

DISTRACTION DISPLAY OF THE WHITE-BROWED WARBLER
***Basileuterus leucoblepharus* IN PARAGUAY: A SHORT NOTE**

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The White-browed Warbler *Basileuterus leucoblepharus* is an Atlantic Forest Endemic (Brooks et al 1999) species restricted to southern Brazil, eastern Paraguay, northeastern Argentina and Uruguay (Ridgeley & Tudor 1989). It is a familiar resident of Paraguayan humid forests, though shier and less conspicuous than the congeneric Golden-crowned Warbler *Basileuterus culicivorus* which often occurs alongside it.



Clay & del Castillo (2004) consider the species frequent to common in eastern Paraguay and mist-netting and acoustic

FIG 1: White-browed Warbler *Basileuterus leucoblepharus* (Paul Smith)

studies have suggested that in some areas it is at least as numerous as Golden-crowned Warbler, with an estimated density of more than 300 individuals per km² (Esquivel 2006, Smith et al. 2006). Unlike the arboreal Golden-crowned Warbler, the White-browed Warbler is semi-terrestrial in behaviour, frequently foraging on the ground, where it moves with a series of hops (Curson et al 1994).

On 14 September 2004 at Hotel Tirol, Departamento Itapúa, southern Paraguay (27°11'S, 55°47'W) a bird of this species was seen engaging in a hitherto undescribed distraction display. It moved in small, tight circles (c30cm in diameter) on the ground with tail fanned, fluttering the spread wings ineffectually as though unable to fly. Simultaneously it gave an unusual, high-pitched *pi-pi-pi...* call, quite different to the usual harsh *pist* note of this species (Smith & Clay in press, Curson et al 1994). As it was approached to within 2m the bird began to move slowly away in a straight line, repeating the tight circular paths whenever there was a pause in the observer's pursuit, imploring him to follow. It proceeded in this manner for c10m before taking flight and perching on a low branch, immediately giving the typical alarm call. The observation was made at the beginning of the southern hemisphere breeding season (broadly September to December) when most species would be

expected to be engaged in breeding activity. The behaviour appeared to be designed to lead a potential predator away from a nearby nest, though no nest could be found during a brief search of the immediate area.

Distraction displays are well-documented in many bird families and have been reported for several genera of Wood Warbler in North America (including other semi-terrestrial species such as the Kentucky Warbler *Oporornis formosus* (McDonald 1998) and the Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapillus* (Van Horn & Donovan 1994)). Wing and tail movement play a major role in social interactions and display in the White-rimmed Warbler, as in many other members of its family (Sick 1993) and the distraction display described here is consistent in its basic design with that of other ground-dwelling Parulids - the Kentucky Warbler for example incorporates spread-wings and tail movements into a zig-zagging terrestrial dance leading the threat a safe distance from the nest (McDonald 1998).

This is the first documented description of the distraction display in White-rimmed Warbler, a common but little-studied South American species. Belton (1994) alluded to what was presumably a distraction display by a nesting bird in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil describing it as “fleeing rapidly and rodent-like with short footsteps while giving a broken wing display”. However that brief description appears to differ in several key elements from the display observed in Paraguay, not least in the path taken by the displaying bird and the speed at which it invited pursuit.

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