

## Records of Hudson's Canastero *Asthenes hudsoni* from Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

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No Brasil, o João-platino *Asthenes hudsoni* é conhecido em duas localidades no Rio Grande do Sul e por apenas três exemplares coletados 32 anos entre si. Aqui, nós fazemos um resumo detalhado destes registros, e informamos sobre o descobrimento de uma pequena população do João-platino na Península de Mostardas, Rio Grande do Sul. A documentação desta ocorrência é substanciada por fotografias e a representação gráfica da gravação em um sonograma.

Hudson's Canastero *Asthenes hudsoni* is a bird of the Pampas region of eastern Argentina and Uruguay<sup>5,6</sup>. The extreme northern limit of its range has been given as southernmost Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil<sup>5,6</sup>, based on a single record of two specimens collected at arroio Chuí on the Brazil/Uruguay border, reported by Pinto<sup>4</sup>. Belton<sup>1</sup>, citing Pinto<sup>4</sup>, 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<sup>3</sup> includes *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<sup>2</sup> provided the following clarification (translated from Portuguese) of the record cited by Pinto<sup>4</sup>: 'The mention of this species for Rio Grande do Sul in Pinto (1978) was based on two examples taken at 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<sup>2</sup> cited an additional specimen of *A. hudsoni*, collected by S. B. Scherer and Ana C. de Menezes on 8 December 1996 near Capão Comprido (31°26'S 51°10'W), on the border between the municipalities of Tavares and São José de Norte (Rio Grande do Sul), and deposited in the Museu de Ciências Naturais de Fundação Zoobotânica do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre (MCN-FZBR). The specimens from arroio Chuí were sexed as female and male (MZUSP 60064–65), and, having been collected on the same date and at the same locality, were probably a mated pair (Fig. 1).

Late in the afternoon on 21 February 2006, during field work at Lagoa de Peixe (Mostardas Peninsula, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil), we heard from the open window of our car an unfamiliar, but distinctly *Asthenes*-like song emanating from the adjacent littoral flats just inland of the coastal dunes. By the time we had stopped and mobilised our tape-recording equipment, the unseen bird had gone silent. Although then unaware of the 1996 specimen from Capão Comprido (c.23 km to the south), we suspected that our mystery bird was, in

fact, *Asthenes hudsoni*. With dusk approaching, we could only mark the spot for an early return next morning. We returned to the site (31°15'S 50°57'W) at 05h40 on 22 February, and heard 3–5 different individual *Asthenes* singing in the pre-dawn darkness. The mystery song was a short (<2 seconds) series of closely spaced, buzzy notes, commencing with two differentiated, lower frequency and more protracted notes before rising in frequency and accelerating into an even trill before dropping slightly at the end (Fig. 2). After tape-recording the still unseen birds, we waited for sufficient light before attempting playback. The birds were skulking and shy, but responded to playback by approaching the sound source while staying out of sight, and then slowly working their way up in the scattered bunches of sedge and grass to more prominent perches. It was at this point that 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<sup>5,6</sup>.

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



Figure 1. Specimens of (top to bottom) female (MZUSP 60064) and male (MZUSP 60065) Hudson's Canasteros *Asthenes hudsoni*, collected at arroio Chui, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, on 12 July 1964, by Antônio Sinício (Kevin J. Zimmer); for 32 years, these specimens constituted the only record of *A. hudsoni* for Brazil.

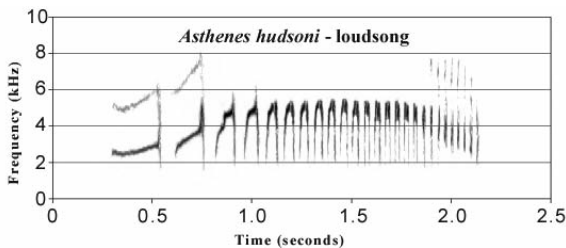


Figure 2. Sonogram of loudsong of Hudson's Canastero *Asthenes hudsoni*, recorded by Kevin J. Zimmer at Lagoa de Peixe, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, on 22 February 2006. Sonogram by Phyllis Isler, prepared using Canary 1.1 software (Bioacoustics Research Program, Cornell Lab. of Ornithology) and a Macintosh computer.

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<sup>6</sup> described the habitat of Hudson's Canastero as 'tall grass and sedges in and near marshes or seasonally flooded areas.' Remsen<sup>5</sup> 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 *A. 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,



Figure 3. Hudson's Canastero *Asthenes hudsoni*, Lagoa de Peixe, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, 22 February 2006 (Kevin J. Zimmer)



Figure 4. Littoral sedge-grass community at Lagoa de Peixe, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil; this site harboured 3–5 pairs of Hudson's Canasteros *Asthenes hudsoni* in February 2006 (Kevin J. Zimmer)

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 *A. hudsoni*. Belton<sup>1</sup> described the coastal plain of Rio Grande do Sul as being a 'flat, occasionally rolling, sandy area of Quarternary 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

sedge-grass 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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