

White-naped Seedeater

Dolospingus fringilloides

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Dolospingus fringilloides is endemic to white-sand forests of the upper Orinoco–Negro watershed at the junction of the Colombian, Brazilian and Venezuelan borders³. The vegetation in this Endemic Bird Area (EBA 065) is specialised, comprising relatively species-poor forest, with pockets of stunted seasonally deciduous vegetation on intervening rocky areas⁵. Eleven species are restricted to this EBA, including *Dolospingus*⁵. Ornithologically, the area is very poorly explored.

Previously known from southern Amazonas state in south Venezuela² and the rio Xié drainage in extreme north-west Brazil⁴, *D. fringilloides* was first reported from Colombia in February 1978, when one was seen and tape-recorded near Mitú, upper Vaupés¹. There were no further reports in the country until July–September 1992, when a joint expedition from Cambridge & London Universities, UK, and Universidad Nacional con Instituto de Ciencias Naturales, Bogotá, Colombia, spent 10 weeks on the Serranía de Naquén, a rocky outcrop in Guainía, east Colombia. Extensive fieldwork resulted in additional records of *Dolospingus* for Colombia.

Although several sites were censused for birds, *Dolospingus* was found at only two, both c.10 km north-north-east of Mahimachi village, which is c.30 km south-east of Caño Colorado. At the first, a low, 450 m-high, ridge, it was common in low scrub with many clearings and isolated dead trees. The vegetation was sparse with large areas of exposed rock and Man had heavily altered the habitat, with evidence of many recent fires. Males used exposed perches from which to sing, being often very conspicuous. Even when silent, males were highly visible; their confiding nature contrasted with previous reports. Females were, however, invariably furtive, feeding quietly alone within dense vegetation. A second site, with taller, more closed forest, held a few males but the species was much less visible and at lower density. No song was heard, although two males were seen chasing each other through the understorey; behaviour assumed to be territorial. It was only recorded in these two small areas, despite much searching, and went unnoticed in forest immediately adjacent to the narrow serranía. Various habitats have previously been postulated or observed to hold the species: secondary vegetation and plantations⁴, low scrubby sandy-belt woodlands³, rainforest and forest edge², savannas and dense arum-filled openings in very open forest¹.

Four birds, including two males, were mist-netted and photographed. The male is readily identifiable, being black with a partial, narrow white nuchal collar, a broad white wingbar and white speculum. The rump is greyish white and bill paler than most related species. The white nape, from which it derives its name, is rarely visible in the field. Females are not as distinctive, but less compact than other seedeaters and warmer brown with a whitish central abdomen. Like males, the long conical bill is a key marker.

Although the species had only been recorded once previously in Colombia, Guainía is very poorly known biologically. Interested observers should concentrate their efforts on sparse ridge-top vegetation; in contrast to the area's other endemic birds, which occur in denser forest.

References

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