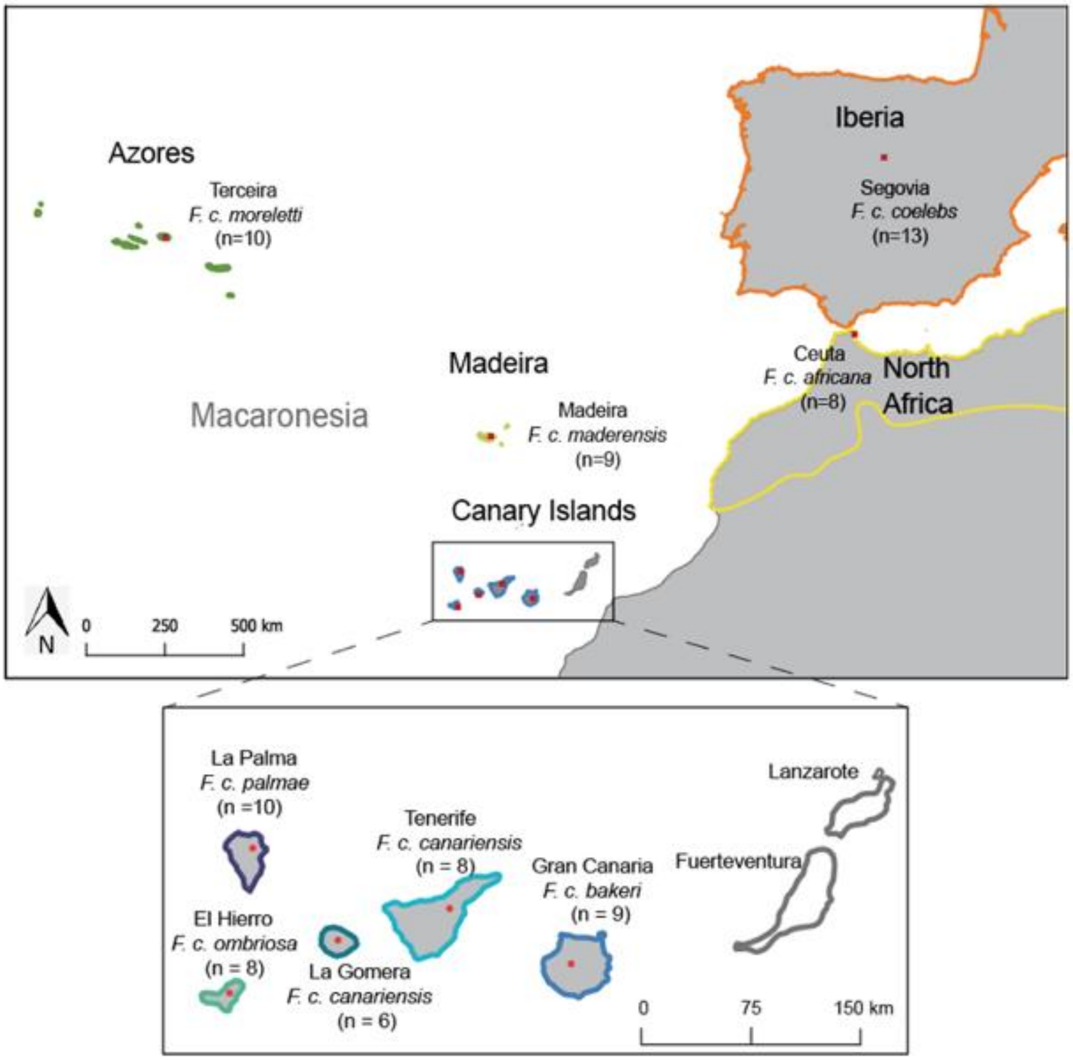


Figure 2: Sampling map of 81 individuals included in the population genetic data set generated via GBS by Recuerda et al. (2021a).

Table 1: Summary statistics, including sample size (n), nucleotide diversity (π), observed and expected heterogyzosity (H_o and H_e).

Region/Locality	n	π	H_o	H_e
Mainland	21	0.193	0.160	0.187
Africa (Ceuta)	8	0.177	0.160	0.165
Europe (Segovia)	13	0.188	0.159	0.177
Macaronesia	60	0.075	0.049	0.074
Azores (Terceira)	10	0.140	0.116	0.130
Madeira	9	0.051	0.047	0.048
Canary Islands	41	0.045	0.034	0.045
Gran Canaria	9	0.035	0.033	0.033
Tenerife	8	0.032	0.030	0.030
La Gomera	6	0.041	0.039	0.038
La Palma	10	0.031	0.031	0.029
El Hierro	8	0.042	0.039	0.039

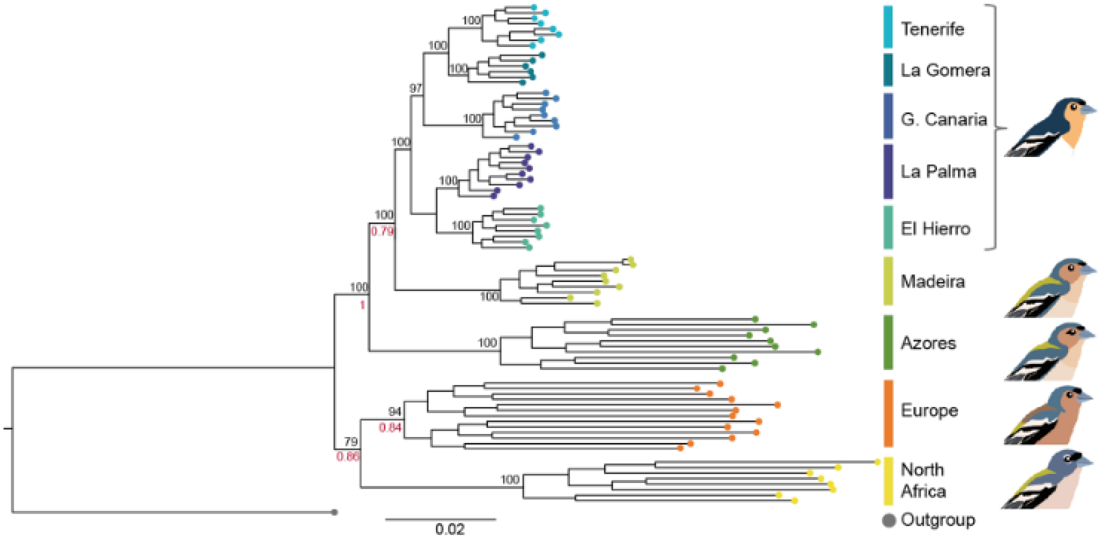


Figure 3: RAxML tree using ~100,000 genome-wide SNPs. Black numbers are bootstrap support values, while red numbers are support values from the mPTP species delimitation method.

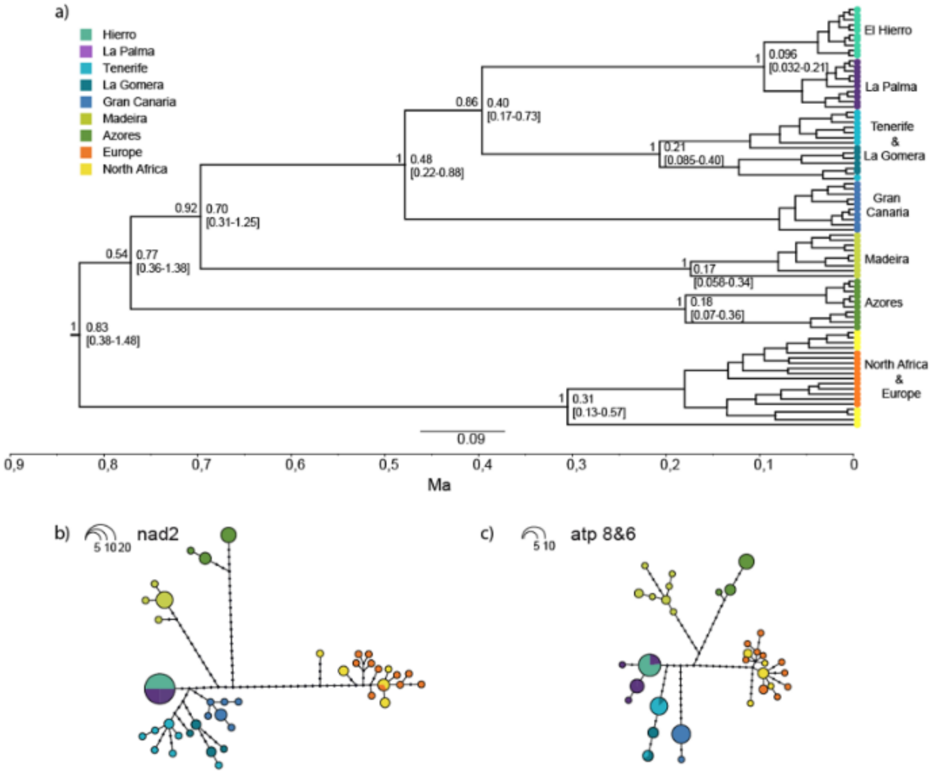


Figure 3: (a) Ultrametric Bayesian tree based on three mitochondrial genes (atp8, atp6 and nad2,) obtained with BEAST. Values on the left of each node represent posterior probability of node support. Values on the right of each node represent node age in million years, with confidence intervals (95% HPD) in brackets. (b) Haplotype networks based on nad2 and (c) atp8&6 genes.

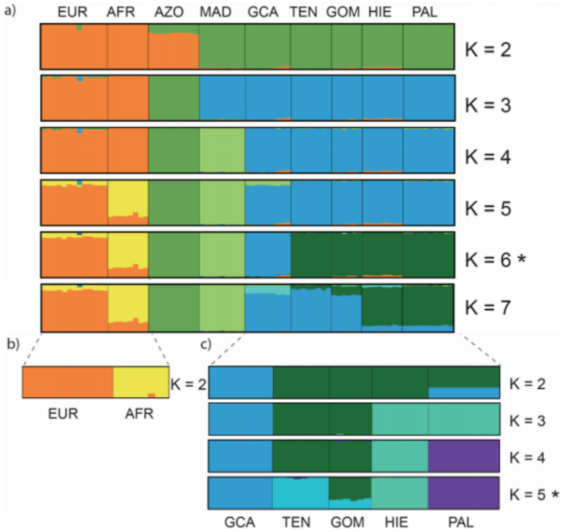


Figure 4: STRUCTURE analysis plots for (a) all chaffinch populations with K ranging from 2 to 7 (plots for K = 8 and 9 are not shown as they do not differ from K = 7), (b) mainland populations only for K = 2, and (c) Canary Islands populations only with K ranging from 2 to 5. EUR (Iberia), AFR (North Africa), AZO (Azores), MAD (Madeira), GCA (Gran Canaria), TEN (Tenerife); GOM (La Gomera), HIE (El Hierro) and PAL (La Palma). Asterisks (*) mark the optimal K value for each analysis.

To consider different species delimitation scenarios, the authors implemented a multi-rate Poisson Tree Processes (mPTP) method, which seeks to distinguish speciation events from coalescent processes within species (Kapli et al. 2017). The authors also presented an assessment of pairwise phenotypic differences under the 'point system' following the Handbook of Birds of the World (Table 1; Tobias et al. 2010). The morphometric data used in these pairwise comparisons are from Grant (1979).

Table 1: Pairwise phenotypic comparisons and point scoring system *sensu* Tobias et al. (2010) presented in Recuerda et al. (2021a).

Subspecies comparison	Morphology	Plumage	Total Score
coelebs vs *africana*	Bill width (2) Wing (1)	Back: brown/green (3) Face: reddish brown/gray (3) Eye ring: Redish brown/white (3)	12
coelebs vs *moreletti*	Wing (1) Bill length (3)	Upper back: brown/green (3) Lower back: brown/blue-gray (3) Face: reddish brown/pale orange (2)	12
coelebs vs *maderensis*	Wing (1) Tarsus (3)	Upper back: brown/green (3) Lower back: brown/blue-gray (3) Face: brown reddish/pale orange (2)	12
coelebs vs *canariensis*	Wing (1) Tarsus (3)	Back: brown/ blue (3) Face: reddish brown/pale orange (2) Breast: reddish brown/pale orange (2)	11
africana vs *moreletti*	Bill length (2) Wing (1)	Lower back: green/blue-gray (3) Face: gray/ pale orange (3) Eye ring: white/ pale orange (2)	11
africana vs *maderensis*	Bill width (1) Bill length (2)	Lower back: green/blue-gray (3) Face: gray/ pale orange (3) Eye ring: white/ pale orange (2)	11
africana vs *canariensis*	Bill width (1) Bill length (2)	Back: green / blue-gray (3) Face: gray/ pale orange (3) Eye ring: white/ light orange (2)	11
moreletti vs *maderensis*	Bill width (2) Tarsus (1)	Eye patch: black / light orange (3)	6
moreletti vs *canariensis*	Bill width (2) Wing (1)	Eye patch: black/orange (3) Upper back: green/blue-gray (3) Lower back: blueish gray/blue-gray (2)	11
maderensis vs *canariensis*	Wing (1)	Upper back: green/blue-gray (3) Lower back: gray/blue-gray (2) Nape : gray /blue-gray (2)	8

The authors concluded that their study supports a taxonomic revision to recognize at least five species within this complex, which was also supported by their empirical mPTP analysis. They proposed five species, each corresponding to a different biogeographic region: Eurasia (*Fringilla coelebs*), North Africa (*Fringilla spodiogenys/africana*), Azores (*Fringilla moreletti*), Madeira (*Fringilla maderensis*) and the Canary Islands (*Fringilla canariensis*).

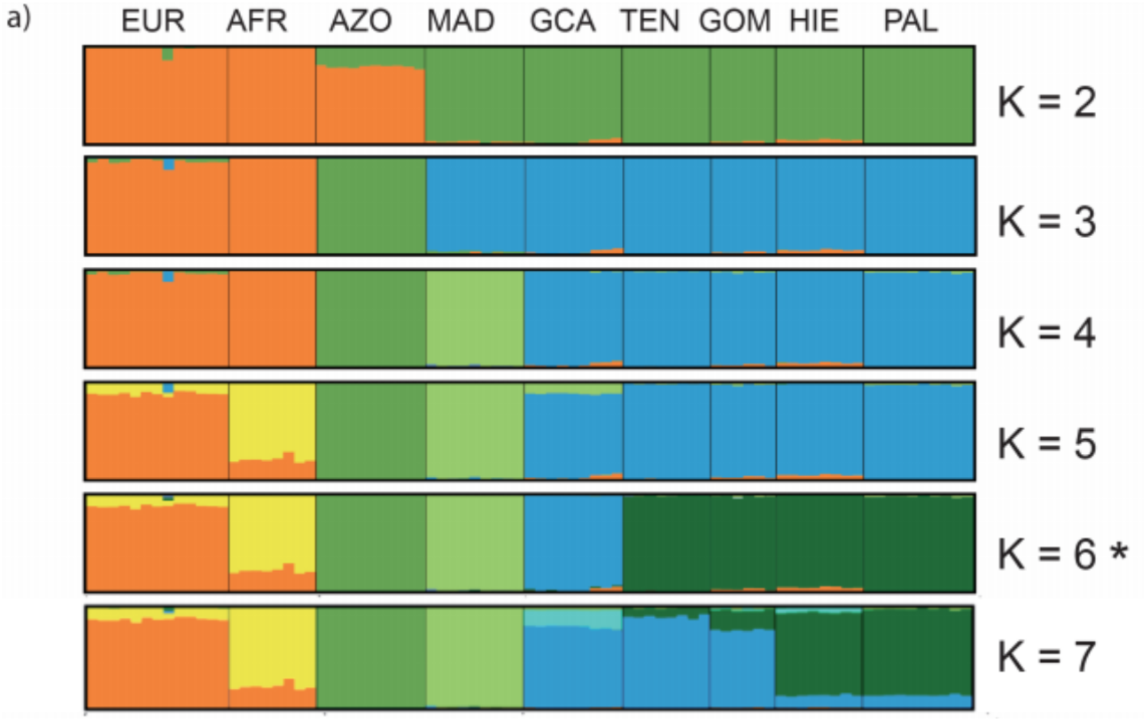
Recommendation:

This is largely an extralimital species complex, so my inclination would be to follow the lead of IOC and Clements, who already recognize the five species proposed above. As such, a YES vote would bring the NACC species list in line with this taxonomic change. The splits for all of the proposed species would be very recent, as the entire species complex shares a MRCA less than 1 million years ago. To me, the sticking point is the Eurasian *coelebs* and African *spodiogenys/africana* lineages. The samples for both taxa are from single sites, which show some signs of admixture in the genome-wide SNP data set in their STRUCTURE analysis. Furthermore, they are not reciprocally monophyletic in mtDNA. That said, they do have pronounced qualitative phenotypic differences in plumage—more so than some of the other species pairs that would be split if a five-way split were adopted. A four-way split with a combined Eurasian + north African species would be a more conservative approach (and probably what I'd personally prefer if we are operating under the BSC), but I am inclined to follow their lead since it's outside NACC jurisdiction. I therefore recommend a YES to a 5-way split of *Fringfilla coelebs*.

Anonymized Comments from WGAC group, who voted 6-0 to a 5-way split of *Fringilla coelebs*.

1. I vote YES (provisionally) to the split off from F. coelebs of 4 different species, based on this molecular study. I keep a relatively open mind, in case others can argue persuasively for retention of these as subspecific groups.

2. Great paper by [Recuerda] et al. (2021)... At the same time, it illustrates how modern genomic datasets don't provide a magic bullet for taxonomic quandaries, and how there is still a large degree of subjective taxonomic assessment involved. Their Figure 5, showing a Structure plot based on genome-wide SNPs, sums is up for me:

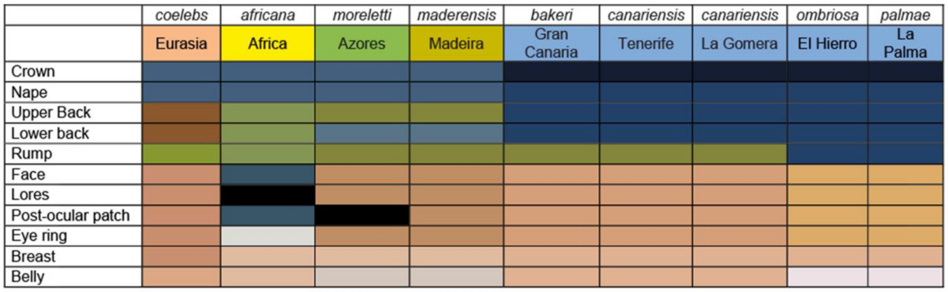


Essentially, there is no doubt in my mind that Common Chaffinches require splitting. Some of the vocal and plumage differentiation contained in this complex is simply too large to accommodate within one biological species. But the question is how far to go... Three species, four, five...? In this Structure plot, we can take our pick.
The authors opted for the color arrangement shown for K=5, and I agree. I can go along with splitting the African and European mainland populations given their pronounced phenotypic differences, even though there seems to be some occasional exchange between them, perhaps across Gibraltar.
If we went one step further (K=6), we'd have to split Gran Canaria from the remaining Canaries, and I agree with the authors that this would go too far for me. Gran Canaria looks pretty much the same as the other populations across the Canaries, and this is a convenient place to stop the splitting.
One problem with the K=5 solution is that we're splitting two taxa that look fairly similar (Azores and Madeira). But I have no problem with that. The authors show (in other analyses) that Azores and Madeira are deeply diverged and not even genomic sisters. And they point to deep bioacoustic differences between them.
In summary, the **5-species treatment** makes the most sense to me and I support it.

3. I cannot find any analysis that clearly demonstrates major bioacoustic differentiation between Azores and Madeira. Frank, is this in Lachlan et al. (2013)? The single sonagrams presented for these two do look rather different but so do all those from the Canaries, and I haven't attempted to work through online recordings, given the complexity of the repertoires involved.

   Also, the split of North African birds would appear to be largely based on their several phenotypic differences, as genetically they seem rather close to and somewhat intermixed with European birds, so I can see why some would choose to consider this as a subspecies group. However, to me the morphological distinctiveness of North African populations is indicative of species not subspecies status.

That said, based on the exemplary and thorough presentation of genomic and morphological differences (I especially like Fig. 7, which very effectively summarizes the color differences:



	coelebs	*africana*	*moreletti*	*maderensis*	*bakeri*	*canariensis*	*canariensis*	*ombriosa*	*palmae*
	Eurasia	Africa	Azores	Madeira	Gran Canaria	Tenerife	La Gomera	El Hierro	La Palma
Crown	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦	⬛	⬛	⬛	⬛	⬛
Nape	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦
Upper Back	🟫	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦
Lower back	🟫	🟩	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦	🟦
Rump	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟦	🟦
Face	🟧	🟦	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧
Lores	🟧	⬛	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧
Post-ocular patch	🟧	🟦	⬛	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧
Eye ring	🟧	⬜	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧
Breast	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧
Belly	🟧	🟧	⬜	⬜	🟧	🟧	🟧	⬜	⬜

Fig. 7. Summary of the main phenotypic differences among males of the different chaffinch taxa. Colors depicted for the different body parts are approximate estimates of real colors obtained from photographs (see Methods). (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

I agree that a 5-way split is warranted here. I don't see any strong rationale for splitting within the Canaries, and I don't see how Azores and Madeira can be kept together based on these results, despite their morphological similarity, which does not reflect their genetic disparity.

4. The paper by Recuerda et al (2021) is really nice! As Frank remarked, contrary to many persons' preconceptions, genomics often (usually?) complicate taxonomic decisions, because they unravel complex histories that aren't apparent based on less comprehensive data. Based on the combined evidence (I haven't looked into the vocal analyses), I vote to recognise **five species**, in accordance with the proposal by Recuerda et al. I'm not worried about the poor plumage differentiation between Azorean and Madeiran populations – morphological divergence happens at different rates in different lineages. There are fewer plumage differences among the Canary taxa than between these and any of the others.

5. I'm comfortable with the proposed **five-way split**, as suggested by Recuerda et al.

6. Shoot, I forgot to vote on this one! I can accept the 5-way split proposed by Recuerda et al 2021, which seems a reasonable way of accommodating the phylogenetic, vocal and morphological variation in the group. Nice paper!

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