Records of Hudson’s Canastero Asthenes hudsoni from Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

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Hudson’s Canastero Asthenes hudsoni is a bird of the Pampas region of eastern Argentina and Uruguay\textsuperscript{5,6}. The extreme northern limit of its range has been given as southernmost Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil\textsuperscript{5,6}, based on a single record of two specimens collected at arroio Chuí on the Brazil/Uruguay border, reported by Pinto\textsuperscript{4}. Belton\textsuperscript{1}, citing Pinto\textsuperscript{4}, included the species in the avifauna of Rio Grande do Sul, but proffered no further details. The most recent version of the official checklist of the birds of Brazil\textsuperscript{5,6} includes the species in the avifauna of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre (MCN–FZBRS). The record cited by Bencke\textsuperscript{2} provides the following clarification (=species with at least one record documented by a whole or partial specimen, photograph, or audio or video recording.), but lists it as being of uncertain status. Bencke\textsuperscript{2} cited an additional specimen of Asthenes from arroio Chuí, collected by Antônio Sinício on 12 July 1964, and later donated to the Museu de Zoologia da Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo (MZUSP). Bencke\textsuperscript{2} cited an additional specimen of A. hudsoni on the Primary List (=species with at least one record documented by a whole or partial specimen, photograph, or audio or video recording.), but lists it as being of uncertain status. Bencke\textsuperscript{2} provided the following clarification (translated from Portuguese) of the record cited by Pinto\textsuperscript{4}: “The mention of this species for Rio Grande do Sul (translated from Portuguese) of the record cited by Hudson’s Canasteros. We were able to confirm that the birds were Hudson’s Canasteros. Field marks observed (as transcribed from verbal description on audio cassette) were as follows. A bulky, ‘chesty’ canastero, with a double-pointed tail. Upperparts sandy grey, boldly streaked black on the back. Crown more finely streaked with black. Underparts, except for whitish chin, entirely buff, with sparsely distributed, fine black streaking on the flanks. Bill, pale-based (fleshy horn), but dusky along the culmen, most extensively near the tip of the maxilla. Broad, buffy supercilium set off by a dusky postocular streak. Tawny patch visible at the base of the folded remiges of some birds; other individuals with paler (almost whitish) panel in the same area. Rectrices mostly dusky, fringed silvery whitish. Legs and toes greyish pink; irides brown. After some effort, we obtained digiscoped photographs documenting most of these characters (Fig. 3). The observed field marks matched precisely with descriptions of A. hudsoni in the literature\textsuperscript{5,6}.

The canasteros were distributed over c.5 ha of well-vegetated littoral plain just inland of the coastal dunes (Fig. 4). The predominant vegetation was Androtrichum trigynum (Cyperaceae), a...
species of sedge (c.1.0–1.5 m tall), interspersed with an unidentified, equally tall bunchgrass, and shorter grasses and herbaceous, broadleaf plants, growing on white-sand soil. Ground cover was patchy rather than continuous. At the time of our visit, the ground was almost entirely dry, but some lower lying patches were poorly drained, with finer, more compacted sandy soil. Ridgely & Tudor described the habitat of Hudson’s Canastero as ‘tall grass and sedges in and near marshes or seasonally flooded areas.’ Remsen described the habitat as: ‘Southern temperate grassland; tall wet grass (e.g. Paspalum quadrifarium) and sedges adjacent to wetlands.’

This constitutes the northernmost and only the third documented record of Asthenes hudsoni for Brazil. We estimated c.1 territorial pair of canasteros per ha within the limited area that we surveyed, which is a surprisingly high density given that the species has essentially been overlooked in Brazil. However, it should be noted that the habitat in which we found the canasteros was patchy and relatively rare. Most surrounding littoral habitats in the Mostardas region were either dunes nearly devoid of vegetation, heavily grazed pastures, or ponds and lagoons surrounded by dense reedbeds, none of which constitutes appropriate habitat for Asthenes hudsoni. Belton described the coastal plain of Rio Grande do Sul as being a ‘flat, occasionally rolling, sandy area of Quaternary origin dominated by two great lagoons (Lagoa dos Patos and Lagoa Mirim) and having hundreds of lesser bodies of water varying from sizeable lagoons to pothole lakes’, and estimated that half of the surface area was water. It was our observation that much of the Mostardas Peninsula that is not inundated has suffered drastic anthropogenic modification, particularly conversion to pasture and pine plantations, reducing potential sedge-grass community habitats even further. In addition to being localised, littoral...
Cotinga communities favourable to colonisation by *A. hudsoni* may be somewhat ephemeral. Much of the landscape on the peninsula appears to be subject to modification by fierce winter winds, as evidenced by the number of coastal roads that are impassable due to windblown sand drifts. The coastal plain of southern Rio Grande do Sul has been extensively surveyed by several workers (G. Bencke *in litt.* 2008), making it unlikely that a sizeable population of *A. hudsoni* has been overlooked. Nevertheless, we suspect that systematic surveys of the littoral plain of Rio Grande do Sul, perhaps especially along the Mostardas Peninsula, may reveal that the species is patchily distributed at additional locations. An alternative possibility is that Rio Grande do Sul, lying as it does at the northernmost limit of the range of *A. hudsoni*, represents an area of opportunistic colonisation during some years when either conditions are particularly favourable or, as an ‘overflow’ area of range expansion during population ‘booms’ further south. Such populations could easily undergo contraction subsequently when conditions are less favourable. Thus, the species may not be present in Brazil in all or even most years. It is of interest that both our and the Capão Comprido record are from the austral breeding season, further indicating that these were not winter vagrants from the south.

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**References**


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