Notes and range extensions of some poorly known birds of northern Argentina

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Esta nota proporciona nuevos datos de distribución, historia natural y voces de diez especies poco conocidas, estudiadas en las provincias de Jujuy, Salta, Formosa y Misiones, en el norte de la Argentina, entre 1996 y 1999. Dichas especies y su importancia son: *Crypturellus undulatus* (nueva localidad en Formosa), *Egretta caerulea* (confirmación de la especie en la Argentina con el descubrimiento de una población en Salta), *Morphnus guianensis* (tercer registro para la Argentina), *Metriopelia ceciliae* (confirmación para Salta y notas sobre movimientos altitudinales), *Leptasthenura yanacensis* (tres nuevas localidades y notas sobre nidificación en la Argentina), *Asthenes heterura* (nuevas localidades y confirmación con especimenes), *Biatas nigropectus* (dos nuevas localidades), *Chamaeza ruficauda* (nueva localidad y revisión de status en la Argentina), *Compsospiza baeri* (extensión de distribución y datos de captura) y *Sicalis citrina* (tercer reporte para la Argentina, con notas sobre una población en Salta).

Introduction

Novel distributional data, including range extensions, new provincial records and several new localities, together with notes on natural history and voice, and comments on distribution and abundance, are provided for ten species poorly known in Argentina or throughout their range. Records are from the four northernmost provinces of Argentina—Jujuy, Salta, Formosa and Misiones—during field trips made in December 1996–January 1997, August 1998, and September–November 1999.

The relative importance of the records is as follows: Undulated Tinamou *Crypturellus undulatus* (new Formosan locality), Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* (discovery of a population in Salta and first photographic record for Argentina), Crested Eagle *Morphnus guianensis* (third record in Argentina), Bare-faced Ground-dove *Metriopelia ceciliae* (new provincial records and notes on altitudinal movements), Tawny Tit-spinetail *Leptasthenura yanacensis* (three new localities and first Argentine nest records), Maquis Canastero *Asthenes heterura* (new localities and specimen confirmation), White-bearded Antshrike *Biatas nigropectus* (two new localities), Rufous-tailed Antthrush *Chamaeza ruficauda* (new locality and review of status in Argentina), Tucuman Mountain-finch *Compsospiza baeri* (range extension and morphometric data) and Stripe-tailed Yellow-finch *Sicalis citrina* (third Ar-

Figure 2. Male White-bearded Antshrike *Biatas nigropectus*, Tobunas, Misiones, September 1999 (M. Pearman)

Figure 1. Adult Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*, Dique Itiyuro, Salta, August 1998 (M. Pearman)

Figure 3. Tucuman Mountain-finch *Compsospiza baeri*, río Tranca, Salta, December 1996 (M. Pearman)

gentine record with notes on a large population in Salta).

Coordinates and altitudes above sea level (where relevant) are given for each study locality at its first mention, taken from GPS readings or from Paynter[26]. Some specimen data are presented from the Museo Argentina de Ciencias Naturales (MACN), Buenos Aires, and Museo de la Plata (MLP), La Plata collections.

Undulated Tinamou *Crypturellus undulatus*

C. undulatus is generally accepted to occur in east Formosa and east Chaco provinces[25], but there are few records and only six known localities as follows. In Chaco province, it is known from two 1962 and 1964 MACN specimens from the mouth of the río de Oro and the mouth of the río Guaycurú[20], and was recently discovered to be relatively numerous at Parque Provincial Pampa del Indio and Parque Nacional Chaco, Chaco province (A. Bodrati in prep., pers. obs.). In Formosa, the species is known only by a 1925 specimen from Estancia San José, 22 km west of Clorinda[14]; and a sight record of three at Reserva El Bagual in September 1987[19], although it is has not been recorded since at this locality (A. Di Giacomo pers. comm.).

On 19 October 1999, one was located in Estancia Guaycolec (25°59'S 58°11'W), east Formosa. It foraged in the interior of a large humid chaco forest island within savanna, which had recently been grazed by cattle. I tape-recorded the mournful, distinctive three-note call, which has given rise to the local onomatopoeic name Cocoé, being given every 1–4 minutes for more than an hour during mid-morning in the austral spring (October). Those in Chaco province generally only vocalise for 15 minutes at dawn and dusk in May, which is the austral winter.

C. undulatus is the largest forest-based, and second largest tinamid in east Chaco and Formosa where local men, in both provinces, reported hunting it. There are insufficient historical data to determine whether it has declined as a result of hunting, or habitat clearance, and more thorough field surveys are required to determine its current status in Argentina.

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*

E. caerulea is known in Argentina from four sight records of single juveniles in south-east Formosa province in November 1992, January 1993, August 1994 and February 1995[9], and a sight record of two juveniles and an adult in north-east Salta province in July 1998[10]. The pattern of recent records in Argentina suggests a southward invasion of *E. caerulea* into north-central Argentina.

On 15–17 August 1998, MP and Richard Johnson (hereafter RJ), located at least three adult *E. caerulea* which were photographed at Dique Itiyuro (22°06'S 63°44'W, c.650 m), extreme north Salta (Fig. 1). This is the first photographic record in Argentina. They were at the edge of a man-made lake, regulated by water channels discharging into a dammed concrete basin with hydroelectric turbines, surrounded by transitional foothill forest with some lower yungas forest and dry chaco woodland. They fed in open marsh grass, by extending the neck in a straight line at an angle of 30–45° from the body in order to search for prey.

The three *E. caerulea* were notably smaller than Snowy Egret *E. thula* in direct comparison, and did not generally associate with other herons. Between feeding sessions they rested or preened in branches over water, shaded by dense vine tangles, on exposed bare branches of an isolated tree in a rushbed (*Schoenoplectus californicus*), or on a log in water. A low-pitched *kraaark* call was heard in flight, when the legs were noted to extend well beyond the tail.

Crested Eagle *Morphnus guianensis*

On 26 September 1999, I observed an adult soaring c.200 m above the forest canopy of Parque Provincial El Piñalito (26°23'S 53°49'W; 750 m), north-east Misiones. It glided directly overhead, on thermals, at c.17h00 in a straight line without flapping. It had a much slighter build than Harpy Eagle *Harpia harpyja*, with narrower wings and a proportionately longer tail with three black bands. The creamy-white underwing-coverts contrasted with black-barred primaries, and its grey head and upper breast were also clearly visible during nearly five minutes of observation until it eventually crossed into Santa Catarina state, Brazil.

Morphnus appears to be a casual visitor to Misiones, being known from Santa Ana[3] and Parque Nacional Iguazú, where a pair was observed displaying in September 1980[24]. The identification of a possible subadult specimen in the Museo de Ciencias Naturales 'Juan Foester', Montecarlo[6], is unresolved.

Bare-faced Ground-dove *Metriopelia ceciliae*

M. ceciliae is well known and common in the vicinity of the towns of La Quiaca and Yavi (3,442 m and 4,000 m), north Jujuy[1,17,19] (pers. obs.), and it has also been described as common at El Moreno (3,800 m), Jujuy[19]. Additionally there is an MLP specimen labelled 'Salta, September 1896', but without a specific locality[4] and nothing further has been published on the species in this province.

A group of four was observed foraging terrestrially along the río Tranca (22°15'S 65°03'W, at 3,100 m), north Salta, on 10 December 1996. On 7 August 1998, RJ and I observed a group of three *M. ceciliae* in a ploughed field at the village of Acoyte (22°17'S 65°01'W, 2,550 m), north Salta. These records provide additional evidence of the species' presence in the province.

A previously unpublished MACN specimen (no. 8633) from Tilcara (2,461 m), Jujuy, collected on 29 July 1914, is only the second collected in Argentina, and appears to be a juvenile. It lacks the extensive pale feather tipping on the upperparts of adults, with only narrow pale feather tips to the lower mantle and rump. However, the general plumage tone of the upperparts is warm brown, like adult *M. ceciliae*; not cold grey-brown as in Moreno's Ground-dove *C. morenoi* (pers. obs.).

Seasonal downslope movements have been recorded in Peru[11] and at least part of the Argentine population may perform similar migrations. Those recorded at the lowest altitudes, e.g. 2,500 m (MACN specimen) and 2,550 m (this paper), in Argentina, are in July–August, corresponding to the mid-austral winter. It is unclear whether *M. ceciliae* occurs at these localities in summer, and it should be noted that part of the population remains on the altiplano during the austral winter.

Tawny Tit-spinetail *Leptasthenura yanacensis*

L. yanacensis was first discovered in Argentina at Caspalá, Jujuy, in January 1996 (H. Povedano) and subsequently recorded at Quebrada Sacha Runa, Salta and Alto Calilegua, Jujuy[17,18]. Here I report observations from four localities, three new for Argentina, and comment on behaviour and the first nesting records for the country.

Two pairs were observed along the río Tranca, north Salta (at 3,100 m) and nearby río Peña Negra (22°15'S 65°04'W, 3,300 m), on 10–11 December 1996, in patches of *Polylepis tomentella* and *Baccharis* shrub. One pair at río Tranca visited an inactive nest placed 2 m above ground.

Seven were encountered along the Quebrada Queñoal (21°55'S 66°08'W, 3,500–3,600 m), extreme north-west Jujuy, on 29–30 December 1996. In the highest isolated *Polylepis tomentella* tree, at 3,600 m, a pair was nest-building on 30 December. The dome-shaped nest, with a lateral entrance hole, was constructed from *Festuca* grass, and placed 2.2 m up on a thick horizontal branch.

L. yanacensis foraged from the ground to 4 m up in *Polylepis* trees, usually starting near the base of a tree and working upwards before flying to the base of a nearby tree or shrub. One was also observed picking insects off a bare rocky slope.

At all three localities, *L. yanacensis* was strongly tied to *Polylepis* groves, but I have also observed the species foraging on *Festuca* grass slopes at Alto Calilegua, Jujuy, far from *Polylepis*. Bill structure is notably different from all other *Leptasthenura*, being long and fine. Further studies may reveal a close link between bill shape and scansorial behaviour on the loose bark of *Polylepis* trees. At two localities *L. yanacensis* was observed foraging in direct association with Brown-capped Tit-spinetail *L. fuliginiceps*.

Maquis Canastero *Asthenes heterura*

A. heterura is currently known in Argentina from three localities. It was first discovered, outside Bolivia, on the trail east of Santa Victoria, between Cañani and Casas Viejas, north Salta in July 1992 (Moschione *et al.* in prep.). In January 1993, it was found at Caspalá, Jujuy[18], and in August 1996 near Alto Calilegua, Jujuy[17], and, on 5 September 1998, together with RJ, I observed and tape-recorded two there.

Another previously unpublished locality is Quebrada Sunchal (25°08'S 65°52'W, 2,850 m), Salta where, on 4–5 January 1997, I observed two individuals. They foraged on the ground or less than 50 cm up in dense *Berberis* shrub cover, usually pumping the tail, rather than cocking it in the manner of most *Asthenes* spp. One delivered a trilled song, descending in pitch, from bare branches, 2 m up, on the edge of tall shrubbery. On three occasions *A. heterura* loosely associated with mixed-species flocks comprising Brown-capped Tit-spinetail, Tufted Tit-tyrant *Anairetes parulus*, Rusty Flowerpiercer *Diglossa sittoides* and Plain-coloured Seedeater *Catamenia inornata*.

Recently, I discovered five MACN specimens of *A. heterura* all labelled *Siptornis sordida affinis* (a synonym of Sharp-billed Canastero *A. pyrrholeuca*) within a large series of *pyrrholeuca* as follows: 8502-107a (male) and 8502-107f (female) from El Alisal (2,800 m), Sierra del Cajón, Salta, on 16 and 9 January 1914; 8502-107d (unsexed) from Sierra del Cajón (2,800 m), Salta, in January 1914 (presumably also from El Alisal); 4320-107e (male) labelled 'Salta, September 1898'; and 8502?-107g (female) from Tafí Viejo (1,600 m), Tucumán, on 26 June 1914. These are the first specimens of *heterura* away from Bolivia. These differ from *A. pyrrholeuca* in having rufous wing-coverts (brown in *pyrrholeuca*) and a broader rufous wingbar at the base of the primaries; brown central rectrices (blackish in *pyrrholeuca*) that are more pointed than in *pyrrholeuca*; and by a broader bill with a less angled tip to the lower mandible.

It is noteworthy that three of the MACN specimens come from 2,800 m, similar to that of several recent sight records, while the Tucumán specimen, collected at 1,600 m in June, suggests that the species may descend during the austral winter. Clearly *A. heterura* has long been overlooked in Argentina and confused with *A. pyrrholeuca*, which it resembles morphologically and shares the characteristic of never cocking the tail. The two species' plumage differences have been poorly described in the literature. The problem is compounded by the arrival of austral migrant *pyrrholeuca* within the range of *heterura* in winter, and the presence of several, apparently isolated, resident populations of *pyrrholeuca* to at least 2,800 m in the north-west Argentinian Andes[27,29].

Careful attention to the plumage differences,

described above, and vocalisations[29] may reveal the presence of *A. heterura* at new localities within Salta, Jujuy and Tucumán.

White-bearded Antshrike *Biatas nigropectus*
Biatas is a scarce and local endemic of the Atlantic Forest of south-east Brazil and north Misiones, Argentina[29]. It is known in the latter from specimens taken at four localities in 1950–1955[8,12,21], and two subsequent sight records in the eastern sector of PN Iguazú and at PP Urugua-í[2]. In addition, G. M. Kirwan (pers. comm.) tape-recorded a male in PN Iguazú, on 16 March 1997.

On 11–12 April 1997, I observed a pair, duetting, 6–8 m up within dense bamboo (*Merostachys clausenii* mixed with *Bambusa trinii*) at Arroyo Alegria (26°30'S 54°16'W), dpto. San Pedro, north Misiones. They principally frequented the *Merostachys* bamboo and were still present in the same area in May 1998 (A. Chiappe pers. comm.), but the area has subsequently been logged.

On 29 September 1999, I located a male near Tobunas (26°28'S 53°54'W), north-east Misiones (Fig. 2). It was holding territory and sang repeatedly, throughout much of the day, from three high song perches in an extensive and dense stand of *Bambusa trinii*. The song of *Biatas* is a steady monotone series of notes, which recalls the song of White-shouldered Fire-eye *Pyriglena leucoptera*. The species' status in Misiones is unclear, but it has undoubtedly been overlooked by observers unfamiliar with its voice, while its habit of frequenting dense impenetrable bamboo stands makes observation difficult.

Plumage variation in *Biatas* has not previously been reported. Some males lack a supercilium and the white, or sometimes buff, nuchal collar of both sexes varies considerably in width and is sometimes wholly absent. The male's olive mantle is sometimes tinged with rufous. A notable, and previously undescribed, feature of both sexes is the semi-erectile crest, which is generally held erect and only occasionally depressed (Fig. 2).

Rufous-tailed Antthrush *Chamaeza ruficauda*
The first Argentine record of *C. ruficauda* was only recently discovered in MACN, where a specimen, labelled *Chamaeza* sp., collected at Tobunas, north-east Misiones, in August 1959, proved to be this species[23]. Subsequently it has been recorded at three other localities in east Misiones[18].

C. ruficauda proved to be relatively common at PP El Piñalito, north-east Misiones, where up to four were recorded daily, on 26–29 September 1999, in different areas of the park; especially in stands of *Merostachys clausenii* bamboo, usually close to water. It is noteworthy that the five known localities for *C. ruficauda* in Argentina are all relatively high (above 600 m) and situated within close proximity of one another, along the Sierra de Misiones. Throughout this area, *C. ruficauda* is outnumbered by *C. campanisona*.

Tucuman Mountain-finch *Compsospiza* (*Poospiza*) *baeri*
On 10 December 1996 two pairs and a single were located at 2,900 m and 3,100 m, along the río Tranca, north Salta, in a steep-sided gully, lined with *Polylepis tomentella*. Another pair was located in similar habitat along the nearby río Peña Negra, at 3,300 m, on 11 December 1996. They moved lethargically on the ground, in grass clumps and low bushes, and occasionally in *Polylepis*, up to c.2 m above ground. It is noteworthy that *C. baeri* was observed in *Polylepis*, a habitat usually associated with Cochabamba Mountain-finch *C. garleppi*[8,11,28]. One was observed foraging in association with a pair of Short-tailed Finch *Idiopsar brachyurus*.

One mist-netted at río Tranca, on 11 December 1996 (Fig. 3), furnished the following biometric and soft-part data: wing (flat) 81 mm; tail 87 mm; culmen (from skull) 14.8 mm; tarsus 23.5 mm; no brood patch; iris muddy brown; tarsus greyish lilac with yellowish soles; maxilla black; mandible pale blue-grey. Contact calls comprised a high-pitched series of *sip* notes.

C. baeri was known only from the Aconquija massif, Tucumán–Catamarca provinces, until a 1950 specimen was discovered from La Quesera, south-west Jujuy[7], and the species was subsequently found at one locality in La Rioja[6], two localities in south-east Salta[22,28] and another in central-north Jujuy[8]. The north Salta records (this paper) represent a range extension of 160 km north to within 20 km of the Bolivian border; there is a published sight record from Tarija, Bolivia, by Stephanie Tyler[30].

Stripe-tailed Yellow-finch *Sicalis citrina*
Known in Argentina from two old specimens: a male collected at an unspecified locality in the 'Cordillera de Tucumán' and held in the Berlin Museum[5]; and a male from the Cuesta de Malamala, Tucumán[15], housed in the Instituto Miguel Lillo, Tucumán, although erroneously reported in the literature as the 'Cuesta de Macamala'[11]. Hellmayr[13] examined both specimens and confirmed their identification. Nothing further has been published concerning *Sicalis citrina* in Argentina since Lillo's notes in 1905, except for the repetition of Tucumán province in the literature and the suggestion that the species 'probably also [occurs] in southern Salta'[25].

On 26 December 1996, I located more than 50 *S. citrina* in flowering meadows, interspersed with isolated montane forest patches, above Canto El Monte (22°21'S 64°43'W, c.1,400 m), extreme north Salta. The majority of males were undertaking vertical display flights, to 6 m above ground, during

which the white inner webs of the outer rectrices were clearly visible. A few associated with Double-collared Seedeater *Sporophila caerulescens* and Grassland Sparrow *Ammodramus humeralis* while foraging on seeding grasses.

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