



May 19, 1947

# BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON

## THE VENEZUELAN RACES OF *PIAYA CAYANA*

BY W. E. CLYDE TODD

*Cuculus cayanus* Linnaeus, 1766, as its name implies, was described from Cayenne, French Guiana. Twenty specimens have been examined from that country, including six from Cayenne. This, the nominate race, ranges through the Guianas and west to the Orinoco Valley in Venezuela. Eight specimens examined from the latter region are on an average darker-colored (especially below) than toponotypical French Guiana birds, but are rather too close for formal separation.

The north-coast bird, however, is clearly racially distinct, as I am satisfied after handling a series of thirty-three specimens from various places from the State of Lara to the Paria Peninsula. Since the publication of the extended report on the birds of the Santa Marta region (1922) I have altered my views considerably. In the first place, I think that birds from the Caribbean coast of Colombia and Venezuela are all one and the same form. I called them *columbiana* of Cabanis, 1862, which was described from Cartagena, and there is no question as to the pertinence of this name, which was accepted by both Ridgway and Chapman. However, Peters (1940) adopts *mehleri*, Bonaparte, 1850, as the earliest name for this race, the range of which he assigns to the Magdalena Valley as far up as Chicoral, and eastward along the coast to the Paria Peninsula. This range, be it noted, would take in Caracas, which he accepts as the type-locality of the race *circe* Bonaparte—in this following G. C. A. Junge (Zool. Meded. Leiden, 19, 1937, 183-185). Through the courtesy of Dr. Herbert Friedmann I have had the opportunity of consulting Dr. Junge's paper. The author insists that Bonaparte's type-specimen of *mehleri* is identical with the birds usually called *columbiana*. In such case this type could scarcely have come from the ascribed and restricted type-locality, Bogotá, where (according to Chapman) only *mesura* occurs. Mainly on this ground I propose to substitute Cartagena for Bogotá as type-locality. After seeing a series of the interior race *mesura* I am now prepared to admit that it is a connecting link between *cayana* and *mehleri*. A single specimen from Santa Elena, Venezuela (No. 90,757), agrees closely with Colombian specimens, and carries the range of *mesura* into the Maracaibo Basin of Venezuela.

Through the courtesy of the authorities of the Chicago Natural History Museum I have had the privilege of examining three specimens of the *Piaya cayana venezuelensis* of Cory from the Maracaibo region—the same specimens that were later sent to Dr. Junge and by him compared directly with Bonaparte's type of *circe*, with which they proved to be identical. To judge from these specimens, *circe* is a very distinct race,

MAY 20 1947



characterized by its dark coloration and small size. Dr. Junge says that the type is labeled as coming from Caracas, but if he has correctly identified these specimens as the same form nothing can be more certain than that it never actually came from there, since the Caracas bird is *mehleri*, as indeed has already been pointed out by Mr. W. H. Phelps (Bol. Soc. Venezolana Cienc. Nat., No. 56, 1943, 290). It is thus entirely probable that the type of *circe* came from Maracaibo instead.

I wish to put on record (for purpose of comparison) my measurement of these three specimens.

Field Mus. No.	Sex	Locality		
34590	♀	Orope, Zulia	Wing, 142; tail, 257	
34591	♂	Orope, Zulia	143	260 (worn)
44099	♀	Rio Catatumbo	144	270
34589	♀	Orope, Zulia	142	293 (fide Cory)

The Carnegie Museum also has four specimens of *Piaya cayana* from another part of the Maracaibo Basin—three from Sabana de Mendoza and one from La Azulita. One would expect that these would also be *circe* but they are definitely not. They resemble birds from the north-coast region in color, but they are markedly and uniformly smaller in size. I do not see how this can be merely accidental.

*Piaya cayana inexpectata*, subsp. nov.

*Type*, No. 88,507, Collection Carnegie Museum, adult female; Sabana de Mendoza, Venezuela, April 29, 1922; M. A. Carriker, Jr.

*Subspecific characters*.—Similar to *Piaya cayana mehleri* Bonaparte of northern Colombia and Venezuela, but smaller, and general coloration paler; tail with the subterminal black areas of the rectrices reduced in extent, and the brown correspondingly increased. Similar also to *Piaya cayana circe* from the region southeast of Lake Maracaibo, but somewhat smaller, and general coloration decidedly paler, the under tail-coverts dusky grayish instead of blackish, and the tail with less black.

*Measurements*.—

Carnegie Mus. No.	Sex	Locality		
88507	♀	Sabana de Mendoza	Wing, 135; tail, 228	
88721	♀	Sabana de Mendoza	138	272
88722	♂	Sabana de Mendoza	136	250
90287	♂	La Azulita	137	230

*Range*.—Region east and south of Lake Maracaibo.

*Remarks*.—On geographical grounds one would expect to find *Piaya cayana* represented by the same race on the east side of Lake Maracaibo as on the west side, but not so. The east-side form is just as distinct from *circe* as it is from *mehleri*. In general coloration it resembles the latter, but is slightly paler; the upperparts are nearest Brussels brown; and there is less black on the tail; it is uniformly smaller. In size it is nearer *circe*, but in coloration it is markedly lighter. The La Azulita specimen is obviously intermediate between the present race and *circe*. And from Santa Elena, not many miles north of La Azulita, we have a perfectly typical example of *P. cayana mesura*, as already noted. Thus, in the Maracaibo Basin three easily distinguishable races of *P. cayana* appear to be endemic, but it does not yet appear what their inter-relationships may be. The problem demands further study in the field and the collection of much additional material for its solution.



Todd, W. E. Clyde. 1947. "The Venezuelan races of *Piaya cayana*." *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington* 60, 59–60.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/107336>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/43281>

**Holding Institution**

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

**Sponsored by**

Biodiversity Heritage Library

**Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder.

Rights Holder: Biological Society of Washington

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

Rights: <https://biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.