Further comments on the avifauna of the middle São Francisco Valley, Minas Gerais, Brazil

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Received 24 July 2003

In earlier contributions (Kirwan *et al.* 2001, Raposo *et al.* 2002, Whitney *et al.* 2003) GMK, JMB and others drew attention to the highly threatened avifauna of the middle reaches of the rio São Francisco in eastern Brazil, and the river's importance in influencing biogeographical processes of avian speciation and endemism. We also presented notes on behavioural aspects of a number of poorly known species, and provided new southernmost records for several north-east Brazilian caatinga specialists. Details of our principal study sites were included in the earlier paper. Since then we have made further visits to the area, resulting in additional data substantially augmenting our previous field work. Here, our intention is only to supply details of those records that update our knowledge of the Minas Gerais avifauna, along the middle reaches of the São Francisco Valley. Systematic order and scientific nomenclature follow Sick (1997), with all departures from this explained in Kirwan *et al.* (2001).

Methods

All tape-recordings were made using Sony TCM-5000 EV tape recorders and Sennheiser ME-66 microphones, and will be deposited at the Arquivo Sonoro Prof. Elias Coelho (ASEC), Departamento de Zoologia, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Several 'new' localities were visited and details of these are presented below (see also Fig. 1). Coordinates were taken from GPS readings or estimated from a map.

Rio Lavado (17°58'S, 44°34'W), Lassance municipality: a patch of gallery forest within an area of altered *cerradão* (closed-canopy, dense woodland), south of Lassance, visited briefly on 9 January 2003.

Lassance (17°54'S, 44°34'W), Lassance municipality: an area of cerrado and *Mauritia* palm *veredas* surrounding the city was visited on 2 February 1997.

Fazendas Jatobá do Cotobelo and **Jatobá da Mata** (centred at 17°45'S, 44°42'W), Várzea da Palma municipality: possess areas of *cerradão* woodland, open areas with caatinga influence, and gallery forest, as well as wetlands and agricultural fields. Active carbon ovens were noted in the area. Visited on 10 January 2003.

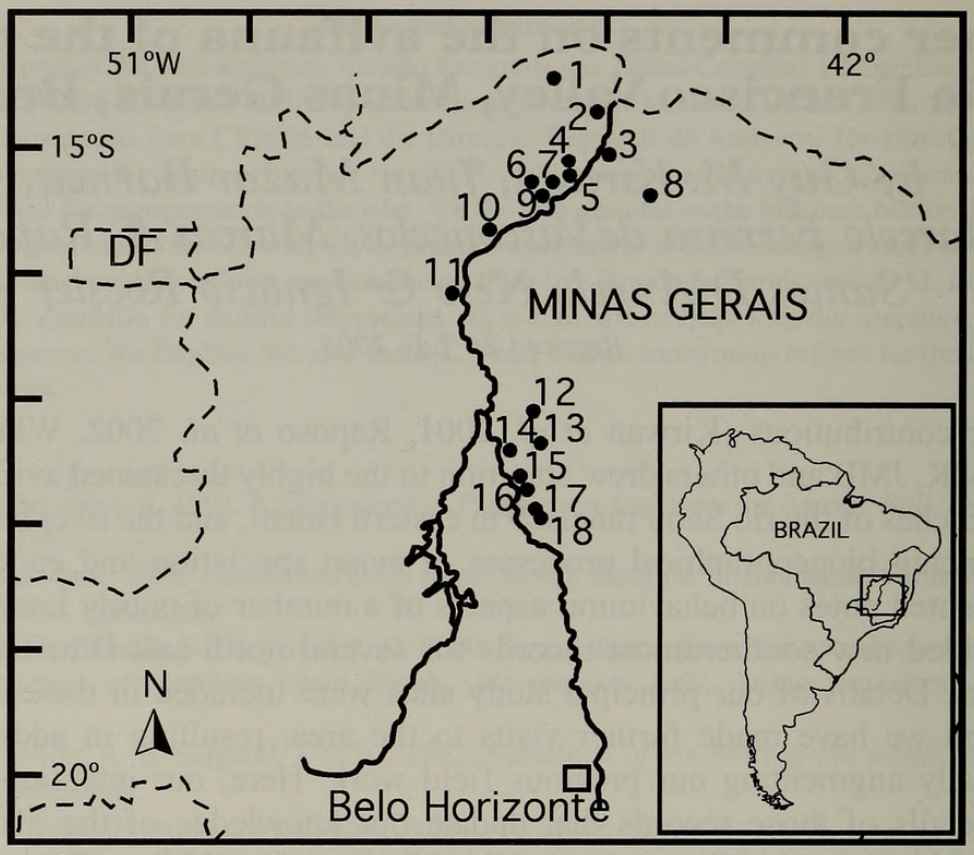

Figure 1. Map of the study localities in northern Minas Gerais. 1. Faz. Nova União; 2.Japoré; 3. Mocambinho; 4. Peruaçu; 5. Levinópolis; 6. Brejo do Amparo; 7. Januaria (10 km north of); 8.Poço da Vovó; 9. Pesqueiro Itambé; 10. rio São Francisco; 11. Faz. Buriti; 12. Curral de Pedras; 13. Serra Boqueirão; 14. Pirapora (south of); 15. Cia Florestal; 16. Faz. Jatobá do Cotovelo and Faz. Jatobá da Mata; 17. Lassance; 18. rio Lavado.

Companhia Florestal at Várzea da Palma (centred at 17°40'S, 44°44'W), Várzea da Palma municipality: road south and west of the town, that passed through a forestry plantation (mainly *Eucalyptus*), and continued through areas of degraded *cerradão*, open areas with influence of caatinga, and several tracts of gallery forest. Visited on 10 January 2003.

Pirapora (south of) (centred at 17°25'S, 44°48'W), Pirapora municipality: an area crossed by several minor roads south of the town, through caatinga–*cerradão* transition habitats, open agricultural fields and a few remaining patches of tall woodlands. Visited on 11 January 2003.

Serra do Boqueirão (17°23'S, 44°32'W), Jequitaí municipality: rocky escarpment between Jequitaí and Várzea da Palma, accessed via a minor road. The area presents mostly degraded woodland and *cerradão* habitats, agricultural fields, and taller woodland along the base of the serra. There is a large marshy area, as well as a number of small streams with narrow belts of gallery forest. Accessed from Jequitaí on 11 January 2003.

Curral de Pedras (17°06'S, 44°35'W), Jequitaí municipality: north-east of Pirapora inland of the right bank of the São Francisco, accessed from Jequitaí. The name, 'curral de pedras', refers to a limestone formation, which appears labyrinthine due to a series of concentric circles in the rock, and in this case is

surrounded by reasonably well-preserved semi-deciduous dry forest. It was visited in late-November 1995.

Fazenda Buriti (16°08'S, 45°09'W), Pintópolis municipality: area of *cerrado* and pastures. Visited on 17 June 2002.

São Francisco river (*c.*15°37'S, 44°28'W), Januária municipality: 15–20 km south of Januária, along a dirt road parallel to the left margin of the river. It contains dense scrub, inundated areas and patches of tall gallery woodlands. It was visited on 10 February 2002, and on 13 and 15 January 2003.

Brejo do Amparo (15°29'S, 44°22'W), Januária municipality: a well-known locality (Snethlage 1928, Willis & Oniki 1991), *c.*10 km west of Januária. We briefly surveyed the tall woodlands and fields along the rocky escarpments west of this locality, on 12 January 2003.

Januária (north of; *c.*15°25'S, 44°35'W), Januária municipality: access roads to the 'Escola Agrotécnica', where areas of scrub among agricultural land, and patches of tall woodlands were surveyed on 14 January 2003.

Poço da Vovó (15°22'S, 43°37'W), Jaíba municipality: region of second-growth caatinga woodlands and pastures. It was visited on 7 July 2002.

Pesqueiro Itambé (15°21'S, 44°11'W), Januária municipality, is located close to Riacho da Cruz village, at the left margin of rio São Francisco. Typical habitats are second-growth gallery forest, and riverbanks. This area was surveyed on 27–28 April 2002.

Levinópolis (*c.*15°15'S, 44°17'W), Levinópolis municipality: area west of town, along a local road, through limestone escarpments with mostly low-stature (possibly degraded) semi-deciduous woodlands. Visited on 14 January 2003.

Japoré (14°42'S, 44°04'W), Manga municipality: second-growth caatinga woodland. Visited on 6 July 2002.

Fazenda Nova União (14°25'S, 44°26'W), Montalvânia municipality: 1.5 km north of Montalvânia, the fazenda contains arboreal caatinga, second-growth caatinga woodland, and pastures. Visited on 6 and 7 December 2002.

The general region presents a mosaic of habitats, ranging from open pastures and agricultural fields, to *cerrado*, *cerradão*, areas with an influence of open (usually degraded) caatinga, arboreal caatinga, 'mata de Jaíba', deciduous and semi-deciduous forests, strips of gallery woodland, and some remaining patches of tall woodland (where 'jatobá' *Hymenaea* sp. abounds). This mix of habitats is a result of the geographical location of this area, at the meeting points of the *cerrado* and caatinga biomes, and several areas represent transitional habitats (Rizzini 1997).

Natural habitats have been greatly modified by human actions, and currently only a few areas of intact woodlands remain, where once rich forests existed (Hartt 1870, Spix & Martius 1981). These forests have been felled mainly to provide open

land for agriculture, *Eucalyptus* plantations, and to produce carbon, an activity noted at Fazendas Jatobá do Cotobelo and Jatobá da Mata. Silva & Oren (1992, 1997) alerted ornithologists to the fragile situation of the remaining deciduous forests growing on calcareous soils, and Kirwan *et al.* (2001) and Raposo *et al.* (2002) added further details concerning habitat modification in the region. We suggest that imminent land-use reform will be required if remaining natural habitats are to be sustainably managed.

We also checked specimens collected in the region housed in two Brazilian collections: the 'Coleção Ornitológica do Departamento de Zoologia da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais' (DZUFMG) in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais; and the 'Museu de História Natural de Taubaté' (MHNT), in Taubaté, São Paulo.

Species accounts

MISSISSIPPI KITE *Ictinia mississippiensis*

Three observed soaring over Fazenda Jatobá da Mata, south of Várzea da Palma, on 10 January 2003 (IR) is about the sixth country record. All individuals had unbarred tails, a diagnostic character to distinguish this species from Plumbeous Kite *I. plumbea*, with which IR is very familiar. First recorded in Brazil, at the Anavilhanas archipelago, Amazonas, in late November 1985 (Stotz *et al.* 1992) with subsequent sight records of migrant flocks in Mato Grosso: 82 over Chapada dos Guimarães on 14 November 1996 (A. Whittaker *in* Mazar Barnett *et al.* 1999), over 200 south of Poconé on 17 October 1997 (H. Buck *in* Mazar Barnett & Kirwan 2000a), c.20 between Poconé and the rio Pixiam on 12 October 1999 and 63 at the Chapada dos Guimarães on 14 October 1999 (P. O'Neill *in* Mazar Barnett & Kirwan 2000b). Wintering range very imprecisely known. The largest numbers are postulated to be in Paraguay, although Hayes (1995) considered it to be rare in most regions of the country, and northern Argentina (del Hoyo *et al.* 1994). Speculated also to winter in adjacent south-east Bolivia and south-west Brazil (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). The present record seems to indicate that, at least in small numbers, the species does, indeed, winter in Brazil.

ORNATE HAWK-EAGLE *Spizaetus ornatus*

Singles observed at Parque Nacional Cavernas do Peruaçu on 30 May and 24 August 2002 (MFV, SDN). On both occasions, they were flying over patches of arboreal caatinga on limestone outcrops, and the latter was tape-recorded. Ornate Hawk-eagle is a threatened species in Minas Gerais (Lins *et al.* 1997) and this is the first state record from within a protected area (Brandt 1998).

WHITE-BROWED GUAN *Penelope jacucaca*

A specimen was taken, by S. F. Guimarães, at Jatobá (15°18'S, 44°10'W), Januária municipality, on 21 August 2000 (MHNT 4561). This becomes the second state

locality, after Mocambinho (Kirwan *et al.* 2001), from where a specimen is also available, taken by J. E. Simon and J. M. C. da Silva on 29 July 1998 (DZUFMG 2883).

LEAST NIGHTHAWK *Chordeiles pusillus*

Up to 50 observed over the rio das Velhas, south of Pirapora, on 1 and 21 October 2002 (GMK, MAE, GMF, RS *et al.*), with fewer individuals noted in early-January 2003 at Rio Lavado and west of Lassance. We had not previously recorded the species in this region (Kirwan *et al.* 2001) and Willis & Oniki (1991) did not record it at Januária. We use these observations to draw attention to the fact, overlooked by Cleere & Nurney (1998) and Cleere (1999), that races other than northerly *esmeraldae* also undertake seasonal movements. Holyoak (2001) also provided very little information on such migrations. We have observed this species in several areas of São Paulo, e.g. around Itirapina, and Minas Gerais states, e.g. at the Serra do Cipó, Serra da Canastra and elsewhere, on a distinctly seasonal basis, confirming that nominate *pusillus* also makes regular migratory movements, as mentioned by Sick (1997). The recent discovery that this species breeds in north-eastern Argentina (Krauczuk 1998), and the timing of records there, also indicate migrations.

PLAIN-TAILED NIGHTHAWK *Nyctiprogne vielliardi*

Until recently known only from the type locality in Bahia, near Manga (Lencioni-Neto 1994), but its known range was thereafter extended south to central Minas Gerais, in the proximity of Pirapora (Whitney *et al.* 2003). In previous visits to the region GMK, JMB *et al.* witnessed large concentrations of these nighthawks along the São Francisco and its main tributaries, considering them to be common in areas around Pirapora, Januária and Mocambinho. At the last we noted groups of 150–200 individuals subdivided into smaller flocks (Whitney *et al.* 2003). Remarkably, during our October and November 2002 and January 2003 visits to the same area, it was only with considerable difficulty that we located any *N. vielliardi*, with none at Mocambinho, very few south of Pirapora, on 12 October (GMK *et al.*), and only two individuals 10 km south of Januária, on 13 January (GMK, JMB, IR). Searches for the species at other, apparently suitable areas of the rio São Francisco, e.g. immediately south-west of the town of Pirapora, in February 2002 (GMK, DB, AG, JM) failed to locate any *N. vielliardi*. The reasons for this drastic variation in numbers can only be speculated. Seasonal movements are plausible, but our mid-December 1999 and mid-January 2003 visits differed in timing by as little as three weeks, and it appears unlikely that the species engages in such migrations (seasonal movements in Band-tailed Nighthawk *N. leucopyga* are known from only one small area of Brazil and nowhere else across its broad range; Holyoak 2001). Climatic events are not likely to have played a major role, nor has habitat modification of those areas used by this species been documented in the region, to the extent to which it would have caused such results. Originally described in *Chordeiles*,

Whitney *et al.* (2003) provided detailed rationale for considering it within *Nyctiprogne*.

PYGMY NIGHTJAR *Caprimulgus hirundinaceus*
During nocturnal surveys, a female was spotlighted down to distances of just 25 cm, 12 km south of Pirapora, on 1 October 2002 (GMK, RS *et al.*). Its very small size was immediately apparent, and contrasted noticeably with the other caprimulgids present on the same dirt road, Pauraque *Nyctidromus albicollis* and Scissor-tailed Nightjar *Hydropsalis torquata*. It had only restricted white in the primaries and lacked any white in the tail. Little Nightjar *C. parvulus* might be expected at this season in this part of Minas Gerais (Sick 1997, Melo *et al.* 2000), although we have failed to record it at any localities in this region (Kirwan *et al.* 2001), but was eliminated because it possesses a broad hindneck collar, more extensive white throat, more broadly patterned wing-coverts, supercilium effect, and lacks any white in the wing. Given the very dark plumage of the form *C. h. vielliardi*, which may even lead observers to mistake it for Blackish Nightjar *C. nigrescens* (Ribon 2000), we attribute this record to the nominate subspecies, the first locality in Minas Gerais. Three races of this Brazilian endemic are currently recognised: the nominate in the arid north-east from southern Piauí to Bahia and Alagoas, *C. h. cearae* from northern Ceará to extreme northern Bahia and the recently described *C. h. vielliardi* from one locality in Espírito Santo and another in extreme eastern Minas Gerais (Ribon 1995, Cleere & Nurney 1998, Vasconcelos & Lins 1998).

FRILLED COQUETTE *Lophornis magnificus*
A male observed periodically over 30 minutes within a patch of tall woodland on the left bank of the rio São Francisco, 15 km south of Januária, on 10 February 2002 (DB, AG, GMK, JM) and another male in the same area on 15 January 2003 (GMK). Occurs principally in east coastal Brazil, from Alagoas south to Rio Grande do Sul, and west to Goiás and Mato Grosso (Sick 1997, del Hoyo *et al.* 1999), but there appear to be few, if any, previous mentions of the species for Minas Gerais.

SILVERY-CHEEKED ANTSHRIKE *Sakesphorus cristatus*
Only recently discovered to be relatively widespread in the middle reaches of São Francisco Valley in the extreme south-west of its range (Kirwan *et al.* 2001). Four specimens deposited in DZUFMG were taken at Mocambinho between 14 and 18 September 1996 by G. T. Mattos (DZUFMG 2521, DZUFMG 2522, DZUFMG 2523, DZUFMG 2524; two males and two females). Additional sight-record localities are: Japoré, Poço da Vovó region, and Fazenda Nova União, (MFV, SDN), and, extending the species' range further south from Pirapora (Kirwan *et al.* 2001), just west of Várzea da Palma on 10 January 2003 (GMK).

CHOTOY SPINETAIL *Schoeniophylax phryganophilus*
This relatively common and widespread species of light woodland and scrubland of south-central South America has an isolated population (*petersi*) in the middle reaches of the São Francisco valley. Pinto (1978) only mentioned it for Pirapora, in Minas Gerais, and Barra in Bahia. Sick (1997), probably assuming a continuous distribution, considered it to occur in the São Francisco Valley of interior Bahia and Minas Gerais. We have recorded this taxon at a number of localities in the study region, and though they are all broadly within its known range, very little has been published concerning this form's distribution. Specific Minas Gerais localities from the literature, other than Pirapora (Pinto 1978, Kirwan *et al.* 2001) are near Itacarambi (Kirwan *et al.* 2001), and south of Januária (Willis & Oniki 1991). We have also recorded the species *c.*10 km north of Januária, on 14 January 2003, and between Várzea da Palma and Lassance, on 10 January 2003, when a pair was found nest-building, taking material from a disused Common (Rufous-fronted) Thornbird *Phacellodomus rufifrons* nest. This would appear to be the southernmost record for *petersi*. In addition, a female specimen (DZUFMG 2489) was taken by G. T. Mattos at Mocambinho on 23 November 1996, and MFV has collected others on the western slope of the Serra do Espinhaço in recent years. The species is almost certainly frequent in woodland edge, degraded brush and agricultural land throughout north-central and extreme north-east Minas Gerais. The validity of *petersi* is perhaps questionable (e.g. Vaurie 1980, Brammer 2002, MFV pers. obs.), although a thorough analysis, including vocalisations, is still lacking.

RED-SHOULDERED SPINETAIL *Gyalophylax hellmayri*
Observed at Japoré, on 6 July 2002 (SDN), where one vocalised close to the ground in secondary low caatinga. This is only the third published state locality for *G. hellmayri*, which is considered globally Near Threatened (BirdLife International 2000).

GREATER WAGTAIL-TYRANT *Stigmatura budytoides*
The form *S. b. gracilis* appeared to be rather common in scrub on the left bank of the rio São Francisco, 15 km south of Januária, on 10 February 2002 (DB, AG, GMK, JM; tape-recorded) and 13 January 2003 (GMK). The species was first reported for Minas Gerais by Kirwan *et al.* (2001) from Mocambinho, where further observations by DB, AG, JM and ourselves have demonstrated it to be common. The new locality extends its range further south by *c.*70 km. We will comment elsewhere on the taxonomy of this genus.

MINAS GERAIS TYRANNULET *Phylloscartes roquettei*
Raposo *et al.* (2002) presented details of observations from two localities in the rio São Francisco Valley. At one of these, the Córrego dos Ovos, GMK, RS *et al.* subsequently discovered a pair (the subject of comparatively regular observation in recent years) nest-building on 1–2 October 2002. The nest was located *c.*10 m above

ground in a tree flanking the córrego (stream) and situated within 1 m of a termitarium suspended close to the main trunk. The nest was broadly globular in shape, slightly distended top to bottom (as is typical among several genera of tyrannid flycatchers) with a short side entrance tube, and was constructed of fine rootlets, dead twigs, lichens, grassy material and a small number of dead leaves, and without an inner chamber at this stage (visible because the nest was sufficiently 'transparent'). It was attached to a small branch, almost at its extreme tip, and its approximate dimensions were 10 cm in height and 6–7 cm across. The pair was actively collecting nest material, usually very close to or from the ground, when they appeared almost fearless and would perch within very close proximity of the observers (photographed; see Fig. 2). GMK (together with MAE, GMF *et al.*) returned to the area on 21–22 October 2002, by which time the nest had apparently been completed (Fig. 3). Only one individual was seen throughout the 2–3-hour observation period, and the other was presumed to be sitting. A further visit to the area, on 11 January 2003, revealed no sign of the pair, despite use of playback (they are usually exceptionally responsive) or even the nest. These data are the first available concerning this species' breeding biology. Elsewhere in January 2003, JMB, GMK, IR and HS conducted further playback surveys for the species at several apparently suitable localities in the general region, at Fazenda Jatobá da Mata, along the road through the Companhia Florestal, south of Pirapora, along the road to Serra do Boqueirão and near Jequitaí, near Brejo do Amparo, along the São Francisco river south of Januária, and north of Januária, also without success. Subsequently, however, it has been found in the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park, by Dante Buzzetti (see del Hoyo *et al.* in press). We can only assume that *P. roquet-*

Figure 2. Minas Gerais Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes roquettei*, south of Pirapora, Minas Gerais (Rick Schaefer)

Figure 3. Nest of Minas Gerais Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes roquettei*, south of Pirapora, Minas Gerais (Louise Augustine)

tei is genuinely rather uncommon within its apparently limited range, presumably to large extent due to the ongoing logging of tall emergent trees in this area of Brazil.

STRIPE-NECKED TODY-TYRANT *Hemitriccus striaticollis*
Regularly observed in small numbers 12 km south of Pirapora in degraded gallery forest fringing the rio das Velhas (GMK *et al.*; Kirwan *et al.* 2001). One was observed in second growth of gallery forest at the left margin of the rio São Francisco on 27 April 2002, near Riacho da Cruz village. It vocalised while foraging in the understorey (MFV, SDN). Another was tape-recorded in riverine scrub along the road to Mocambinho, on the right bank of the rio São Francisco, on 12 January 2003 (JMB), and two pairs were tape-recorded in similar habitat, but on the left bank of this river, *c.*15 km south of Januária, on 13 January 2003 (JMB, IR). These individuals moved within the tangled understorey of riverine woodland. This is a little-known species in Minas Gerais and the records south of Pirapora appear to represent the southernmost state locality for the species (see map in Ridgely & Tudor 1994). Although the species was known from this area, its regional distribution is poorly documented, and our records serve to underscore the fact that it is relatively widespread, where suitable habitat exists.

CAATINGA BLACK-TYRANT *Knipolegus franciscanus*
MFV and SDN observed *K. franciscanus* at Parque Nacional Cavernas do Peruaçu, on 30–31 May and 24–25 August 2002, confirming previous observations by Andrade (1990). A single male was observed on both occasions, and was photographed. It perched close to an arboreal caatinga edge near a limestone outcrop. On 14 January 2003, GMK, JMB and IR observed a lone male in low-stature dry forest atop a relatively low rocky outcrop (*lajeiro*) between Riacho da Cruz and Levinópolis, on the left bank of the São Francisco. This was the only individual found between Pirapora and Itacarambi in four days of searching throughout the area. Notably, it was discovered near human habitation. As is usual in our experience of this form, it behaved rather unobtrusively, unlike many others within the genus *Knipolegus*, perching quietly and occasionally very low within the low crowns of the open forest, and only intermittently conducting short, low foraging sallies. Sometimes perched on more exposed situations such as a dead cactus, hanging branches or even on top of rocks. Sally flights were normally within the crown of small trees and also towards the ground. It delivered short, nervous tail flicks. We believe that this species' rather unobtrusive behaviour renders it difficult to find in the taller, more densely vegetated sandstone outcrops that abound in the region. It is therefore probably commoner in the area than our records suggest, although the species clearly has a rather restricted range and specific habitat requirements, and is evidently not common. One exception to this is an area known as Curral de Pedras (17°06'S, 44°35'W), where as many 50 individuals were seen in just one hour, on 22 November 1995 (MAR). Three males and a female were

collected and are housed at the Museu Nacional do Rio de Janeiro (MNRJ 42730/31/32/33). Lima (1999) listed only five localities (including Jequitaí) in Minas Gerais for this highly localised and only recently recognised species (Silva & Oren 1992).

LONG-BILLED WREN *Thryothorus longirostris*
One (tape-recorded and photographed) responded weakly and with an unfamiliar vocalisation to playback of the voice of *T. l. bahiae*, at Mocambinho, on 9 February 2002 (DB, AG, GMK, JM) and several of this form were found in caatinga at Parque Nacional Cavernas do Peruaçu, on 30–31 May 2002 (MFV, SDN) and 13 January 2003 (JMB, IR, HS; when tape-recorded). MFV and SDN also found the species on the right bank of the São Francisco, in the Poço da Vovó region, on 7 July 2002. In addition, two specimen records are available for the state, both held at DZUFMG and taken at Mocambinho: DZUFMG 2572 (male) taken on 4 April 1997 by M. R. Bornschein, B. L. Reinert and M. M. Coelho, and DZUFMG 2529 (female) taken on 20 May 1997 by G. T. Mattos. These specimens were compared to the nominate race and appear to belong to *T. l. bahiae*. They also appear to be the first state records, but are unsurprising given the discovery of several other caatinga species from further north in this area of Minas Gerais in recent years. Indeed, MFV and SDN have found this form to be very common in the caatinga of much of northern Minas Gerais, including away from the São Francisco Valley. Specimens have been deposited at DZUFMG. Brewer & MacKay (2002) considered the range of *T. l. bahiae* to encompass Ceará and eastern Piauí south to northern Bahia and Alagoas. We will comment elsewhere on the taxonomy of this species.

SCARLET-THROATED TANAGER *Compsothraupis loricata*
Found at two new localities in January 2003 (GMK, JMB, IR), at Rio Lavado and along the road through the Companhia Florestal, up to 75 km south of Pirapora, which is the southernmost locality for this Brazilian endemic mentioned by Sick (1997). It was also recorded at a number of sites around Pirapora and further north. The species seems relatively abundant in the southernmost edge of its range, and is normally encountered in flocks of 5–15 individuals (possibly involving family groups), mostly in gallery woodlands and taller wooded areas.

GREY-HEADED TANAGER *Eucometis penicillata*
One observed at close quarters in patchy forest bordering the left bank of the rio São Francisco, 10 km south of Januária, on 10 February 2002 (DB, AG, GMK, JM). This widespread species reaches its farthest south and east in Goiás, and western São Paulo and Minas Gerais states (Sick 1997). Our record extends its range to north-central Minas Gerais, a distance of *c.*170 km from one of the closest specific localities that we can locate, Parque Nacional de Brasília (Forrester 1993).

RUSTY-COLLARED SEEDEATER *Sporophila collaris*

Three males were present at the scrubby edges of an extensive marsh beside the road between Jequitaí and the Serra do Boqueirão, on 11 January 2003 (GMK, JMB, IR, HS). They were observed feeding in the open rush-beds fringing the waterbody, and flying back and forth between there and scrubby marsh away from the open waterside. No female-plumaged individuals were found. In the field these birds appeared uniform black from the crown, forehead and cheeks to the lower mantle, with an obvious pale grey rump, the tail and wings were black, with a white speculum, and a white bar on the median wing-coverts. The white throat extended as a half-collar below the cheeks and onto the ear-coverts, but did not meet on the hindneck. There was a broad black pectoral band and otherwise white underparts. Previously, MAR had collected a male probably at the same marsh as the observations above, in 1995 (MNRJ 42726), and a second specimen (MNRJ 28817) from Conceição da Aparecida, south of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, with slightly more ochre suffusion on the belly, was found among the *S. americana* specimens in that institution. These specimens are very different to all other *S. collaris* examined by us in MNRJ but they do recall one, of uncertain locality in Brazil, in the Natural History Museum (Tring, accession number 85.2.10.132). They are, in many respects, closer to *S. americana* than to other *S. collaris* due to the predominantly black-and-white plumage, partial nuchal collar, greyer rump and black pectoral band, although the last was broader than in typical *americana* and unbroken, and there was no trace of a greater covert bar. JMB considered that the bill morphology of these Minas Gerais specimens was strikingly similar to that of specimens of *S. americana* from northern Amazonia housed at MNRJ, and quite different from *S. collaris* specimens in the same institution. Sharing morphological and plumage characters with both *S. americana* and *S. collaris*, we feel unsure as to the taxonomic identity of this population. This also opens questions concerning previous southern records of *S. americana* (e.g. Stuart 2000). Subspecies limits within *S. collaris* are currently under review by MAR, as more than one species may be involved.

SÃO FRANCISCO SPARROW *Arremon franciscanus*

Our observations in the newly declared Parque Nacional Cavernas do Peruaçu indicate this recently described and globally Near-Threatened species (BirdLife International 2000) to be rather common there. We have also discovered it in the Poço da Vovó region, on 7 July 2002 (MFV, SDN) and in scrubby, heavily degraded roadside caatinga just north of Montalvânia, on 8 February 2002 (DB, AG, GMK, JM). An additional specimen (the sixth) to those mentioned by Raposo (1997) is available: a male taken at Mocambinho by G. T. Mattos on 19 May 1997 (DZUFMG 2480). Further south, e.g. around Pirapora, the species appears to be replaced by Saffron-billed Sparrow *A. flavirostris*, which until recently was known from rather few localities in the state (Raposo 1997) principally in the west (e.g. Sick 1997, Silveira 1998, Marini 2001) but also to the centre, around Belo Horizonte (Melo-

Júnior *et al.* 2001, Vasconcelos & Melo-Júnior 2001; GMK pers. obs.), and south (Vasconcelos *et al.* 2002). Thus far, *A. franciscanus* appears to be known from just eight, perhaps nine localities (Raposo 1997, Parrini *et al.* 1999, Kirwan *et al.* 2001, D'Angelo Neto & Vasconcelos unpubl.), though we suspect that it is reasonably common in suitable habitat within its comparatively small range. A record of *A. flavirostris* from Manga (Mattos *et al.* 1991) may well be in error, as *A. franciscanus* was undescribed at that time, and the latter seems much more likely to occur at this site (J. F. Pacheco *in litt.* 2003).

FORBES'S BLACKBIRD *Curaeus forbesi*

It appears worthy of remark that we have searched for this globally threatened species at several localities in the region, without success, notably at the sugarcane fields and marshy areas fringed by woodlands at Brejo do Amparo (JMB, GMK, IR), where probably observed in 1977 by Willis & Oniki (1991) and south of Pirapora, at the rio das Velhas, where found by E. Willis and H. Remold in 1999 (BirdLife International 2000). The habitat at the former is similar to that where the species is known from in Pernambuco (JMB, IR pers. obs, L. A. P. Gonzaga and W. Silva pers. comm.).

Acknowledgements

Among others, the following observers, indicated by their initials in the text, joined GMK and JMB in recent field trips to the middle reaches of the rio São Francisco Valley: Dave Beadle (DB), Mark Elwonger (MAE), Mike Flieg (GMF), Arthur Grosset (AG), Jeremy Minns (JM), Rick Schaefer (RS) and Hadoram Shirihai (HS). GMK is grateful to Robert Prŷs-Jones and Mark Adams at the Natural History Museum (Tring) for access to specimen material at that institution. J. A. Silva kindly prepared the map. Chris Feare, the editor, and Fernando Pacheco, as referee, made several comments which improved the manuscript.

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