
Natural history of the little-known Speckled Antshrike *Xenornis setifrons*

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Xenornis setifrons es sólo conocido de las selvas húmedas en el pedemonte hasta la divisoria continental en el este de Panamá, con un registro en la Serranía de Baudó en la costa del Pacífico colombiano. En su distribución, ha sido registrado en sólo 12 localidades, seis de ellas en los 90 (todas en la parte occidental de su distribución), el resto en el sector oriental de su distribución, y ninguna de éstas desde los 60. La densidad de individuos es desconocida, y entre estas localidades parece estar verdaderamente ausente de hábitat aparentemente apropiado. Tampoco se conoce si la especie desarrolla movimientos altitudinales. *Xenornis setifrons* se alimenta (solo o en parejas) a través de vuelos cortos, a menudo en bandos mixtos, en el sotobosque, especialmente donde hay abundantes palmeras. La especie nidifica aproximadamente entre abril y junio, y el nido (recientemente descrito) es suspendido a c.3 m en una horqueta.

Introduction

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 north-west. Itatiaia Spinetail is a Brazilian endemic discovered in the early 20th century by Carlos Moreira, a crustacean specialist 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.

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

Specimen	Date	Locality	Collector
MNRJ 15213	08-31-1929	Serra do Caparaó	E. Snethlage
MNRJ 15214	08-29-1929	Serra do Caparaó	E. Snethlage
MNRJ 15215	08-29-1929	Serra do Caparaó	E. Snethlage
MNRJ 15216	08-31-1929	Serra do Caparaó	E. Snethlage
MNRJ 15217	04-20-1927	Serra do Itatiaia	E. Snethlage
MNRJ 15218	08-30-1929	Serra do Caparaó	E. Snethlage
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 3417812-11-1949		Itatiaia NP	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 3417912-12-1949		Itatiaia NP	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 3433207-28-1950		Itatiaia NP	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 3478505-21-1951		Serra do Itatiaia	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 3478605-21-1951		Serra do Itatiaia	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 3478705-22-1951		Serra do Itatiaia	J. L. Lima
MZUSP 3478805-22-1951		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.

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 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 Antthrush *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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