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## The identity of Azara's No. 315 “Ibiyau de cola extraña” and No. 316 “Ibiyau anónimo” (Aves: Caprimulgidae)

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### Abstract

The identities of Azara's No. 315 “Ibiyau de cola extraña” and No. 316 “Ibiyau anónimo”, and those of *Caprimulgus sphenurus* Vieillot, 1817 and *C. epicurus* Vieillot, 1817 which were based upon Azara's descriptions, are elucidated. All are found to refer to the taxon currently known as Little Nightjar *Setopagis parvula* (Gould, 1837). A hitherto overlooked 20<sup>th</sup> Century usage of the name *C. sphenurus* by Bertoni (1900) validates this name, and hence, according to the ICZN code it could be correctly applied to this taxon. However, it is recommended that this name be suppressed in the interests of maintaining stability. New synonymies for this species are also clarified.

**Key words:** *Caprimulgus azarae*, *Caprimulgus cordicilla*, *Caprimulgus epicurus*, *Caprimulgus sphenurus*

Félix de Azara (1742–1821) was a Spanish military engineer and one of the earliest students of the natural history of the Southern Cone of South America. His major ornithological contribution was the extraordinary three-volume publication “*Apuntamientos para la Historia Natural de los Pájaros del Paraguay y Río de la Plata*” (1802–1805) describing 448 birds from this region, of which over half were new to science. However, Azara used only common names to describe his birds and consequently his names were not scientifically valid, as they did not employ the Linnean binomial system. Taxonomists thus later applied binomial names to his descriptions, notably the French ornithologist Louis Jean-Pierre Vieillot (1748–1831) (Beolens & Watkins 2003). Vieillot translated and abbreviated Azara's original texts, applying a French common name and scientific binomial to them. However, the identities of some of these names have been questioned (Berlepsch 1887; Bertoni 1901; Laubmann 1939; Pereyra 1945), and some of them have subsequently fallen into disuse.

In this note I deal with the identity of two nightjars (Caprimulgidae) described by Azara and named by Vieillot that have long been considered unidentifiable: Azara's No. 316 “Ibiyau anónimo” *Caprimulgus sphenurus* Vieillot, 1817 and No. 315 “Ibiyau de cola extraña” *Caprimulgus epicurus* Vieillot, 1817 (emended to *C. enicurus* in Vieillot, 1823: p. 543). Both descriptions are identified to a known taxon and the nomenclatural connotations are discussed.

### Azara's No. 316 “Ibiyau anónimo”

The “l'engoulevent a queue étagée” *Caprimulgus sphenurus* Vieillot, 1817 is based on Azara's (1805) No. 316 “Ibiyau anónimo” from “Paraguay”. Azara describes this bird as follows (my own translation) (Note that Azara gave body measurements in inches and feather and leg measurements in “lines”, with one line approximating to 2.21 mm):

“Length 7  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches; tail 3  $\frac{2}{3}$ ; wingspan 15  $\frac{1}{2}$ . The feathers of the head have the centers velvet black: the others to the back, inclusive seem grey-brown, but are composed of an infinity of tiny white and grey spots, and the feather shafts are almost black. The sharp feathers of the scapulars, and on the outer web towards the tip have a large velvet black spot, with the edges white on the posteriormost; and on the anteriormost the black spot is thinly edged cinnamon, the rest of the scapulars being like the top of the head.

The same can be said for the inner webs of the coverts; but with the centers black. The outer flight feathers are like the coverts, and the others and the outer webs of the coverts dark grey-brown with random cinnamon spots and bands. The tail and upper tail coverts are spotted like the crown and with irregular dark grey-brown bands. The mid-throat dark grey with thin white streaks: followed by a buffy-whitish patch with a few dark-grey spots; and from there to the tail, the sides and the lower back, with dark grey and whitish streaks, these being broader. The under wing and under tail streaked with dark grey and buff. Flight feathers 21, the second and third longest: tail 10 feathers in steps: the outer 4 lines shorter: leg 15: tarsus 9.

In October I was able to find two identical specimens, and I described them as a different species, but now I have changed my mind. The description is this. Measurements as before. The crown is grey, but along its length is a black streak, as previously described, which it also matches from there to the tail; except that there is a notable cinnamon nuchal collar, which continues from above the ear and joins on the lower hind neck. The chin barely differs from that previously described, and between it and the buff mentioned there is a white patch. From there to the venter and sides the feathers have a black center, and transverse dark lines with the intermediate area buffy. The venter and under wing cinnamon, variegated at the leading edge of the shoulder with dark grey, which is also the color of the greater coverts on the outer web. The tail and scapular as the first bird, and the flight feathers dark grey with cinnamon spots. The same goes for the outer web of the coverts: the others have the center black and the rest buffy, and dark grey with spots and streaks. Everything else as in the first bird.”

Hartlaub (1847) offered “*C. sphenurus* Vieill. Enc. p540” as his identification of Azara No. 316, adding that “Lesson considered this the female of *C. furcifer*”. However, this name apparently fell into disuse shortly afterwards and does not appear in the synonymies of any Caprimulgidae species in the major taxonomic work of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, where Hartert (1892) simply stated in a footnote that the bird “remains unidentified”. Shortly afterwards two major reviews of the birds of the Southern Cone of South America (Sclater & Hudson 1889; Cory 1918) omitted all mention of the name *C. sphenurus*. In fact Vieillot (1817) had ignored crucial parts of Azara’s much longer description that contributed significantly to the identification of this bird being viewed as questionable. Perhaps most significantly of all he left out all of the morphometric data provided by Azara (1805), except for the total length (Table 1).

**TABLE 1.** Measurements of male and female *Setopagis parvula* from Reserva Natural Laguna Blanca, San Pedro department, Paraguay derived from Smith *et al.* (2011) and unpublished data, compared with those provided by Azara (1805) for his No. 315 “Ibiyau de cola extraña” and No. 316 “Ibiyau anónimo”. Measurements for female *Hydropsalis torquata*, *Macropsalis forcipata* and *Uropsalis lyra* are from Cleere (1998). Sample sizes are noted for these three species only where they were provided by Cleere (1998).

	TOTAL LENGTH (mm)	TARSUS (mm)	TAIL (m)
<i>Setopagis parvula</i> Males (n=4)	197–204	17–20	87–98
<i>Setopagis parvula</i> Females (n=2)	198	15–18.5	93–106
Azara “No. 315” (1805)	194.74	18.79	93.1
Azara “No. 316” (1805)	196.85	19.89	93.1
<i>Hydropsalis torquata</i> Females	250–300	17.8–19.8	134–169
<i>Macropsalis forcipata</i> Females	280–310	18 (n=1)	172 (n=1)
<i>Uropsalis lyra</i> Females	250–280	17.4–18.5	136–145

Gould (1837:22) later described *Caprimulgus parvulus* as follows (note the similarity of the measurements of the length and tail to those provided by Azara):

“CAPRIMULGUS PARVULUS. *Cap. intensè fuscus, guttis minutis cinereis ornatus ; vittâ rufâ cervicem cingente ; gutture scapularibusque ad marginem, secundariis ad apicem stramineis; pectore et abdomine lineis fuscis transversis; primariis nigrescentibus, tribus fasciis inaequalibus pallidè rufescentibus; caudâ fasciis pallidè fulvescentibus et fuscis ornatâ.*

Long. tot. unc, 7 1/2; alae, 5; caudae, 4; tarsi, 5/8.”

Azara’s (1805) description, and consequently *Caprimulgus sphenurus* of Vieillot, 1817, which was derived entirely from it, have in fact been fairly widely accepted to apply to Little Nightjar *Setopagis parvula* (Gould, 1837) by the various authors who have studied the work of Azara (Laubmann 1939; Pereyra 1945). This makes sense as it is one of the commonest and most widespread caprimulgids in Paraguay, but is otherwise absent from Azara’s work. Bertoni (1930) may also have been alluding to this case when he stated in a text about *Setopagis parvula* that Azara’s No. 315 and 316 “seem like females of this species and a definitive review of the descriptions will probably impose a name change, something that I am unable to do at the moment because of a lack of comparative material”.

Considering the nightjars known to occur in Paraguay (Guyra Paraguay 2004) and the La Plata basin (Narosky & Yzurieta 2010) where Azara was based, this description can *only* apply to *Setopagis parvula*. Crucially the morphometrics are also consistent with those of Paraguayan birds (Table 1).

### **Azara’s No. 315 “Ibiyau de cola extraña”**

There is good reason to suspect that Bertoni (1930) was correct when he stated that both Azara’s No. 315 and No. 316 “seem like females” of *Setopagis parvula*. Indeed the name chosen by Azara for his No. 315 (roughly “nightjar with a strange tail”) seems to have unduly distracted the attention of subsequent authors from the rest of his description. Almost all subsequent authors have assumed that if the species has a strange tail then it must be a species of *Hydropsalis* (Berlepsch 1887; Hartert 1892; Laubmann 1939; Pereyra 1945). In fact the measurements provided for this species are virtually identical to that of the “Ibiyau anónimo” whilst the description of the rest of the plumage is also startlingly similar. In fact the species seems to be separated almost entirely based on the unusual tail shape, described thus (my translation):

“Tail 10 feathers, the third four lines longer than the outermost or first and 10 longer than the fourth and fifth; so that the tail has a notable, square concavity in the middle”

This description however immediately rules out the only species of *Hydropsalis* known to occur in this region. The female Scissor-tailed Nightjar *Hydropsalis torquata* (Gmelin, 1789), has the central pair of tail feathers longer than the rest of the tail and is regardless a much larger bird. Only two other species of nightjar with “strange tails” occur in the area which Azara is known to have frequented (Contreras 2010): Long-trained Nightjar *Macropsalis forcipata* (Nitzsch, 1840) and Lyre-tailed Nightjar *Uropsalis lyra* (Bonaparte, 1850). Females of both of these species are at least 25% larger than the measurements provided by Azara (Cleere 1998, 1999), and neither fit the plumage description or the tail shape.

The unusual shape of the tail as mentioned by Azara can be easily explained as a bird that was moulting the tail feathers. Nightjars moult centrifugally (from the central feathers outwards) (Cleere 1999) and this would quite satisfactorily explain a bird with the innermost pairs of tail feathers shorter than the rest.

### **Nomenclatural connotations for Little Nightjar *Setopagis parvula*.**

Though clearly deriving his texts on Paraguayan nightjars strongly from the work of Azara, Bertoni (1900) employed the names *Caprimulgus sphenurus* Vieillot, 1817 for a bird he called the “Yvyahú anónimo” and *Caprimulgus epicurus* Vieillot, 1817 for a bird he called the “Yvyahú de cola extraña”, thereby linking both directly with Azara’s original work. This is a crucial step because it represented a post-1899 employment of these otherwise forgotten names and thereby validates them for usage (ICZN 1999: Art. 23.9.1.1). *Caprimulgus sphenurus* Vieillot, 1817 (p. 243) has priority over both *Caprimulgus parvulus* Gould, 1837 and *Caprimulgus epicurus* Vieillot, 1817 (p. 243), and is thus an available name for the Little Nightjar.

A decade after Vieillot (1817), two other names were also been proposed for Azara’s two nightjars by Merrem (1826), *Caprimulgus azarae* for No. 316 and *C. cordicilla* for No. 315, and these also enter into the synonymy of

Little Nightjar. Note that the usage of the name “Yvyahú de Azara” *Caprimulgus Azarae* Bertoni, 1900 for a “new species” of nightjar from eastern Paraguay is not in the sense of Merrem, 1826 and represents a junior homonym. *Caprimulgus Azarae* Bertoni, 1900 was not adequately described, the author stating simply that it “has the form of the previous species” in reference to *Chordeiles minor* (Forster, 1771), and that it “shows differences in color which I do not consider it necessary to detail here”. With no other keys to its identity, *Caprimulgus Azarae* Bertoni, 1900 must be considered a *nomen dubium*.

The ICZN states on its preamble that “priority of publication is a basic principle of zoological nomenclature; however, under conditions prescribed in the Code its application may be modified to conserve a long-accepted name in its accustomed meaning. When stability of nomenclature is threatened in an individual case, the strict application of the Code may under specified conditions be suspended by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature.” Therefore, given the long history of usage of the current name *Setopagis parvula* (Gould, 1837) and the stated aim of the ICZN Code to maintain stability, it is recommended that the following synonyms of this name be suppressed as *nomina oblita* and current usage be maintained (ICZN 1999: Recommendation 23A).

*Caprimulgus sphenurus* Vieillot, 1817

*Caprimulgus epicurus* Vieillot, 1817

*Caprimulgus enicurus* Vieillot, 1823

*Caprimulgus azarae* Merrem, 1826 (not *Caprimulgus Azarae* Bertoni, 1900)

*Caprimulgus cordicilla* Merrem, 1826

In order to protect this long- and widely-used name, *Setopagis parvula* (Gould, 1837) is here declared a *nomen protectum*. An official proposal to the ICZN will be made forthwith in accordance with ICZN guidelines (1999: Arts. 23.9.2 & 23.9.3) requesting the use of its plenary powers to suppress the above mentioned names in the interests of nomenclatural stability.

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