

Range extension for Itatiaia Spinetail *Oreophylax moreirae* with comments on its distribution

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Poucas informações estão disponíveis sobre as aves que ocorrem exclusivamente em campos de altitude ou rupestres no Brasil. São apresentadas as primeiras observações da garricha-chorona *Oreophylax moreirae*, na região do Pico do Sol (20°06'S 43°27'W), Parque Natural do Caraça, Minas Gerais. Esse registro indica uma dispersão mais interiorana e implica numa significativa extensão da distribuição dessa espécie, encontrada pela primeira vez na Serra do Espinhaço.

Introduction

Delimitation of species ranges are subjects to constant revision, particularly for poorly known taxa. Here we report observations of Itatiaia Spinetail *Oreophylax moreirae* at the Pico do Sol (20°06'S 43°27'W, 2,070 m), in Parque Natural do Caraça, Catas Altas municipality, Minas Gerais state, in 1996. This is the first record from the Espinhaço range, and extends the species known range by at least 150 km west. Itatiaia Spinetail is a Brazilian endemic discovered in the early 20th century by Carlos Moreira, a carcinologist from Museu Nacional do Rio de Janeiro^{4,12}, whilst working in the Itatiaia highlands, south-east Brazil. It was originally described as *Synallaxis moreirae* by Miranda-Ribeiro⁴. Several subsequent authors^{3,5,8} have placed it within its own genus—*Oreophylax*—following Hellmayr¹, which is the treatment we prefer and have followed here. Others^{9,11} concur with Vaurie¹² and place it within the Andean genus *Schizoeaca*.

Distribution

Oreophylax moreirae is restricted to high montane south-east Brazil, in the Serra do Caparaó (Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo states), Serra dos Órgãos (Rio de Janeiro state) and Itatiaia (Minas Gerais, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro states), at 1,900–2,800 m^{5,8,11} (Fig. 1). The record from Espírito Santo considered to be “without foundation”⁹, requires review, as the species is found in the high mountains of the Serra do Caparaó region, an extensive part of which is within this state.

In a brief study of the bird collections at the Museu Nacional do Rio de Janeiro and Museu de Zoologia da Universidade de São Paulo, TAMJ found, and checked the labels of, 24 specimens of the species. Only one specimen—MNRJ 15281—did not possess any information on its label.

Most *O. moreirae* were collected in the Serra do Caparaó and Itatiaia, in the first half of this century. For most specimens, even the most basic data

Table 1. Specimen data from original labels (N = 23).

Specimen	Date	Locality	Collector
MNRJ 15213	08-31-1929	Serra do Caparaó	E. Sneathlage
MNRJ 15214	08-29-1929	Serra do Caparaó	E. Sneathlage
MNRJ 15215	08-29-1929	Serra do Caparaó	E. Sneathlage
MNRJ 15216	08-31-1929	Serra do Caparaó	E. Sneathlage
MNRJ 15217	04-20-1927	Serra do Itatiaia	E. Sneathlage
MNRJ 15218	08-30-1929	Serra do Caparaó	E. Sneathlage
MNRJ 15222	11-01-1922	Serra do Caparaó	Peixoto Velho
MNRJ 25899	unknown	Serra do Caparaó	H. Sick
MNRJ 25915	unknown	Serra do Caparaó	H. Sick
MNRJ 26129	unknown	Serra do Caparaó	H. Sick
MNRJ 27124	unknown	Serra do Caparaó	H. Sick
MNRJ 31028	08-09-1966	Itatiaia NP	Carlos Muck
MZUSP 6129	04-13-1906	Serra do Itatiaia	unknown
MZUSP 6130	04-14-1906	Serra do Itatiaia	unknown
MZUSP 34178	12-11-1949	Itatiaia NP	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 34179	12-12-1949	Itatiaia NP	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 34332	07-28-1950	Itatiaia NP	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 34785	05-21-1951	Serra do Itatiaia	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 34786	05-21-1951	Serra do Itatiaia	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 34787	05-22-1951	Serra do Itatiaia	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 34788	05-22-1951	Serra do Itatiaia	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 34789	05-22-1951	Serra do Itatiaia	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 34790	05-22-1951	Serra do Itatiaia	J. L. Lima

MNRJ = Museu Nacional do Rio de Janeiro.

MZUSP = Museu de Zoologia da Universidade de São Paulo.

NP = National Park.

were not recorded or were lost, and consequently important information concerning elevation, body mass, stomach contents and reproductive condition are unavailable.

Field identification

In proportion to the size of the bird—180 mm—the tail is very long and pointed¹². Upperparts are predominantly brownish, the underparts and superciliary buffish with some rufous in the wings and tail^{3,8}. Bill and legs are dark greyish. The chin and throat are ochraceous, and our field observations suggest this character is variable in extent. One specimen—MZUSP 6129, an immature—had

only a small pale buff patch on the throat.

Study area and discovery

Parque Natural do Caraça is an 11,187 ha private reserve in the southern Espinhaço range, on Catas Altas and near Santa Bárbara (Fig. 2), c.120 km south-east of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. Being at the transition of the Atlantic Forest and cerrado regions, it possesses a locally rich fauna and flora. Serra do Espinhaço has a quartzitic base composition, different to Itatiaia and Serra dos Órgãos, where granite and gneiss are dominant⁶.

Birds include Brazilian endemic and threatened elements¹¹ such as Serra Antwren *Formicivora serrana*, Ochre-rumped Antbird *Drymophila ochropyga*, Such's Anthrush *Chamaeza meruloides*, Shrike-like Cotinga *Laniisoma elegans*, Cinnamon-vented Piha *Lipaugus lanioides*, Grey-backed Tachuri *Polystictus superciliaris*, Gilt-edged *Tangara cyanoventris* and Brassy-breasted Tanagers *Tangara desmaresti* (TAMJ pers.obs.).

In May 1996, LGMM and his wife—Doralice—observed an unusual furnariid at long distance on the Pico do Sol, the highest peak in the Espinhaço range.

In June 1996, TAMJ and MMC travelled to Caraça specifically to identify this species. Our survey of the Pico do Sol region was helped by two local guides. At 06h30 we reached the Pico do Sol shelter, where we camped for two days. This region has typical rocky outcrops, headwaters and tiny watercourses, gallery vegetation, cerrado and campo vegetation. Two arboreal plants, Asteraceae (*Eremanthus* sp.) and Melastomataceae (*Lavoisiera* sp.), were found but low montane vegetation was dominant, e.g. Asteraceae (*Baccharis* sp.), Bromeliaceae (*Aechmea* sp., *Bilbergia vitatta*, *Tillandsia* sp., *Vriesea* sp.), Eriocaulaceae (*Paepalanthus* spp.), Lycopodiaceae (*Huperzia rubra*), Orchidaceae (*Epidendrum* sp., *Laelia* spp., *Zygopetalum* sp.), Scrophulariaceae (*Esterrhazia* sp.) and Velloziaceae (*Barbacenia sessiflora*, *Vellozia compacta*, *V. cf. albiflora*) (M. F. Vasconcelos pers. comm.). Above 1,700 m we found *Chusquea* sp., a bamboo also encountered in other areas where Itatiaia Spinetail occurs¹⁰. However, other plant species largely occur on or are restricted to the Serra do Espinhaço (e.g. Eriocaulaceae and *Paepalanthus* spp.).

We found *O. moreirae* at 1,850–2,000 m, usually in pairs. Response to playback was recorded using a TCM 5000 EV tape-recorder. The song was very similar to that heard in other populations, e.g. the Serra do Caparaó. One bird was observed actively searching and gleaning insects for c.15

minutes, enabling us to record its behaviour: hops and short flights, flicking its short wings and occasionally hanging upside-down or sideways⁷ from Velloziaceae and other tall plants.

In addition, 21 other species were recorded, including three taxa confined to the Espinhaço range: Hyacinth Visorbearer *Augastes scutatus*, the local form of Grey-breasted Sabrewing *Campylopterus largipennis diamantinensis* and Pale-throated Pampa-finch *Embernagra longicauda*.

Conservation and other recommendations

In September–October 1997, after 30 years of relative stability, the Pico do Sol region burned down and subsequently plant species previously unrecorded in this area were able to colonise (M. F. Vasconcelos & J. J. Filho pers. comm.). Such events are a serious threat to species with small populations restricted to isolated mountains.

Itatiaia Spinetail probably occurs on Pico da Carapuça (1,905 m) and Pico do Inficionado (2,064 m) also in Parque Natural do Caraça, and may occur at other sites in Minas Gerais. A long-term avian study of areas such as Serra do Brigadeiro and Espinhaço (Serra do Cipó, Caraça, Pico do Itacolomi and its vicinity, Serra da Piedade and Pico do Itambé) is recommended. Additional range extensions and even new taxa may be recorded from these areas.

O. moreirae is uncommon to locally fairly common within its restricted range⁸, but was recently included in a list of presumed threatened fauna in Minas Gerais². Detailed studies, and use of modern biological techniques, will hopefully clarify the systematic position and origins of *O. moreirae*.

Contacts

For accommodation within Parque Natural do Caraça phone or fax +55-31-837-2698. João Júlio Filho, and Draks and Francisco Soares are excellent guides within the national park. To contact them phone +55-31-832-2151.

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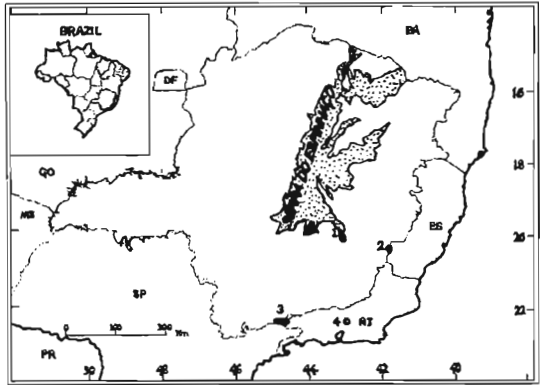
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Map 1. Distribution of Itatiaia Spinetail (*Oreophylax moreirae*), including the new locality, Cata Altas in the Serra do Espinhaço, Minas Gerais State.

- ▲ – Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais capital).
- 1 – Cata Altas (Minas Gerais).
- 2 – Caparaó (Minas Gerais/Espírito Santo).
- 3 – Itatiaia (Minas Gerais/São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro)
- 4 – Serra dos Órgãos (Rio de Janeiro State)