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First confirmed record of Arrowhead Piculet *Picumnus minutissimus* in French Guiana

by Paul Lenrumé

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SUMMARY.—I report the first record of Arrowhead Piculet *Picumnus minutissimus* in French Guiana and the first to be documented away from Suriname of this species, which until now was considered endemic to the latter country. Although it seemed more likely the species would be found in degraded coastal habitats, similar to those in Suriname, the bird was in the interior forest block at a former gold mining site now characterised by shrubby vegetation corresponding to the species' ecological requirements. This is not only the easternmost record of the species but probably also the most southerly. I discuss the issue of the species' status in French Guiana: is it a rare breeder in under-surveyed western French Guiana, or is this piculet capable of dispersing across the forest block and the Maroni River?

On 16 September 2020, during a bird survey I photographed and sound-recorded an Arrowhead Piculet *Picumnus minutissimus*, possibly an adult female, along the Paul Isnard dirt road c.80 km south of Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni and 10 km north-west of the Citron gold mining camp in the interior of western French Guiana (c.04°46'N, 54°00'W). The area adjacent to the dirt road had been severely degraded by gold mining and is characterised by shrubby vegetation composed mainly of *Mimosa pigra*, *Senna multijuga* (both Fabaceae) and dense herbaceous plants, with areas that are both wet (due to the presence of old gold mining ponds) and dry with bare laterite. The area hosts an avifaunal assemblage characteristic of open and semi-open coastal habitats, comprising mostly generalist and common species, although a few that are rare in French Guiana like Brown Jacamar *Brachygalba lugubris* occur there.

At c.09.00 h, I heard a distant song resembling White-barred Piculet *Picumnus cirratus*, Arrowhead Piculet *P. minutissimus* or White-bellied Piculet *P. leucogaster*. All three have very similar songs and are basically inseparable by ear (B. J. O'Shea *in litt.* 2023). However, the latter two are not known to occur in French Guiana (CHG 2022), whilst White-barred Piculet is restricted to sandy woodland on the west coast between Sinnamary and Awala-Yalimapo (GEPOG 2022). In degraded habitats of the country's interior, only Golden-spangled Piculet *P. exilis*, whose song is very different, is frequently recorded. Thus, the probability that it was one of the two species unknown in French Guiana seemed as likely as a White-barred Piculet outside its habitat and known range. I broadcast the song of Arrowhead Piculet and the bird responded almost immediately by singing (<https://www.xeno-canto.org/634915>) before I saw it approaching the road c.2 m above ground. I could see the characteristic scaly breast and belly, and took photographs to document the record (Figs. 1–2). However, I quickly lost sight of the bird and, because the site is remote and difficult to access, no one was able to return to search for the species in the period following the observation.

The record was accepted by the French Guiana rarities committee (CHG 2022). As a result, French Guiana has 18 woodpecker species, three of them *Picumnus*. Arrowhead Piculet is distinguished from the others mainly by its scaly underparts and creamy apical spots dorsally. As mentioned, its song is very similar to those of White-bellied Piculet and



Figures 1–2. Arrowhead Piculet *Picumnus minutissimus*, Paul Isnard road, 10 km north of Citron, French Guiana, 16 September 2020 (Paul Lenrumé)



Figure 3. Habitat of Arrowhead Piculet *Picumnus minutissimus*, Paul Isnard road, 10 km north of Citron, French Guiana, 16 September 2020 (Paul Lenrumé)

White-barred Piculet, and there are few recordings of any of the three species on Xeno-canto (www.xeno-canto.org) or in Macaulay Library (www.macaulaylibrary.org).

Discussion

This unexpected record raises questions as to the species' status in French Guiana. Until now, it has been considered the only bird species endemic to Suriname (Remsen *et al.* 2021) as sightings in Guyana (B. J. O'Shea *in litt.* 2023) and French Guiana (Tostain *et al.* 1992) were undocumented and not confirmed. In Suriname, it is common on the coast, especially around Paramaribo where the species is the most abundant woodpecker (O. H. Ottema & B. J. O'Shea *in litt.* 2023). It frequents varied habitats including secondary woodland, mangroves, riparian forest, cultivated and degraded areas, and gardens (Ribot 2021).

My observation is remarkable for being the easternmost, and probably southernmost, record. Moreover, it was made in the interior forest block whereas Suriname records are mainly in the littoral. However, other species typical of open coastal habitats are not uncommon at mines in the interior of French Guiana. Relatively large tracts of interior forest have been cleared, and open to semi-open environments characterised by regrowth harbour many species not usually found in the forest block, such as Black-faced Tanager *Schistochlamys melanopsis* (GEPOG 2022). Thus, the habitat in which the bird was observed is not as atypical as its location might suggest.

Two hypotheses could explain this isolated record. One cannot rule out that Arrowhead Piculet is a rare resident in western French Guiana. There are very few birdwatchers in this region, and the possibility of confusion with the scarce White-barred Piculet could mean it has gone unnoticed. Plainly, more records in the country will be needed to confirm this hypothesis. The notion of a bird wandering from Suriname is also credible as the species is common <200 km away (Ribot 2021). Nevertheless, woodpeckers are not generally known for their dispersal abilities and the Maroni River is likely to be a significant barrier for small species. However, many sections of the Maroni River contain numerous islets, reducing the distance of open water for birds to cross.

The possibility of hybridisation between these closely related species should not be overlooked (Winkler *et al.* 2020a,b) as the border region between Suriname and French Guiana is a potential contact zone. The individual I photographed, however, did not show any characters to cast doubt on its identity as a pure Arrowhead Piculet.

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