

DISTRIBUTION AND GENERIC  
PLACEMENT OF THE PLAIN  
TYRANNULET (*INEZIA INORNATA*)

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Originally described as a new species of the tyrannid genus *Serpophaga* by Salvadori in 1897, the Plain Tyrannulet (*Inezia inornata*) was briefly considered by Hellmayr (1925) to be no more than a subspecies of *Serpophaga subcristata*. Later (1927), he restored it to species status. It remained in the genus *Serpophaga* until Zimmer (1955) showed that *inornata* differed in several respects from *S. subcristata*, the most important of which was the taxaspidean rather than exaspidean tarsal envelope. The latter character was considered sufficient to place *inornata* in the genus *Inezia*, which previously had contained only the single species *I. subflava*.

In his 1925 paper, Hellmayr referred two female specimens in the Carnegie Museum collection, one each from Santa Cruz de la Sierra and Puerto Suarez, Bolivia, to *inornata*. In 1927 he retracted this identification, saying that these two were "apparently females of *S. subcristata*." During the course of rearranging the flycatchers of the genus *Serpophaga* in Carnegie Museum, I had occasion to re-examine these specimens, which still bear Hellmayr's identifications on their labels. One of the two, CM 32742 from Santa Cruz de la Sierra, is indeed *S. subcristata*, as reidentified by Hellmayr. The other (CM 31313), a badly worn adult female from Puerto Suarez, has a taxaspidean tarsal envelope and matches *Inezia inornata* in all other respects. Furthermore, there are two additional specimens of *I. inornata* from Puerto Suarez in Carnegie Museum (CM 31329, ♂, and CM 31467, ♀); these were apparently not seen by Hellmayr.

Meyer de Schauensee (1966) gave the range of *I. inornata* as "BOLIVIA in Beni, Cochabamba and Tarija; southern BRAZIL in Mato Grosso; PARAGUAY in Chaco (*vide* Olog 1963); northwestern ARGENTINA in Salta (Embarcación)." In citing Olog as authority for the occurrence of this species in Paraguay, Meyer de Schauensee overlooked the original Paraguayan record, that of Wetmore (1926) from 80 km W of Puerto Pinasco, a record duly cited by Hellmayr (1927). The Department of Santa Cruz was omitted from the Bolivian range as given by Meyer de Schauensee, although a Field Museum specimen from Buena Vista in that Department was listed by Hellmayr (1927).

The specimens of *I. inornata* in the Carnegie Museum serve to fill in an apparent gap in the species' range as given in current literature. From west to east across the large Department of Santa Cruz (more than half of the total width of Bolivia), we have specimens from Río Yapacaní and Río Surutú (both near Buena Vista), Río Quizér (a branch of the Río San Miguel, between Santa Cruz and Concepción), Palmarito (just east of Laguna Concepción), and Puerto Suarez, on the border of Mato Grosso, Brazil. Puerto Suarez is less than 400 km N of Puerto Pinasco, Paraguay, and only 200 km NW of Miranda, Mato Grosso, where the species has been recorded by Pinto (1944), although Miranda is in southwestern Mato Grosso, not southeastern as given by Pinto.

To return to classification, Smith (1971) considered the three species currently placed in *Inezia* as forming no more than a "species group" within the genus *Serpophaga*. He cited tarsal scutellation and crown color as the alleged generic characters of *Inezia*. The latter character is admitted by all authors to be unimportant, as there is overlap through individual variation in crown pattern. Smith disagreed with Zimmer's statement that the differences in tarsal scutellation are "certainly of generic value" and pointed out that Zimmer did not give reasons for this judgment. Smith was unable to find anything in the vocal displays of *I. subflava* that would set it apart from the studied members of the genera *Serpophaga*, *Mecocerculus*, and *Stigmatura*. One suspects that this influenced his viewpoint that "it is difficult to think of a priori reasons why [tarsal scutellation] should be a magically decisive taxonomic characteristic, and we lack much understanding of functional differences among the various tarsal patterns." I would go further and say that we lack *any* understanding of even whether there *are* at present any functional differences among these patterns, just as we do not as yet understand the functional significance of many characters used at various taxonomic levels. Nevertheless, I prefer to invoke a morphological difference as a generic character rather than outweigh this by a failure to find differences in vocal displays.

Study of the Carnegie Museum series of *Serpophaga* and *Inezia* (supplemented by two specimens of *I. tenuirostris* kindly loaned by Charles O'Brien of the American Museum of Natural History) has revealed additional characters of *Inezia*, supplementing those used by Zimmer (1955) in transferring *inornata* from *Serpophaga* and *tenuirostris* from *Phaeomyias*. In combination, all of these characters suggest that *Inezia* and *Serpophaga* do form separate groups in spite of the close superficial resemblance of *I. inornata* and *S. subcristata*. Whether one wishes to consider them as separate genera is, at this point, a matter of taxonomic taste. At present, I consider the apparent lack of trenchant differences in vocal behavior between the species of *Inezia* and *Serpophaga* studied by Smith (as well as among the other serpophagine genera, which Smith has not proposed to "lump") as insufficient evidence to warrant the suppression of the generic name *Inezia*.

The specimen from Santa Cruz de la Sierra, whose identification Hellmayr correctly changed from *inornata* to *subcristata*, differs from most examples of the latter only in lacking any white mixed with the black of the elongated crown feathers. This appears to be simply a minority variant in *subcristata*, unrelated to locality, as suggested by other authors; 3 of the other 14 adults in our collection are similar. It is clear that crown color is unimportant as a character of the genus *Serpophaga*.

The collector, J. Steinbach, annotated the labels of seven of our *subcristata* and eight of our *inornata* specimens with the perishable colors of unfeathered parts. All of the bills of *subcristata* were described as "black" except for one juvenile, for which the upper mandible was described as "black" and the lower "yellow." The upper mandibles of *inornata* are described as "black," "brown-black," or "horn black," and the lower mandibles as "dark brown," "brown," "light brown," "brownish-grey," or "grey." The feet, too, are darker in *subcristata*; these were marked as "black" or "plumbeous black" by Stein-

bach, while those of *inornata* were labeled "bluish-grey," "leaden grey," "blue plumbeous," "plumbeous," or "dark slate."

The wholly black bill and black or blackish feet of *subcristata* are consistent with those of all other *Serpophaga* species in our collection. The other two species of *Inezia* match *inornata* in having the feet and at least the lower mandible paler than in *Serpophaga*. M. A. Carriker, Jr., annotated the labels of 25 adults of *I. subflava* in the Carnegie Museum collection with bill and foot colors. The bills of 21 were described as "black, leaden [or leaden blue] below," and those of the other 4 as "black." Similarly, 21 were described as having "leaden" feet, 4 as having "black" feet (only 2 specimens have both bill and feet described simply as "black"). On the labels of our 16 adult *I. tenuirostris*, Carriker described the bills of 13 as "black, paler [or flesh] below" and of 3 as "black." The feet of 14 were "leaden" and of 2, "black." These annotations suggest that the paler color of lower mandibles and feet of *Inezia* is not a consistent character. However, examination of the specimens themselves indicates that the unmodified word "black" used by Carriker was apparently a shorthand, or written in haste, as the dried bills and feet of these specimens are scarcely if at all darker than those on whose labels Carriker wrote colors other than just black, and they are quite different in appearance from the shiny black bills and feet of specimens of *Serpophaga* sp.

The color of the juvenal plumage proves to be another character linking the three species of *Inezia* and separating them from *Serpophaga*. The juvenal plumage of *S. subcristata*, *S. munda*, and *S. cinerea* is much like that of older birds, but with colors more subdued. The wing bars are more heavily washed with cinnamon buff or ochraceous, and the markings of the crown are usually absent or reduced. In the rather distinctive *S. hypoleuca*, the juvenile is grayish-brown rather than brownish-gray dorsally, with somewhat shorter, sepia rather than black, crest feathers. The adult lacks wing bars, but two dull reddish-brown ones are present in the juvenile. The two Carnegie Museum specimens of *Inezia inornata* from Puerto Suarez that were not seen by Hellmayr are both undergoing the first prebasic molt, with much of the juvenal feathering still present. In this species the juvenal plumage is distinctly reddish-brown dorsally, with vaguely paler tips to the feathers, quite different in appearance from the succeeding basic plumage. The juvenal plumage of *Inezia subflava* (CM 43117, Mamatoco, Colombia; CM 78728, Arroyo de Arenas, Colombia) is similar to that of *I. inornata*, although somewhat less reddish. I have not seen specimens of *I. tenuirostris* in full juvenal plumage.

Three specimens in late stages of the first prebasic molt (CM 43072, Gaira, Colombia; CM 45436, Riohacha, Colombia; AMNH 150468, La Vela de Coro, Venezuela) retain enough juvenal feathers to show that, as in *inornata* and *subflava*, the juvenal upper parts are distinctly brown rather than grayish or greenish as in the first basic plumage; as indicated above, this contrast in the color of the two plumages is lacking in the species of *Serpophaga* examined.

There are thus at least three characters linking the three species of *Inezia* and separating them from *Serpophaga*: tarsal scutellation, color of bills and feet, and contrast between juvenal and first basic plumages. Smith's proposal to suppress the genus *Inezia* seems to be based entirely on resemblances noted between certain vocalizations of two pairs of *Inezia subflava* and those of *Serpophaga subcristata*, *S. cinerea*, and *Stigmaturota budytoidea*. By implication, the retention of *Stigmaturota* as a valid genus appears to rest on its distinctive appearance and nonvocal behavior patterns, in spite of its vocal similarity to the other serphagines. On the other hand, the "lumping" of *Inezia* into *Serpophaga*, because of the vocal similarities mentioned, appears by implication to be accepted by Smith on the basis of the superficial plumage similarity of adults of *S. subcristata* to those of *I. inornata* (a species not studied in the field by Smith). I submit that a good case has not yet been made for the inclusion of the three species of *Inezia* in *Serpophaga*.

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