

## The first record of Dickcissel *Spiza americana* for Ecuador

Rob P. Clay

Cotinga 11 (1999): 49

El primer registro de *Spiza americana* en Ecuador se trata de un individuo solitario, probablemente una hembra en su primer invierno, encontrada el 27 de enero de 1998 en una bandada mixta de corbatitas *Sporophila*, cerca de la Estación Biológica Jatun Sacha Bilsa, provincia de Napo. Se describe al ave y se resumen las observaciones previas de la especie en Sudamérica.

On 27 January 1994 the author, accompanied by Stuart Jack and Jon Vincent, found a Dickcissel *Spiza americana* at the turn to Cabanas Alinahui, near the Jatun Sacha Bilsa Biological Station, Napo Province, Ecuador. The bird, probably a first-winter female, was in a large mixed-species flock including Chestnut-bellied *Sporophila castaneiventris* and Black-and-white Seedeaters *S. luctuosa* and Yellow-browed Sparrows *Ammodramus aurifrons*. This flock was observed for several days, foraging in grassland and roadside shrubbery, but the *S. americana* was observed on only one day.

Compared to the accompanying *Sporophila* and *A. aurifrons*, the *Spiza americana* was noticeably larger, similar to a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* in size, and also reminiscent of that species in plumage. Particularly striking was the large pale (pinkish horn) bill, with a darker culmen. The head pattern was comparatively distinctive with a pale yellowish buff supercilium and submoustachial stripe contrasting with the relatively plain greyish brown ear-coverts, crown and nape. The crown was streaked darker brown, with a few faint streaks on the ear-coverts, but the nape appeared unmarked. There was a pale crescent below the eye. Upperparts were light brown streaked dusky, with two paler 'tramlines' on the mantle. A fine dark malar stripe separated the yellowish buff submoustachial from the off-white throat. The malar stripe continued down the breast sides and flanks as a series of fine streaks; these also extended lightly across the breast. The underparts were a very pale greyish brown, washed buff on the flanks and faintly with yellow on the breast.

The bird was aged as a probable first-winter as the characteristic chestnut in the wing was restricted to the tips of the median-coverts, which otherwise had noticeable dark centres. Chestnut

appeared to be completely lacking from the lesser-coverts. Although adult female *S. americana* can lack chestnut on the wing-coverts<sup>1</sup>, the most likely age and sex diagnosis, supported by the relatively indistinct yellow coloration on the head and breast, is that of a first-winter female. An additional supporting feature was the prominently pointed rectrices—although this is a feature of all ages of *S. americana*, it is most pronounced in first-winters<sup>1</sup>. Twice the bird was heard to call—a short buzzy note.

*S. americana* is a locally common, but erratic, visitor to northern South America during the Northern Hemisphere winter<sup>3</sup>, with at least 50 records, some involving millions of birds, from 35 localities in Colombia and the Venezuelan llanos, with single records from Guyana and north Brazil<sup>2</sup>, but this record is the first for Ecuador (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1994). Given its migratory nature, its occurrence as a vagrant in western Ecuador was not unexpected (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1994).

### References

1. Lewington, I., Alström, P. & Colston, P. (1991) *A field guide to the rare birds of Britain and Europe*. London, UK: HarperCollins.
2. Paynter, R. A. Jr. (1995) *Nearctic passerine migrants in South America*. Cambridge, Mass: Publications of the Nuttall Ornithological Club 25.
3. Ridgely, R. S. & Tudor, G. (1989) *The birds of South America*, 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### Rob P. Clay

Guyra Paraguay: Conservacion de Aves, Belgica 165, C.C. 714, Asuncion, Paraguay. E-mail: guyra@highway.com.py.