

First record of a Sungrebe (*Heliornis fulica*) nest in French Guiana

PRIMER REGISTRO DE UN NIDO PARA EL AVESOL AMERICANO (*HELIORNIS FULICA*) EN LA GUAYANA FRANCESA

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Abstract

We present information and colour photographs of a Sungrebe (*Heliornis fulica*) nest, with three eggs, found in French Guiana.

Keywords: eggs, French Guiana, *Heliornis fulica*, nest, Sungrebe.

Resumen

Presentamos información y fotos en color de un nido con tres huevos del Avesol Americano o Ipequí (*Heliornis fulica*) encontrado en la Guyana Francesa.

Palabras clave: Avesol Americano, Guayana Francesa, *Heliornis fulica*, huevos, nido.

The Sungrebe or American Finfoot (*Heliornis fulica*) is uncommon from south-eastern Mexico through Central America and throughout most of northern South America mainly east of the Andes, and as far south as Bolivia and north-eastern Argentina. Quiet forest streams and rivers, and freshwater ponds and lakes with thick, overhanging riparian vegetation form its preferred habitat. It has a wide distribution, however with an apparently low population density. It is rarely observed because of its inconspicuous colour pattern and secretive behaviour. Only three nests have been reported in literature (Wetmore 1965, Álvarez del Toro 1971, Bertram 1996).

In coastal French Guiana, Sungrebes are uncommon in fresh water swamps, with scattered vegetation, such as the marshes of Corosony, Yiyi and Kaw, and along creeks and rivers with thick, riparian vegetation, such as the creeks Coswine, Yiyi, Couy, Gabrielle and Angélique, and the rivers Sinnamary, Malmanoury, Comté, Kounana and Kaw. In the interior, it has been found near the Saut Maripa on the Oyapock river, near the Saut Pararé on the Crique Arataï in the Nouragues

Nature Reserve and on the lake behind the hydroelectric dam of Petit Saut.

On 20 January 2009 at about 16:30 h, DT discovered a Sungrebe nest, with three eggs in the vegetation along a bank of the Crique Gabrielle, just before it enters Lac Pali, a small lake on that creek (4°42' N, 52°16' W, 5 m.a.s.l.) (Fig. 1). The bulky nest was a *ca.* 8 cm thick platform of sticks with a slight depression and had a diameter between 20 and 25 cm. It was resting *ca.* 1 m above the water, on a fork of thick, horizontal branches and supported by a few thin branches of a low tree growing in the riparian vegetation of the creek. The incubating adult had a cinnamon patch on the cheeks and sides of the neck, scarlet eyelids and a red upper mandible, typical for a female in breeding condition (Fig. 1) (Bertram 1996). The eggs were buffy white to pale cinnamon with irregular cinnamon, reddish-brown and pale purplish spots, rather uniformly over the entire surface. One egg had almost no spots while another one was well spotted (Fig. 2).

Few Sungrebe nests have been found and described. Knowledge of its breeding biology mainly depends on the observations made at two nests with three and four

eggs found on 16 June and 15 July 1963 along the Chilibre River in Panamá (Wetmore 1965) and at one nest with two eggs found on 16 April 1969 in Chiapas, México (Álvarez del Toro 1971). The nest is a thick platform of twigs and dried stems in vegetation, 1-2 m above water, with usually two or three, sometimes even four eggs (Wetmore 1965, Bertram 1996). Both adults share incubation, with the male incubating during the

day and the female from late afternoon until early morning next day. The incubation period lasts 10-11 days only, and the altricial chicks are carried by the male in special pockets of skin beneath his wings (Álvarez del Toro 1971, Bertram 1996, Braslavsky *et al.* 2005). The breeding season is probably related to rainfall and corresponding high water levels.



Figure 1. Sungrebe (*Heliornis fulica*) nest with incubating female, in riparian vegetation along a bank of the Crique Gabrielle in French Guiana (Photo: D. Tauleigne).



Figure 2. Same Sungrebe (*Heliornis fulica*) nest, with three eggs (Photo: D. Tauleigne).

The nest described here is the first one found in French Guiana (Tostain *et al.* 1992), although breeding was already confirmed by the observation of a female attending a fledgling at the end of February 1996 and by the record of an orphaned downy young on the lake of Petit Saut early in April 1996 (Claessens 2000).

Our observations agree with data given in literature. The clutch size of 3 eggs and the female incubating at 16:30 h when the nest was found, agree with what is known for the Sungrebe. And breeding in French Guiana

occurs during the rainy season which lasts from approximately December to July (Bertram 1996).

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