

Some ornithological observations of interest from Área de Reserva para Parque Nacional San Rafael, Itapúa department, Paraguay

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PAUL SMITH^{1,2*}

MARCIN SIDELNIK¹

ISMAEL TIRADOS AMEZ¹

SERGIO D. RÍOS³

¹FAUNA Paraguay, Encarnación, Dpto. Itapúa, Paraguay. * Corresponding author: faunaparaguay@gmail.com.

²Para La Tierra, Centro IDEAL, Mariscal Estigarribia 321 c/ Tte. Capurro, Pilar, Dpto. Ñeembucú, Paraguay.

³Departamento de Arqueología y Paleontología. Secretaría Nacional de Cultura. Asunción, Paraguay y Museo Nacional de Historia Natural del Paraguay, San Lorenzo, Paraguay.

ABSTRACT

At 72,849 ha the “Área de Reserva para Parque Nacional San Rafael” (Departamentos Itapúa and Caazapá) is the second largest block of Upper Paraná Atlantic Forest remaining in eastern Paraguay and widely considered the highest priority for conservation of the endemic Atlantic Forest avifauna in the country (Cartes *et al.* 2008). The avifauna of the reserve has been well documented (Lowen *et al.* 1996, Madroño *et al.* 1997, Smith *et al.* 2006, Esquivel *et al.* 2007, Esquivel and Peris 2011, Smith and Clay 2015) with most field effort in recent years concentrated on Estancia Nueva Gambach (Pro Cosara). Detailed descriptions of this locality are provided by Cartes (2008), Esquivel and Peris (2011) and Smith and Clay (2015).

The San Rafael reserve list stands at 426 species, making it the most ornithologically diverse protected area for birds in Paraguay (Smith and Clay 2015). Here we provide documentation for five additional species which take the park total to 431 species, including two new records for Itapúa department and formal documentation of one species for Paraguay that was previously known only from literature reports. Additionally we provide information on three additional observations of interest.

Key words: *Calidris melanotos*, *Chondrohierax uncinatus*, *Falco peregrinus*, *Phyllomyias fasciatus*, *Polioptila dumicola*, *Tringa flavipes*

FIVE NEW RECORDS FOR THE PARK

Hook-billed Kite *Chondrohierax uncinatus* (Accipitridae)

A single adult female individual observed (PS and MS) and photographed soaring at the edge of Atlantic Forest close to the accommodation area at Estancia Nueva Gambach on 20/08/2019 (Fig. 1). This is the first published report of the species from Itapúa department, although there is a previous unpublished photographic record of the species from the Santuario de Itacuí on 7 November 2013 by PS.

Planalto Tyrannulet *Phyllomyias fasciatus* (Tyrannidae)

Three individuals of this rare tyrannid were observed by PS and ITA in canopy of the Suruku'a Sa'yju trail at Estancia Nueva Gambach on 23/09/2019 (Fig. 2). The species was identified based on its vocalisations, notably short bill and plumage characteristics. There are very few previous published reports of the species in Paraguay (Bertoni 1914, Brooks *et al.* 1993, Guyra Paraguay 2005) and it is known from Alto Paraná (Puerto Bertoni), Canindeyú



Figure 1. Female Hook-billed Kite *Chondrohierax uncinatus* Estancia Nueva Gambach, 20 August 2019 (Photo Marcin Sidelnik).

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(Itabó), Concepción and Paraguari departments. As well as the first park record this is also the first report of the species from Itapúa department and apparently the first documented record of the species in Paraguay. This bird has long been considered a resident in Paraguay, but phenological data is scarce and the appearance of three individuals together at this locality is possibly suggestive of migratory movements.

Masked Gnatcatcher *Poliptila dumicola* *dumicola* (Poliptilidae)

A single male individual observed by PS and MS in a mixed canopy flock at forest edge close to the southern entrance of the Urutaú trail at Estancia Nueva Gambach on 19/08/2019 (Fig. 3). This flock also contained at least one individual of the closely-related Creamy-bellied Gnatcatcher *Poliptila lactea*, reconfirming that the two species can occur in sympatry, albeit rarely (Brooks et al. 1993). This is a common species associated with drier habitats, especially in the Chaco and Cerrado, and its presence at Atlantic Forest edge is probably ephemeral. However continued deforestation, coupled with the observable drying of disturbed habitats (“Chacoification”) mean that this species could potentially expand its range into previously uninhabitable areas.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* and Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* (Scolopacidae)

Two individuals of each of these species were observed by PS, SDR and Francisco Capli on the artificial lake at Estancia Nueva Gambach on 14/11/2020. This observation was made during a period of drought when the lake levels were at a previously unseen low, resulting in the exposure of extensive muddy flats along its shores. Both of these species are common Nearctic migrant sandpipers in Paraguay and their presence in the reserve area is likely opportunistic but to be expected when suitable environmental conditions are present.



Figure 2. Planalto Tyrannulet *Phyllomyias fasciatus* Estancia Nueva Gambach, 23 September 2019 (ventral and dorsal photos) (Photo Ismael Tirados Amez).



Figure 3. Male Masked Gnatcatcher *Poliptila dumicola dumicola* Estancia Nueva Gambach, 19 August 2019 (Photo Marcin Sidelnik).

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS OF INTEREST

Nest of Ruddy Quail-dove *Geotrygon montana* (Columbidae) (Figs. 4-5)

A nest of this species was found close to the northern end of the Chachí trail at Estancia Nueva Gambach on 25/10/2012, the first of this species reported in Paraguay (PS). The nest was located amongst dry leaves on a platform of tangled tacuarembó bamboo stems (*Chusquea* sp.) at a height of approximately 150 cm. The nest platform was an untidy mix of small sticks and pieces of bamboo, some still with dried, green leaves attached and located below a natural “roof” of bamboo stems that provided visibility protection from above. Nest dimensions were 170 x 146 mm. Dry leaves found inside the next cup were presumably the result of accidental leaf fall rather than being placed there specifically. Two eggs, similar in colour to those of hens eggs, were being incubated by the male when the nest was discovered at around 10 am. The dimensions of the eggs were 28 x 22 mm and 29 x 21 mm.

A detailed description of the nesting behaviour of this species in Argentina was published by Bodrati and Salvador (2013).

Observation of pale morph of *Falco peregrinus tundrius*

On 14/11/2017 a single individual of the pale morph of the northern subspecies of the Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus tundrius* was observed flying over soy fields close to the accommodation buildings at Estancia Nueva Gambach (PS). The bird was notably pale all over especially on the head and upperparts, with the wings silver-grey, strongly scalloped with white and the underparts almost unmarked. The bird was observed for approximately a minute before flying away at speed over the forest. It was unfortunately not possible to take a photograph of the bird before it departed. The species is not regularly recorded in the park (Esquivel and Peris 2011) and the individual is assigned to this subspecies based on the date of the record when migrant northern birds are in Paraguay.

A similar pale morph of the southern subspecies *F. p. cassini* was originally described as a distinct species *Falco kreyenborgi* Kleinschmidt, 1929 and was long considered an enigmatic taxon (Stresemann and Amadon 1963, Anderson and Ellis 1981) un-

til its status as a morph was confirmed (Ellis and Garat 1983, McNutt 1984). Though of superficially similar appearance, the *kreyenborgi* morph occurs in southern Chile and Argentina and is apparently resident in that area (Ellis and Garat 1983, McNutt 1984).

Natural attraction of Pheasant Cuckoo *Dromococcyx phasianellus* by a singing Pavonine Cuckoo *D. pavoninus* (Cuculidae)

A Pheasant Cuckoo was observed at Estancia Nueva Gambach on the Chachí trail in riparian/bamboo Atlantic forest at around 11am on 26/09/2018, the bird having been called into view using the typical three-note whistle of the species (PS). Over several minutes of observation the calling of the cuckoo increased in intensity and it eventually repeatedly employed a five-note whistle. After leaving this bird to go silent, and several minutes later, a calling Pavonine Cuckoo was then heard some 100 m or so away in a dense *Guadua* bamboo thicket. The bird was using the typical five-note call of the species, and may in fact have been responding to the Pheasant Cuckoo vocalisations shortly before, which were well within earshot. This bird was then located singing on an exposed branch over a trail where it was observed closely at a distance of 5 m by seven observers. Unperturbed by observer presence it continued to sing monotonously. After several minutes of watching this individual, remarkably, a Pheasant Cuckoo then appeared (perhaps the same individual we had been watching earlier) and perched on a similarly open branch within 5 m of the Pavonine Cuckoo and within full view of it. Though the Pheasant Cuckoo did not respond vocally it remained largely motionless on the exposed branch (uncharacteristic behaviour for such a skulking species), having clearly been attracted by the singing of the other species. The only responses observed were physical, occasional raising and lowering its crest, and periodic fanning of the tail whilst opening the alulas. Both individuals appeared unconcerned by the group of observers, allowing an extremely close presence until, after five minutes or more they were accidentally flushed – both flying away at approximately the same time.

In Paraguay the two species are known locally by the Guaraní name *jasy jatere* (literally “soul of the moon”) because of their tendency to call at night. The mysterious nature of these calls is the root of the indigenous legend of a monstrous being of the same name which haunts the forests



Figure 4. Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* (left and right) and Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* (centre) Estancia Nueva Gambach, 14 November 2020 (Photo Sergio Ríos).



Figure 5. Male Ruddy Ground-dove *Geotrygon montana* incubating eggs. Estancia Nueva Gambach, 25 October 2012 (Photo Marcin Sidelnik).



Figure 6. Eggs and nest of Ruddy Ground-dove *Geotrygon montana*. Estancia Nueva Gambach, 25 October 2012 (Photo Marcin Sidelnik).

and uses his whistling to enchant unwary children (Bertoni 1901, 1925). Indeed Bertoni (1901), believing it to be an unknown species, actually described a specimen of *D. phasianellus* from Alto Paraná as *Geophilus jasyjatere*. Bertoni (1925) latter observed that the name *jasy jatere* is most correctly applied to *D. pavoninus*, as the five-note call

of that species is onomatopoeic, compared to the three-note call of *D. phasianellus*. However he was apparently unaware that at high intensity the latter species also produces a very similar, but little-known, five-note call, which differs principally in the quavering tremolo ending to the final note (Erritzøe et al. 2012).

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