

New records and eastward range extension of the Yellow-eared Toucanet (*Selenidera spectabilis*) in the northern Central Andes of Colombia

Nuevos registros y extensión hacia el oriente del área de distribución del Tucán orejiamarillo (*Selenidera spectabilis*) en los Andes centrales del norte de Colombia

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Abstract

The Yellow-eared Toucanet (*Selenidera spectabilis*) is an infrequently recorded species in northwestern Colombia, and records toward the eastern portion of its distribution are scarce or absent. Here, we report two new records from the foothills of the northern Central Andes in the department of Antioquia. These records represent an eastward range extension of approximately 164 km and confirm the presence of the species in foothill forests bordering the Cauca-Magdalena Valleys. Our findings refine the known distribution of Yellow eared-Toucanet in northern Colombia and highlight the importance of continued field surveys in transitional Andean-lowland ecosystems. Notably, both localities are affected by ongoing mining and logging activities, underscoring the conservation importance of documenting species occurrences in increasingly threatened landscapes.

Key words: anthropogenic pressures, bird monitoring, Central Andes foothills, inter-andean valleys, range extension

Resumen

El Tucán orejiamarillo (*Selenidera spectabilis*) es una especie registrada con poca frecuencia en el noroccidente de Colombia, y los registros hacia la porción oriental de su distribución son escasos o inexistentes. En este trabajo reportamos dos nuevos registros en las estribaciones de los Andes centrales del norte de Antioquia. Estos registros representan una extensión en la distribución hacia el oriente de aproximadamente 164 km y confirman la presencia de la especie en bosques húmedos que bordean los valles del Cauca y el Magdalena. Nuestros hallazgos refinan la distribución conocida del Tucán orejiamarillo en el norte de Colombia y resaltan la importancia de continuar los muestreos de campo en ecosistemas de transición andino – tierras bajas. Notablemente, ambas localidades se ven afectadas por las actividades mineras y madereras, lo que subraya la importancia de documentar la presencia de especies en paisajes cada vez más amenazados.



Palabras clave: estribaciones de los Andes centrales, extensión de rango, monitoreo de aves, presiones antropogénicas, valles inter-andinos

The genus *Selenidera* comprises six recognized species (Ramsen *et al.* 2026). Four species are Amazonian (*S. reinwardtii*, *S. nattereri*, *S. piperivora*, *S. gouldi*), one is restricted to southeastern Brazil and adjacent eastern of Paraguay and northeastern of Argentina (*S. maculirostris*) (Short 2020, Ramsen *et al.* 2026). While the remaining species, the Yellow-eared Toucanet (*Selenidera spectabilis*), inhabits forests from sea level to 1500 m and is distributed in the

northwestern and Pacific lowlands of Colombia, extreme northwestern Ecuador (Esmeraldas), and throughout Central America from northeastern Honduras through Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama (Sandoval & Rodríguez 2018, Short 2020, Ramsen *et al.* 2026).

Historically, the systematics of the genus *Selenidera* have been complex (Lutz *et al.* 2013). Specifically, *S.*

spectabilis was proposed as sister to *Andigena*, with both forming a clade sister to the remaining *Selenidera* species (Kimura et al. 2004, Lutz et al. 2013). More recently, evidence from ultraconserved elements (UCEs) and mitochondrial phylogenies indicates that *Selenidera* is paraphyletic with respect to *Andigena* (Ostrow et al. 2023). These findings suggest that all taxa within the *Selenidera* + *Andigena* clade should be classified within *Selenidera*, which has taxonomic priority, as a way to resolve the observed paraphyly (Lutz et al. 2013, Ostrow et al. 2023). Furthermore, this non-monophyly points to a complex biogeographic history involving multiple transitions between lowland and montane regions (Ostrow et al. 2023).

In this framework, the phylogenetic placement of the lowland Toucanet *Selenidera spectabilis* as more closely related to highland Toucan such as *Andigena*, supports the hypothesis of dynamic movements between lowlands and montane regions within this clade of Ramphastidae (Ostrow et al. 2023). There is also evidence that this species may perform downslope post-breeding movements into lowlands in Costa Rica and Panama, although such movements remain uncertain and require further investigation (Short 2020). Similarly, a related species, *Selenidera maculirostris*, has been reported to undertake occasional movements into human-modified and urban areas during colder periods in southeastern Brazil, likely in response to changes in food availability associated with habitat alteration (Schunck et al. 2025).

In this context, we report two new records of Yellow-eared Toucanet (*S. spectabilis*) from the lowlands of the northern Central Andes of Colombia. Although the species is infrequently recorded in Colombia, eBird weekly frequency data indicate a very low relative reporting rate (<0.1%) throughout the year (eBird 2026). These records confirm the presence of the species in the lowlands of the Central Andes, within the Nechí River basin (department of Antioquia), and represent an eastward range extension of approximately 164 km. Additionally, we highlight ongoing anthropogenic pressures in these localities and emphasize their detrimental impacts on biodiversity, including the loss of evolutionary history associated with these populations.

The first record was obtained on 27 Nov 2022 in Vereda La Tirana, municipality of Anorí, department of Antioquia (7.2984° N, -75.0621° W; 644 m) (Figure 1). The observation was made along a trail within a primary tropical wet forest, very close to the Anorí river. During the survey, we observed two individuals, (male and female) producing several vocalizations. The encounter lasted at least ten minutes, during which RHTR obtained photographs of both individuals using a Nikon D7200 equipped with a 150-600 mm tamron lens (Fig. 2A-B).

The northern central Andes harbor exceptionally high bird diversity and well-preserved forest, however, relatively few ornithological inventories and distributional studies have been conducted in this region (Cuervo et al. 2008a, Cuervo et al. 2008b, Donegan 2012, Tejada-Arango et al. 2024). The locality where we recorded the Yellow-eared Toucanet is also characterized by high bird diversity, as documented in this eBird checklist (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S125660772>).

Despite this, the area is embedded within the Nechí river basin, a region heavily affected by mining and logging activities that pose serious threats to biodiversity at multiple levels. These pressures highlight the urgent need for increased attention from environmental authorities at both regional and national levels, including stronger monitoring of land-use change, improved enforcement against the impacts of mining and logging, and the promotion of sustainable management practices to mitigate ongoing deforestation in tropical forest.

The second record was obtained near the previous locality at 8:00 h on 30 Dec 2025 in Vereda El Pescado, municipality of Segovia, department of Antioquia (7.2545° N, -74.686° W; 442 m). During a field trip near a forest edge and creek, while observing a nest of the Red-and-green Macaw (*Ara chloropterus*), we heard the call of a Yellow-eared Toucanet. The vocalization was verified using the Merlin Bird ID app, after which two individuals (male and female) were observed in the canopy. Over a period of at least 20 minutes, both individuals were photographed by FAUP using a Canon SX70 HS

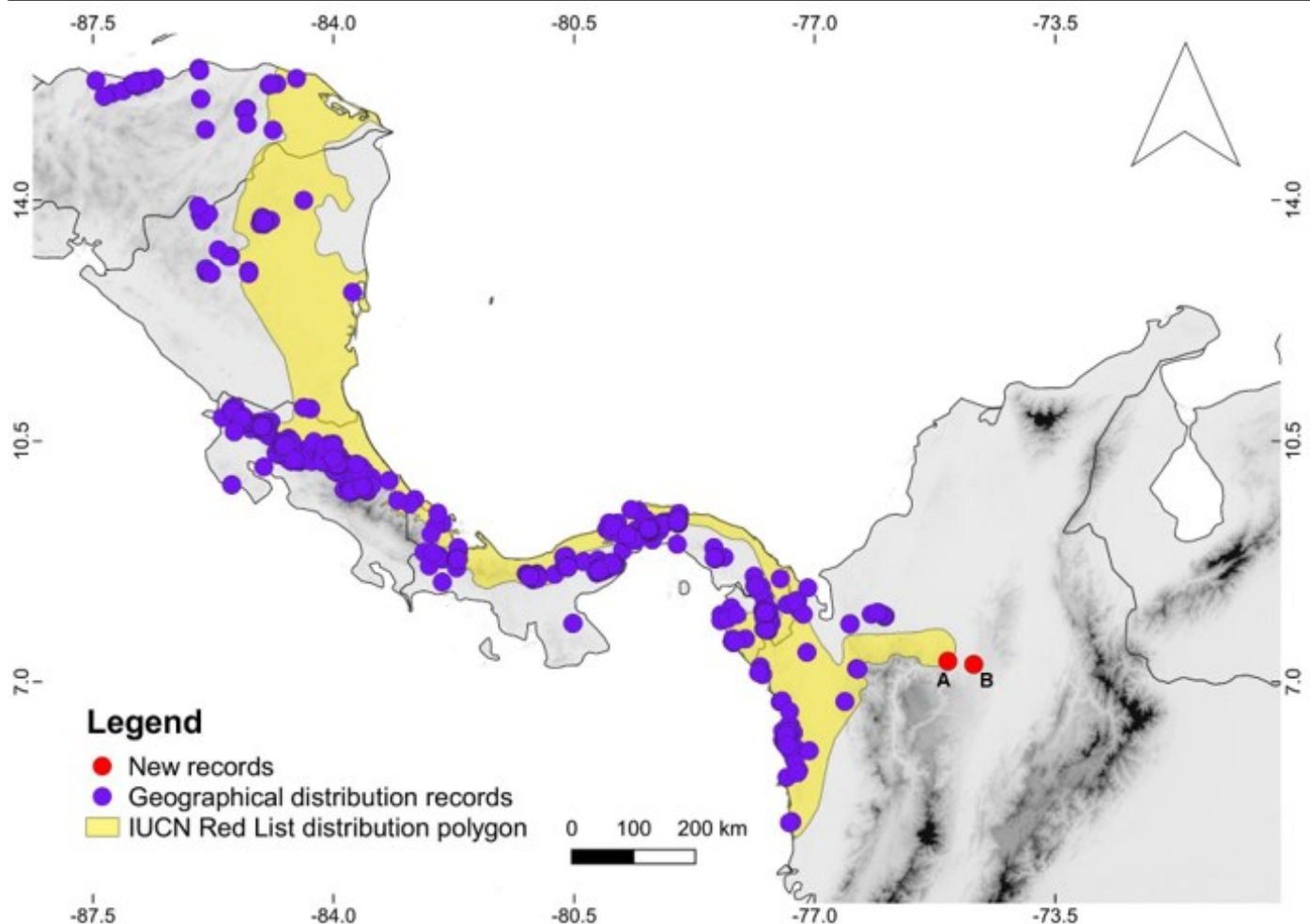


Figure 1. Updated distribution of the Yellow-eared Toucanet. Purple circles represent occurrence records across its known distribution obtained from the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF 2026). The IUCN Red List distribution polygon is shown in yellow, and the new records from the foothills of the Central Andes of Colombia are indicated by red circles, highlighting an eastward range extension **(A)** Anorí Municipality and **(B)** Segovia Municipality (Antioquia).

camera, providing photographic and video confirmation of the record (Fig. 2C-D). The bird list from this field survey, as well as the recorded video, was archived in the corresponding eBird checklist (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S294848632>).

Unfortunately, similar patterns of logging, pollution and mining were observed in this municipality, reducing habitat quality and negatively affecting both biodiversity and local human communities.

Together, these records extend the known distribution of the Yellow-eared Toucanet by approximately 164 km eastward, confirming its presence in foothill forests of the northeastern Central Andes (442-644 m). These findings suggest that the species may be more widespread in transitional Andean-lowland

ecosystems than currently documented. Given the increasing anthropogenic pressures in the region, continued field surveys and systematic monitoring are essential to better understand the species loss and inform conservation strategies in these threatened landscapes.

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Figure 2. Photographs of Yellow-eared Toucanet in the foothills of the Central Andes of Colombia **(A-B)** Male (left) and female (right) observed in the canopy in Vereda La Tirana, Anorí, department of Antioquia **(C-D)** Male (left) and female (right) observed at Casa Urrego locality, Vereda El Pescado, Segovia, department of Antioquia.

area in Vereda La Tirana, Anorí, as part of a compensation monitoring. Finally, we thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on the manuscript.

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