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SHORT-COMMUNICATION

A case of Straight-billed Reedhaunter (*Limnoctites rectirostris*: Furnariidae) nesting in Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*: Dipsacoideae)

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ABSTRACT: I present a case of a Straight-billed Reedhaunter (*Limnoctites rectirostris*) nesting in Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*), an exotic plant widely distributed in the study area in northeast of Buenos Aires province, Argentina. *Limnoctites* nests specifically in Eryngo (*Eryngium*), however I show here that it may also nest in other plants with fairly similar (thistle-like) characteristics, when in close proximity to *Eryngium*. The nest, active with one egg and two chicks, was destroyed by a rainstorm which toppled the Teasel. Since the structure did not fall completely to the ground the nestlings initially remained alive, but eventually perished, although the nest was not destroyed.

KEY-WORDS: Argentina, breeding, exotic plant, nesting behavior.

Nesting sites of the Straight-billed Reedhaunter (*Limnoctites rectirostris*: Furnariidae) are restricted to their preferred habitat: Eryngo (*Eryngium* sp.: Apiaceae), with *E. pandanifolium* and *E. eburneum* being the only host species identified to date (Daguerre 1933, Pereyra 1938, Narosky *et al.* 1983, Ricci & Ricci 1984, Babarskas 1998, Babarskas & Fraga 1998, Babarskas & López-de-Casenave 1998, López-Lanús *et al.* 1999, Babarskas *et al.* 2003). In each and every case the nests have been constructed on *Eryngium* and there is no mention of it using any other kind of plant.

On 21 November 2001 I found an active nest of *L. rectirostris* placed on a plant of Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*: Dipsacoideae). It was located in the Otamendi Nature Reserve (*Reserva Natural Estricta Otamendi*) located at 34°13'03.7''S; 58°53'33.5''W, in the borough of Campana, Buenos Aires province, Argentina. Teasel is an exotic plant, originally from Europe, which is widespread in South America. During 2001, in the Otamendi Reserve an explosive growth of Teasel occurred, forming patches as large as half a hectare. At the site where the nest was located, the flowering Teasel was within a one-hectare patch of Pampas Grass (*Cortaderia selloana*: Danthonioideae), forming a dense green thicket about 2 m in diameter, where the Pampas Grass subsided. A patch of *E. eburneum* grew next to the Teasel, intermixed in places with some Waxy-leaf Nightshade (*Solanum glaucophyllum*: Solanaceae).

This patch of mixed vegetation maintained well-differentiated communities, while the ground beyond descended very gradually towards a partly flooded area dominated by Bulrush (*Schoenoplectus americanus*: Cyperaceae). The section was delimited to the West, some 70 m away, by a wire fence and a water-filled drainage canal, covered by patches of Espadaña Reeds (*Zizaniopsis bonariensis*: Ehrhartoideae), lacking *E. pandanifolium*. It was at this place that an adult *Limnoctites* was seen feeding and I noted its direction of flight to the nest, which was subsequently located.

The nest construction material, the height above ground, its ovoid shape with a side entrance and its color were no different to previously-described nests (Ricci & Ricci 1984, Babarskas 1998, Babarskas & Fraga 1998, Babarskas & López-de-Casenave 1998, López-Lanús *et al.* 1999, Babarskas *et al.* 2003). However, instead of being placed in the center of a *Eryngium* with radial arrangement of its leaves, it was placed on a Teasel. The site chosen for its construction was next to several *Eryngium*, with the entrance facing towards them. The Teasel entirely supported the structure, with the nest resting on the base of one of its leaves (which regularly store rainwater and dew in the same way as occurs in *Eryngium*), and attached on one side to the spiny stem.

This way of supporting the nest is identical to nests on *Eryngium*, although rather than using three or four leaves to hold it down, they used just one attachment

- in this case the spiny, vertical and rigid main stem of the Teasel. On the whole, the height of the Teasel clump exceeded that of the surrounding *Eryngium*, but the nest, however, was placed close to the base such that its height above ground was equivalent to other nests previously recorded (*c.* 20 cm). Only one part of the nest, on the side opposite to the Teasel stem, had been secured to the end of an *Eryngium* leaf, providing only a secondary degree of support.

Due to the toppling of the Teasel by the wind before the discovery of the nest, as had equally happened to the rest of the Teasel patch, which had fallen in the same direction, the nest was found accidentally tilted and almost detached from the Teasel. This was caused by the windy and rainy weather of the previous day. Part of the attachment of the nest to the Teasel stem was slightly released, and the entrance to the nest was somewhat tiled downwards (main axis *c.* 45°). Inside it was found an unhatched egg and two active and apparently in good health chicks, with remiges visibly fledged but their skin was mostly bare (as they were indeed very young chicks). The end of the *Eryngium* leaf (flexible, especially at the tip) had not assisted in avoiding the fall of the nest (that had originally been vertical) together with the Teasel, which as a result had become twisted and bent. The weight of the structure, on account of the chicks and of the nest being wet on the outside, may have contributed to the tilting of the nest by gravity. Adults roamed the site throughout the time during data collecting, even feeding chicks after my notes.

When I returned to the site again on 25 November the nest was found empty, but showed no sign of destruction. I found a fecal sac on a Teasel leaf, one centimeter away from the structure. The wrapping and contents were still damp, suggesting that the chicks may have been predated upon only recently. I dismiss the fact that the chicks may have left the nest by themselves on account of the early fledging stage observed only four days earlier.

This record provides data for the first time of a *Limnoctites* nest constructed on a plant other than *Eryngium*, in this case exotic Teasel (*Dipsacus*) which, due to the spiny features of its structure and being located next to the usual *Eryngium* habitats of *Limnoctites* was used for this purpose. Nevertheless, the Teasel failed to properly support the nest in the event of a storm, and on being toppled by the wind, resulted in the detachment and instability of the structure. Although it continued to be used (as I found the adults still feeding the chicks), finally the nestlings perished.

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