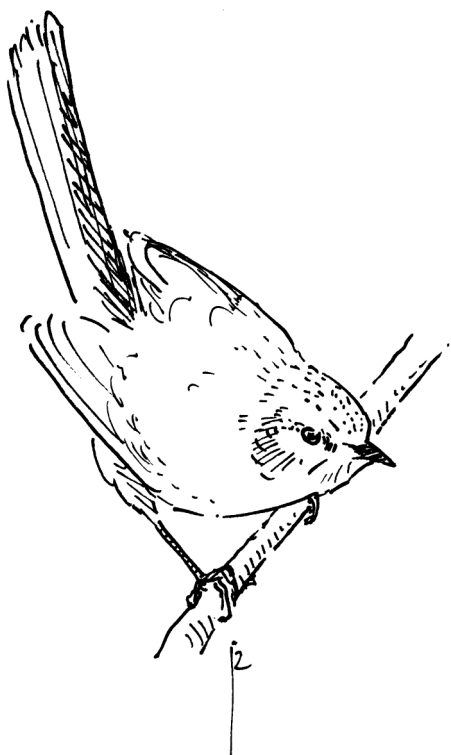


The identity of *Sylvia ruficollis* Vieillot, 1817 and Azara's No. 240 "Cola aguda cola de canela obscura" (Aves: Furnariidae)

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Smith P. 2018. The identity of *Sylvia ruficollis* Vieillot, 1817 and Azara's No. 240 "Cola aguda cola de canela obscura" (Aves: Furnariidae). *Ardea* 106: 79–83. doi:10.5253/arde.v106i1.a5

The identity of Azara's No. 240 "Cola aguda cola de canela obscura" and the name *Sylvia ruficollis* Vieillot, 1817 which is based on it has been widely discussed, but never convincingly elucidated. Azara obtained the specimen from the "barbarians of Paraguay" and the distinctive tail pattern that he described narrows the identity down to three species in the Paraguayan avifauna, two in the genus *Asthenes* and *Phacellodomus sibilatrix*. Much confusion about the identity of Azara's birds has been previously caused by Vieillot's tendency to omit the morphometrics provided in the original description. In this case, it is possible to confirm the identity of *Sylvia ruficollis* as *Phacellodomus sibilatrix*. In order to maintain nomenclatural stability, it is recommended that the older name *Sylvia ruficollis* be suppressed.

Key words: *Asthenes baeri*, *Asthenes pyrrholeuca*, Paraguay, *Phacellodomus sibilatrix*

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Born in Huesca, Spain on 18 May 1746, Félix de Azara (1746–1821) was a military engineer sent in 1781 to delimit the Spanish territories in South America with his Portuguese equivalent. Charged with marking boundaries from his base in Asunción, Paraguay, the failure of his counterpart to ever arrive led to him occupying his spare time in the study of the fauna and geography of the 'Paraguay and La Plata' region, that includes modern day eastern Argentina, Paraguay, extreme southern Brazil and Uruguay (Beddall 1983). A detailed chronology of his movements, life and work is provided by Contreras (2010).

His three-volume landmark publication "Apuntes para la historia natural de los pájaros del Paraguay y Río de la Plata" (1802–1805) provided descriptions of 448 birds from this region, almost half of which were unknown to science at the time. It seems that the author may have funded publication himself, and as a consequence it received limited circulation. However, a poor French translation by Sonnini (Azara 1809) was more widely available and was probably

the one most consulted by scientists of the time. Unfortunately the translator overstepped the remit of his work by cropping and abbreviating text, allowing his own opinions to override those of the author (typically erroneously), reorganizing it and openly criticizing perceived shortcomings in the original in an undiplomatic manner unbefitting of somebody unfamiliar with the study area (Beddall 1983). As a result of the translator's omissions and tinkering, the general opinion of the work at the time of its publication was that it lacked depth, and it was not until the travels of the great French naturalist Alcide d'Orbigny that Azara's claims were vindicated and the true value of his contribution became apparent (d'Orbigny 1839).

Azara's original descriptions in fact showed an extraordinary breadth of knowledge and attention to detail, and his observations have been largely supported by subsequent study. However, he refrained from providing scientific names for the species, listing each one instead with a common name (usually Spanish or Guaraní in origin). Sonnini also stopped short of putting

scientific names on the descriptions he translated, though he felt sure enough to omit some descriptions which he thought belonged to known species (incorrectly) and to mark “new species” as such when he was unable to do so. Some 178 of Azara’s descriptions were subsequently given scientific names based entirely on the descriptions, many of them by Louis-Jean-Pierre Vieillot, who had supervised the illustrations for Sonnini’s translation (Beddall 1983). Often such descriptions involved a brief French translation of the descriptive part of Azara’s description, with most of the morphometric data and typically all of the ecological information omitted. Many of these names remain valid today.

However, not all of Azara’s descriptions and the scientific names associated with them have been conclusively associated with known species, and a series of authors have attempted to reidentify these descriptions and apply them to known taxa (Hartlaub 1847, Burmeister 1861, Berlepsch 1887, Bertoni 1901, Laubmann 1939, Pereyra 1945). Despite this, some species remain unidentified and the identification of others is moot. In this paper, I deal with the identity of one of these species, “240 Cola aguda cola de canela obscura”, the basis of *Sylvia ruficollis* Vieillot, 1817 and discuss the nomenclatural implications.

**240 Cola aguda cola de canela obscura
(Azara 1805: 273)**

Though it was not specifically linked to Azara’s work in the description, it is clear from the near word for word translation that this was the basis of *Sylvia ruficollis*

Vieillot, 1817: 266. Vieillot however elected to omit the measurements provided in the original, except for the total length measurement of 5.5 inches.

None of the major reviewers of Azara’s work were able to conclusively identify No. 240, all of them attaching the (to that point) unidentifiable name given by Vieillot to it (Hartlaub 1847, Burmeister 1861, Laubmann 1939, Pereyra 1945). The only reviewer to attempt to associate it with a known species was Berlepsch (1887), who suggested with a query that it may refer to his *Thripophaga sclateri* Berlepsch, 1883, a species that was later included in the synonymy of Orange-breasted Thornbird *Phacellodomus ferrugineigula* (Pelzeln, 1858). This generic allocation presumably led Bertoni (1901) to list *Thripophaga? ruficollis* (Vieill.; the question mark suggests that Bertoni was unsure what genus to place it in) as the identity of Az. No. 240 “Cola de canela obscura”. However, Berlepsch’s (1887) identification leaves much to be desired not least because it is a much larger bird, but also because there are no records of it from Paraná state in Brazil that immediately borders Paraguay (Scherer-Neto *et al.* 2011).

Bertoni (1914) later listed the species as *Acrochilus ruficollis*, again associating this name directly with Azara No. 240, but it was absent from the updated edition of the same work (Bertoni 1939). By a process of deduction it is possible that he substituted the name *Cranioleuca pallida* Wied, 1831 for it. *C. pallida* occurs well to the east of Paraguay (Remsen 2003) and Bertoni’s usage of the name was clearly a misapplication as he also listed it for Argentina (Bertoni 1913).

Table 1. Comparison between measurements provided by Azara (1802–1805) and potential confusion species (in mm). For the measurements provided by Azara one inch was treated as equivalent to 25.4 mm and one line (“una línea”) was treated as equivalent to 2.21 mm, consistent with conventions of the time. References for measurements: 1: Smith *et al.* (2008), 2: Brodkorb (1938), 3: Vaurie (1980), 4: Müller Rebelato *et al.* (2011), 5: Azara No. 231 (1805).

	Azara No. 240	Short-billed Canastero <i>Asthenes baeri chacoensis</i>	Sharp-billed Canastero <i>Asthenes pyrrholeuca</i>	Little Thornbird <i>Phacellodomus sibilatrix</i>
Total length (mm)	139.70	133.50 (n = 2; range = 129–138; 1)	162.00 (n = 1; 4)	143.00 (n = 2; range = 142–144; 1)
Tail (mm)	57.15	57.71 (n = 7; range = 55.5–62; 1,2)	78.59 (n = 37; range = 68–87; 3,4)	59.33 (n = 28; range = 56–65; 3)
Leg (mm)	28.73	NA	28.73 (n = 1; 5)	NA
Tarsus (mm)	22.10	20.75 (n = 2; range = 20–21.5; 1)	22.82 (n = 1; 5)	19.00 (n = 2; range = 19; 1)
Mid-toe (mm)	14.37	10.00 (n = 2; range = 9–11; 1)	15.47 (n = 1; 5)	11.75 (n = 2; range = 11.5–12; 1)
Bill (mm)	13.35	11.64 (n = 7; range = 10–13; 1,2)	15.58 (n = 42, 4; range = 13.8–18; 3)	14.50 (n = 30; range = 12–16; 1, 3)



Figure 1. A) Short-billed Canastero *Asthenes baeri chacoensis*. Note the mustard-coloured chin spot and fairly weak bill. B) Little Thornbird *Phacellodomus sibilatrix*. The species is a close match physically and morphometrically to Azara's description. C) Sharp-billed Canastero *Asthenes pyrrholeuca* frontal view. Note the sharp, slender bill, greyish tinge to the underparts and very long tail. D) Sharp-billed Canastero dorsal view with spread wing. The wing pattern does not conform to that described by Azara. Photos A and B Oscar Bordon, photos C and D Arne Lesterhuis.

Hellmayr (1925) dismissed any link between Azara No. 240 and *Cranioleuca pallida*, stating that he was “quite unable to recognize this bird” in it – but it is unclear who he was inferring made the link, as none of the publications cited in that work apparently do so.

Azara states clearly that his bird was obtained from the “barbarians” of Paraguay and, even allowing for the greater geographic area of Paraguay at that time, there are only three birds of similar size to the measurements provided by Azara that occur in that region and which share the distinctive tail pattern described: *Asthenes baeri chacoensis* Brodtkorb, 1938, *A. pyrrholeuca pyrrholeuca* Vieillot, 1817 and *Phacellodomus sibilatrix* Sclater, 1879 (see Figure 1). Of these the description and measurements provided are a close match only for *Phacellodomus sibilatrix* (Table 1). Though there are very minor

omissions from the description (which is relatively brief), there are no inconsistencies with that species. The full description and my own English translation of it are provided below.

“Le compré hace muchos años en mayo á los Bárbaros del Paraguay; y como no he visto otro, le deposito aquí por las razones que al anterior.

Longitud $5\frac{1}{2}$ pulgadas: cola $2\frac{1}{4}$: braza 7 escasas. El costado de la cabeza y baxo de ella hasta el pecho son de una canela que vá blanqueando hasta el vientre. El costado del cuerpo, tapadas, timoneles inferiores, cola y cobijas menores, son de canela; exceptuando la central y su inmediata en la cola, que son pardas obscuras. Del pico á la cola, y los dos órdenes mayores de cobijas, pardos acanelados, dominando mas la

canela en la rabadilla. Los remos tienen algo del último color junto a las cobijas, la barba superior parda acanelada, y lo demás oscuro.

Remos 19, el cuarto mayor: cola 12 plumas en escalera igual, la de afuera 12 líneas más breve que la interior y su inmediata: pierna 13 : tarso 10, trigueño : dedo medio $6\frac{1}{2}$: pico 6, muy comprimido por los costados, algo corvo, agudo y fuerte, oscuro encima, celeste abaxo.

Cotejándole con la Fauvette à queue rousse de Cayena de Buffon (Tom. IX, pág. 236), encuentro la misma magnitud y distribución de los colores, aun estos no difieren sino en que el Autor tiñe baxo de la cabeza de un blanco circundado de rubio y punteado de pardo, y toda la cola de un color; pero yo no me atrevo sino a dudar la identidad.”

“I bought it many years ago in May from the barbarians of Paraguay, and as I haven’t seen another, I include it here for the same reasons as the previous species.

Length $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches: tail $2\frac{1}{4}$: wingspan 7 short. The side of the head and beneath it to the breast are of a cinnamon colour that whitens towards the venter. The sides of the body, underwing coverts, underside of the tail, tail and lesser coverts are cinnamon, except for the central feather and its immediate neighbour in the tail which are dark brown. From the bill to the tail, and the two higher orders of coverts, it is tawny-brown, with cinnamon dominating more on the rump. The flight feathers show something of the same colour next to the coverts, the upper web tawny brown, and the rest grey.

Flight feathers 19, the fourth the longest: tail 12 feathers, evenly graduated, the outermost 26.52 mm shorter than the two innermost pairs: leg 28.73 mm: tarsus 22.1, pale brown: mid-toe 14.37 mm, bill 13.35 mm, very laterally compressed, somewhat curved, thick and strong, dark above, bluish below.

Comparing it with the ‘Fauvette à queue rousse de Cayena’ of Buffon (Tome IX, page, 236), I find the same size and distribution of colours, although these do not differ except for the fact that the author paints under the head with white surrounded by yellow and spotted with brown, and all of the tail of a single colour; however, I do not dare to doubt the identity.”

Reasons to discount *Asthenes baeri chacoensis*

The morphometrics of this species are a good match for Azara No. 240 (Table 1), and this species is in fact similar both in structure and appearance to *Phacellodomus sibilatrix* (with which it is often confused in the field). However, the description of the wing pattern is not a match. There is no mention of the large mustard-

yellow spot on the chin, and its absence is significant given the comparison made with the chin spot of ‘Fauvette à queue rousse de Cayena’. The bill is very slightly curved on the culmen, but is otherwise rather weak.

Reasons to discount *Asthenes pyrrholeuca pyrrholeuca*

The morphometrics of this species are a poor match for Azara No. 240 (Table 1), most notably the much longer tail and bill. The bill of this species is sharp, slender and straight, not curved and robust. The difference in length between the outer tail feather and its adjacent feather is 39–42 mm in this species (Palerm 1971), much greater than the 26.5 mm (12 lines) stated by Azara. It is largely greyish ventrally with a pale orange chin spot (though not always visible), lacking the warmer colouration described by Azara. The tail and wing patterns described by Azara also do not conform to this species.

Nomenclatural recommendation

Employment by Bertoni (1901), Laubmann (1939), Pereyra (1945) and others means that the name is available for usage under ICZN rules (ICZN 1999, Art. 23.9), however in none of these cases was the name specifically attached to a known species. The name *Phacellodomus sibilatrix* has been in unbroken usage since the formal description of the species and in order to maintain stability I recommend this be retained as a *nomen protectum*. Thus, *Sylvia ruficollis* is to be considered a senior synonym of *Phacellodomus sibilatrix* and a *nomen oblitum* (ICZN 1999: Recommendation 23A).

Though it must be affected immediately, the action recommended herein remains provisional pending approval by the ICZN. A proposal seeking formal validation of this action will be submitted to the ICZN by the author in due course.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is grateful for the support of the PRONII program of CONACYT Paraguay, and the anonymous librarians behind the online Biodiversity Heritage Project which made many of these hard to find references freely available. Thank you to Oscar Bordon and Arne Lesterhuis for providing photographs of the species for publication.

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SAMENVATTING

De identiteit van Azara's nr. 240 "Cola aguda cola de canela obscura" en de naam *Sylvia ruficollis* Vieillot 1817 die daarop is gebaseerd, is in de literatuur vaak bediscussieerd. De onduidelijkheid betreffende de nomenclatuur is echter nooit overtuigend opgehelderd. Azara verkreeg het bewuste exemplaar destijds van de "barbaren uit Paraguay". Het kenmerkende staartpatroon dat hij beschreef, beperkt de mogelijke identiteit van de vogel tot drie soorten die in het toenmalige Paraguay voorkwamen: twee van het geslacht *Asthenes* (distelstaarten en canastero's) en de Kleine Stekelkruin *Phacellodomus sibilatrix*. Veel verwarring over de identiteit van Azara's vogels is destijds veroorzaakt door de neiging van Vieillot om de biometrie, zoals weergegeven in de oorspronkelijke beschrijving, weg te laten. In dit geval is het mogelijk om de determinatie van *Sylvia ruficollis* als *Phacellodomus sibilatrix* te bevestigen. Om stabiliteit in de nomenclatuur te behouden, wordt aanbevolen om de oudere naam *Sylvia ruficollis* niet meer te gebruiken.

Corresponding editor: Allert Bijleveld

Received 13 September 2017; accepted 29 December 2017