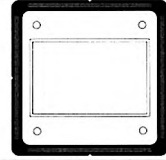


Thick-billed Siskin
Carduelis crassirostris



The Thick-billed Siskin *Carduelis crassirostris* occurs locally in the Andes from Peru to central Chile, at elevations of 3,000-4,800 m^{3,10}. Fjeldså & Krabbe³ and Parker *et al.*⁸ describe the species as “locally common”, while other authors consider it “uncommon to rare”¹⁰, “scarce or difficult to find”⁶, and “rare”⁵. Two subspecies are recognised: *amadoni* from Peru to N Bolivia, and nominate *crassirostris* from SW Bolivia to Chile; Fjeldså & Krabbe² further consider northernmost Peruvian birds to represent an unnamed subspecies.

In Peru and Bolivia, *C. crassirostris* is characteristic of *Polylepis* woodland^{2,4,7,11}, a threatened habitat that occurs from Ecuador to northern Chile¹⁰. In central Chile, south of the range of *Polylepis* woodland, I discovered the species in a small valley at Juncalito, below Portillo, Los Andes (formerly Aconcagua) province: a pair on 12 November 1992 and up to eight birds (three male, two immature male, three female) on 26 October (when the photos here were taken) and 10 November 1994. Directions to this site were given by Pearman⁹. Interestingly, all other Chilean localities are within 50 km of this valley⁵, which is at only 2,100 m, well below the elevation credited to the species. The habitat (see photo) comprises stony slopes with scattered low bushes and a single small tree which, on all occasions, the siskins visited often, and in which they were photographed. Other species present here included White-sided Hillstar *Oreotrochilus leucopleurus*, Sharp-billed (Lesser) Canastero *Asthenes pyrrholeuca*, and Rufous-banded Miner *Geositta rufipennis*. In 1992 no other siskins were present but in 1994 I saw up to 20 Yellow-rumped Siskins *Carduelis uropygialis*. The two siskin species did not associate with one another, although at times they perched only 50 m apart. In contrast to *C. uropygialis*, which was somewhat wary, *C. crassirostris* was always very confiding and could have been overlooked easily if not singing. The song was a prolonged, jangling and twittering warble, not especially buzzy. Calls included a wheezy, upslurred *j'reeh* and a slightly squeaky *klee-ee* while perched, and a hard, dry

cheh-cheht or *ch-cht*, *ch-ch-cht*., etc., while perched and in flight.

The literature is somewhat at odds concerning plumage variation in this species. I assumed the three plumages (photos) to be adult male, first-year male, and adult female. The birds' behaviour supported this (adult and immature males singing, adults chasing off immatures, both tolerating females), as did the ratio of plumage types, including the pair in 1992. Further, most sources^{3,5,6,10} describe and/or illustrate *C. crassirostris* as similar to Hooded Siskin *C. magellanica*, i.e. lacking a dark hood. The immature male appears to be undescribed as such, although mentioned in passing by George⁴. Figure 8d on Plate LXII of Fjeldså & Krabbe³ matches quite closely this plumage but is labelled “*amadoni* female”; however, this contradicts their text³. Clement *et al.*¹, providing no supporting data, illustrate and describe the female as having a dark grey hood, and thus looking similar to the male. Unless females are dimorphic and/or female plumage varies geographically, I suspect that Clement *et al.*¹ may be in error, and that both their description and illustration of a female and the illustration in Fjeldså & Krabbe³ are based on immature males.

Acknowledgement

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Steve N. G. Howell

PRBO, 4990 Shoreline Highway, Stinson Beach, California 94970, U.S.A.

Thick-billed Siskin *Carduelis crassirostris*

Back cover: Photos by Steve N. G. Howell

Top left: adult male Thick-billed Siskin *Carduelis crassirostris*, Juncalito, Los Andes province, Chile, 26 October 1994.

Top right: presumed immature male Thick-billed Siskin, Juncalito, Los Andes province, Chile, 26 October 1994.

Bottom left: adult female Thick-billed Siskin, Juncalito, Los Andes province, Chile, 26 October 1994.

Bottom right: habitat of Thick-billed Siskins in Juncalito valley, Chile.

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Please direct correspondence to:
The Senior Editor, Neotropical Bird Club, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Beds. SG19 2DL, U.K.