

A first documented Brazilian record of Least Seedsnipe *Thinocorus rumicivorus* Eschscholtz, 1829 (Thinocoridae)

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ABSTRACT: Herein we present the first documented record of the Least Seedsnipe *Thinocorus rumicivorus* (Eschscholtz, 1829) for Brazil. On the 21 April 2012 a juvenile *T. rumicivorus* was photographed and sound-recorded by birdwatchers on the beach at Ubatumirim in the municipality of Ubatuba, on the northern São Paulo state coast. This is the first documented record of any seedsnipe (Thinocoridae) for Brazil. Its behaviour and the circumstances and potential drivers of its vagrancy are discussed.

KEY-WORDS: birdwatching; *Eragrostis*; *Thinocorus*; vagrancy.

At mid-morning on 21 April 2012, F. C., J. C. and A. R. F. were birdwatching on the beach at Ubatumirim (23°19'53.53"S; 44°54'34.89"W) in the municipality of Ubatuba, in northern São Paulo state, Brazil, when they encountered an unusual bird with which they were not familiar and could not identify. They documented the occurrence with a series of digital images and sound-recordings. On returning home, F. C. posted these on a social networking site and solicited help with the identification from A. C. L.; who along with Juan Mazar Barnett immediately identified the bird as a juvenile Least Seedsnipe *Thinocorus rumicivorus*. The bird remained at the same site for five days, remaining until the 26 April. The individual (Figure 1a) was very tame and did not interact with any other bird species on site, occasionally drinking from nearby small pools (Figure 1b), and spending its entire stay along a straight path which gave access to the beach for local people (Figures 1c and 1d). It foraged on the seeds of the non-native Elastic Grass *Eragrostis tenuifolia* (Poaceae, Chloridoideae) in addition to other unidentified food items picked up from the ground. The bird was extremely tame and when approached closely it would prefer to run away and hide between grass tussocks rather than flying (a behaviour that reflects its Portuguese name 'agachadeira-mirim';

Figure 1a). The bird only flew on rare occasions when totally encircled by the watching observers or when approached rapidly by locals on foot or on bicycles. On flushing, the species would typically call (see archived record: Pereira 2012). In the middle of the day the bird would shelter in the shade of the tussocks with beak and wings open, apparently suffering from the effects of heat stress. This species has not previously been documented drinking in the wild, as it is normally thought to obtain all its dietary moisture through eating succulent plants (Fjeldsá 1996).

Thinocoridae is an exclusively South American family, composed of four species in two genera (*Attagis gayi*, *A. malouinus*, *Thinocorus orbignyianus* and *T. rumicivorus*), which are principally distributed in Andean and cold temperate environments in the Andes and Patagonia (Fjeldsá 1996). *Thinocorus rumicivorus* is the smallest species in the family and is composed of four subspecies: *T. r. pallidus* found in the lowlands of southwestern Ecuador and northwestern Peru; *T. r. cuneicauda* of the Peruvian desert; *T. r. bolivianus* of the Altiplano region extending from the extreme south of Peru through northern Chile and western Bolivia to northwestern Argentina; and finally *T. r. rumicivorus* of the Patagonian steppe south to northern Tierra del Fuego, migrating to central Chile

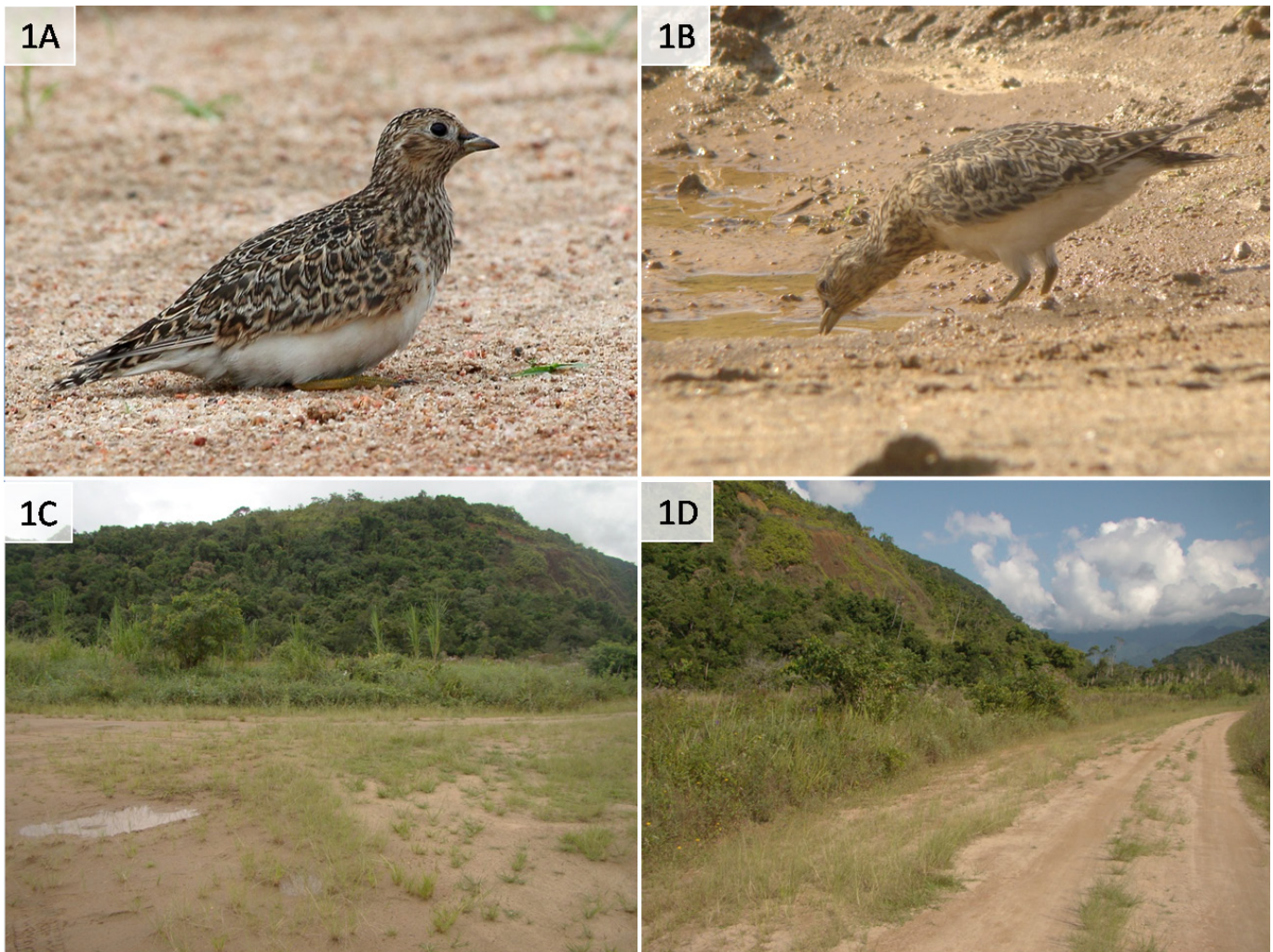


FIGURE 1. a): juvenile Least Seedsnipe *Thinocorus rumicivorus* (photo by J. C.); 1b): *Thinocorus rumicivorus* drinking rainwater from a puddle (photo by M. A. C.); 1c and 1d): images depicting the habitat frequented by the individual (photos by M. A. C.).

and the plains of northeastern Argentina and Uruguay. The species typically occupies sandy semi-desert habitats with a sparse cover of creeping plants and shrubs, with many succulents. It may also use lightly cultivated areas, feeding on roads and shrubby pastures close to flooded plains, especially in areas dominated by *Parastrephia* sp. (Fjeldså 1996, Laredo 1996, Aramburú *et al.* 2007). Its diet consists primarily of seeds and foliage (Fjeldså 1996, Aramburú *et al.* 2007, Korzun *et al.* 2009).

In Brazil the species has been reported on one previous occasion; from the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in the municipality of Tavares at the Parque Nacional da Lagoa do Peixe, on 26 April 1990 by Antas (1990), as follows:

“*Thinocorus rumicivorus* – Uma ave em plumagem juvenil encontrada nos campos úmidos entre a formação de dunas e a lagoa a 26 de abril de 1990. Diagnosticada pelo seu característico deslocamento no solo e forma de corpo e bico inconfundíveis. A ausência do negro no centro do pescoço denunciou a idade da ave. Essa ave, componente de uma família especial de Charadriiformes,

tem distribuição predominantemente andina, ocorrendo também na Patagônia argentina tanto em reprodução, como invernando. No inverno austral alcança rotineiramente as costas uruguaias. Esse é, entretanto, o primeiro registro da espécie e da família no país.”

As this record did not include any supporting vouchers (images, recordings or a specimen) it could not be accepted onto the primary list of Brazilian birds by the Comitê Brasileiro de Registros Ornitológicos (CBRO) along with 30 other species for which documentation is not available (CBRO 2011). Reasons for this CBRO decision were outlined in the journal “Nattereria” (CBRO 2000). As such, this record of a multi-observed, photographed and sound-recorded individual should be sufficient proof to allow this species to be promoted to the primary list by the CBRO.

Despite being one of the commonest bird species of southern Patagonia, *Thinocorus rumicivorus* has been the subject of few field studies and its natural history is poorly known (Fjeldså 1996, Laredo 1996, Aramburú *et al.* 2007, Korzun *et al.* 2009). We consider it most

likely that this individual pertains to the subspecies *T. r. rumicivorus*, since individuals of this taxon are migratory, travelling north to Uruguay to escape the austral winter (Fjeldså 1996). Rates of long-range vagrancy are typically far higher in longer-distance migrants than shorter-distance migrants or resident species (McLaren *et al.* 2006). The overlapping of the two Brazilian records within a few days of each other at the onset of the austral autumn is probably more than coincidental, and both events may have been related to the presence of exceptional cold weather which may have stimulated the individual to migrate farther north than normal. The weather at the time of the discovery was calm, overcast, 20.0 °C, 88% relative humidity and 1017 hPa, but there had been a particularly strong cold front over southern South America in the preceding week. Vagrancy in the species has previously been reported with an adult male photographed on the South Shetland Islands, Antarctica on 1 December 1996 (Favero & Silva 1998). It is also possible, that this individual, a juvenile on its first migration, may have committed a navigation error or failed to 'turn off' the endogenous urge ('zugunruhe') to continue migrating (cf. Lees & Gilroy 2009).

The diet of the family is poorly known, although the beak morphology is suitable for removing both seeds and parts of the plant itself (Korzun *et al.* 2009) and this species consumes more seeds than other members of the family, which apparently prefer shoots (Fjeldså 1996). *Thinocorus rumicivorus* has not previously been reported as consuming seeds of *Eragrostis* (cf. Aramburú *et al.* 2007) although Aramburú *et al.* (2007) found that members of the family Poaceae may make up around 40% of the species' diet. *Eragrostis tenuifolia* is native to south-east Asia and the Afrotropics but has been widely introduced elsewhere in the world (Jung *et al.* 2008). In Brazil it has been reported from the states of Goiás, Minas Gerais, São Paulo, and Rio Grande do Sul (Boechat & Longhi-Wagner 2000). Within its regular range, *T. rumicivorus* has been viewed as a potential crop pest, but has been shown to be beneficial to farmers as the species actually consumes more weed species and may in fact be providing an ecosystem service (Aramburú *et al.* 2007). For example, in Buenos Aires the species principally consumed the species *Polygonum aviculare*, a pest of wheat (*Triticum* sp.), from within crops of "couza" (*Brassica napus*) (Aramburú *et al.* 2007).

This Brazilian 'first' also illustrates the growing trend for notable ornithological records to be made by amateur ornithologists, a situation fostered by the growth of the Wikiaves website (www.wikiaves.com.br) which has acted as a focal point in nurturing the community of domestic amateur ornithologists. This vagrant was also visited ('twitched') by many observers on subsequent days, a regular occurrence for a vagrant sighting in Europe

or North America, but perhaps the first instance of its kind in Brazil, see Booth *et al.* (2011) for a review of the potential conservation benefits of this activity.

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