The range of Rufous-rumped Seedeater *Sporophila hypochroma* extends to the *Pampas* region of Argentina, with the first nests of the species

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Se presenta evidencia de *Sporophila hypochroma* (casi-amenazada) en la región pampeana (Saladillo, prov. Buenos Aires, Argentina), y se describe por primera vez el nido de la especie. La reproducción de este capuchino era conocida hasta Gualeguaychú, Entre Ríos, Argentina, en su distribución más austral, con dos observaciones aisladas en el noreste de la prov. Buenos Aires. La presencia regular de la especie entre 1991 y 1993 en el área de estudio extiende su distribución a una nueva provincia biogeográfica: pampas. Se describe por primera vez el nido y se confirma su reproducción en diciembre y enero (verano) durante tres años consecutivos. Luego de 1993 la especie no se volvió a registrar a pesar de la presencia de otros 'capuchinos' migratorios como *S. ruficollis* y *S. hypoxantha*, al menos hasta 2007. El área de estudio enfrenta alteración de hábitat por actividad agropecuaria. Se recomienda realizar estudios sobre la presencia de 'capuchinos' en esta AICA de la prov. Buenos Aires (AICA BA24).

Rufous-rumped Seedeater *Sporophila hypochroma* is a species of conservation concern and its breeding biology is little known[3]. Formerly considered Vulnerable[3], at present the species is treated as Near Threatened[1]. The breeding range in Argentina encompasses the provinces of Entre Ríos and Corrientes[3], with the southernmost known population in the grasslands of Puerto Boca (33°03'S 58°26'W), Gualeguaychú, Entre Ríos[3], where the vegetation comprises a mosaic of wet grasslands, thorn woodland (*espinal*) and riparian forest. Further south, in prov. Buenos Aires, there are single observations from Otamendi reserve[6] and Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur[2], both of which are in the extreme north-east of Buenos Aires, where the predominantly open landscape is connected to the riparian forest and littoral of Entre Ríos and Corrientes provinces. Here, we present confirmation of a population in the *Pampas* of Argentina, as well as the first nest description.

Presence in the *Pampas*

In 1991–93, the species was recorded by the río Saladillo, on the old Meridiano Quinto road (35°30'S 59°56'W; Important Bird Area BA24[5]) in Partido de Saladillo, prov. Buenos Aires. A specimen deposited in the Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales 'Bernardino Rivadavia', Buenos Aires (MACN 68727), collected by MAR in 1999, is the first documented record for the phytogeographic *Pampas* region[4]. The bird is an adult male that was found wounded but alive, by MAR, at estancia La Aurora (Meridiano Quinto), on 7 January 1992. It was kept in a cage, belonging to P. Ferro and under continuous observation by MAR, until it died in 1999, whereupon the bird was prepared as a specimen and deposited at MACN. The identification was confirmed by J. Navas (*in litt*. 1999) and, additionally, several photographs were taken of other males in the same area during 1991–93, eliminating the possibility that the specimen might have related to an escaped cagebird.

In the same grassland, two other 'capuchino' seedeaters were found, Dark-throated Seedeater *S.*

Figure 1. Breeding male Rufous-rumped Seedeater *Sporophila hypochroma* (Miguel Ángel Roda)

Figure 2. Nest of Rufous-rumped Seedeater *Sporophila hypochroma* with eggs, in a *Cirsium vulgare* thistle (Miguel Ángel Roda)

ruficollis and Tawny-bellied Seedeater *S. hypoxantha*, and all three species appeared every summer to breed. Using the captured individual as a reference, other observations of *S. hypochroma* were confirmed as follows: a pair in December 1990, a pair photographed in January 1991 and a pair in December 1992 (photographs of birds and nests).

All observations were made in grasslands of *Paspalum quadrifarium*, *Spartina densiflora*, with some *Cortaderia selloana* and sedges (Cyperaceae), as well as exotic plants, particularly thistles, *Cirsium vulgare*. Post-1993, the area was transformed into cattle pastures and cropland, thus habitat for this and other 'capuchinos' was almost entirely lost. Recently (2007) we found new patches of grassland in the lower reaches of the río Saladillo, where we obtained summer observations of Dark-throated and Tawny-bellied Seedeaters, but not of Rufous-rumped Seedeater.

First nest description

The nest of Rufous-rumped Seedeater is undescribed. We obtained three records of nesting. Females were identified in all cases by observing joint parental care. *Nest 1*—19 December 1990: fledgling, nest construction similar to that of Dark-throated Seedeater, in *Cirsium vulgare* thistle, 38 cm above ground; materials similar in colour to those of Double-collared Seedeater *S. caerulescens*, but darker than in Dark-throated Seedeater. *Nest 2*—4 January 1991, with full-grown young ready to fledge. Adults remained close by (photographed). Constructed on a *C. vulgare*, 40 cm above ground; outside diameter 6.5/7.5 cm, inside diameter 4.7 cm; height 5.6 cm; depth 4.7 cm. *Nest 3*—12 December 1992, with two recently laid eggs (16.2 × 11.7, 16.2 × 12.1 mm), in a *C. vulgare*. Construction of similar shape, size, location and materials to nests of Dark-throated Seedeater. Photographed on 20 and 27 December (nest and male, Figs. 1–2). On 3–4 January, two young were observed, male near the nest. On 7 January, the male was injured in the vicinity of the destroyed nest (MACN 68727; see above). All photographs are deposited in the personal collection of MAR: *S. hypochroma* MAR 239.18–19; 256.24–25 (nests); 256.18–22; 258.01; and 333.17 (males).

Conclusion

Until now, Rufous-rumped Seedeater had not been found breeding south of 33º04'S, thus we extend the species' known range 260 km south and confirm breeding in prov. Buenos Aires. The species' seasonal presence coincides with the arrival of the more abundant Dark-throated Seedeater (2–3 pairs in the study area) and the scarce Tawny-bellied Seedeater. All three depart the area in late March. Habitat alteration is the major threat to populations of these and other threatened seedeaters, and further monitoring is needed to determine their local status and to discover new populations.

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