

## New records of the Sickie-winged Nightjar, *Eleothreptus anomalus* (Caprimulgidae), from a Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil wetland

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Recebido em 16 de janeiro de 2002; aceito em 14 de maio de 2002.

**RESUMO.** Novos registros do curiango-do-banhado *Eleothreptus anomalus* (Caprimulgidae) em uma área de banhado no Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil. Indivíduos de *E. anomalus* foram observados em três ocasiões em uma área de banhado em Viamão, região metropolitana de Porto Alegre. Observações próprias e compiladas sobre seu hábitat divergem das evidências de alguns autores atuais de que essa espécie não está associada a áreas úmidas, mas sim que a mesma apresenta plasticidade quanto a esse fator. Seu comportamento de vôo apresentou semelhanças às descrições anteriores e duas vocalizações distintas foram gravadas. A presente nota representa o primeiro registro documentado de *E. anomalus* no Rio Grande do Sul. Apesar do crescente número de registros brasileiros de *E. anomalus* nos últimos anos, ainda não há um conhecimento populacional e comportamental satisfatório sobre a espécie, sugerindo-se a sua permanência como espécie ameaçada de extinção tanto da fauna brasileira como da gaúcha.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Eleothreptus anomalus*, áreas úmidas, Rio Grande do Sul, conservação.

**KEY WORDS:** *Eleothreptus anomalus*, Sickie-winged Nightjar, wetlands, Rio Grande do Sul, conservation.

The Sickie-winged Nightjar, *Eleothreptus anomalus*, is a species whose geographical range extends through eastern Paraguay, northern Argentina, and from central-western and eastern to southern Brazil (Federal District and States of Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul). Previously considered globally endangered (Collar *et al.* 1992) today it is classified as near threatened (Birdlife International 2000) in its whole range and as endangered both in Rio Grande do Sul (Marques *et al.* 2002) as well as throughout Brazil (Bernardes *et al.* 1990).

During an ornithological survey in the “Banhado dos Pachecos” wetland (municipality of Viamão, near Porto Alegre), I observed the Sickie-winged Nightjar on three occasions. All records were obtained at the same site (30°05’S, 56°50’W at 20 m above sea level) in two distinct environments: 1) an approximately 600 m wide strip of peaty wetland composed of tall tufts of herbaceous vegetation whose typical species are *Blechnum imperiale*, *Blechnum serrulatum*, *Dryopteris* spp (ferns), *Panicum aristellum* (Poaceae), *Sphagnum* spp.(moss), *Eryngium pandanifolium* (Apiaceae), and *Eriocaulon kunthii* (Eriocaulaceae), and 2) a contiguous grassland strip about 50 m wide formed by grasses (overgrazed by cattle) no taller than 10 cm. This is bordered by a narrow restinga woodland strip.

On September 27, 2000 at 05:25 h (Brazilian Summer Time – BST), I observed six distinctly isolated individuals

in the grassland. I recorded two distinct voices with a Marantz PMD 430 tape recorder and a Sennheiser K6-C microphone (figures 1 and 2) emitted by two well-separated individuals. The same day at 19:06 h (BST) vocalizations of the species began from the grassland. The voices correspond to those described by Kirwan *et al.* (1999): a “chirrup” that resembles the sound of a cricket, emitted both from the ground and in flight at intervals of approximately 12 seconds (figure 1) and a “tik” emitted by an individual perched on the ground (figure 2).

On November 21, 2000 at 20:30 h (BST) I was able to observe three well-separated individuals in the wetland, one presumably a male, easily distinguishable from two presumed females by its white wing tips. The three individuals executed movements that correspond to those described by Gjai (1950): rapid flight with a short glide after every wing beat, alternating with abrupt maneuvers up or down at an angle of about 90° that also resemble the “hovering in the air and falling as if injured” described by Pereyra (1939), and associated by him with the breeding season. The flight was low, never exceeding three meters above ground, and was repeated several times.

Once more the observed individuals emitted the two sounds described above, but at 20:44 h (BST) they stopped and were not seen after this time. The next day the vocalization began at the same site at 20:26 h (BST) and I observed two well-separated individuals. One, a male, was caught in a 36 mm mist net. Its skin was deposited in the

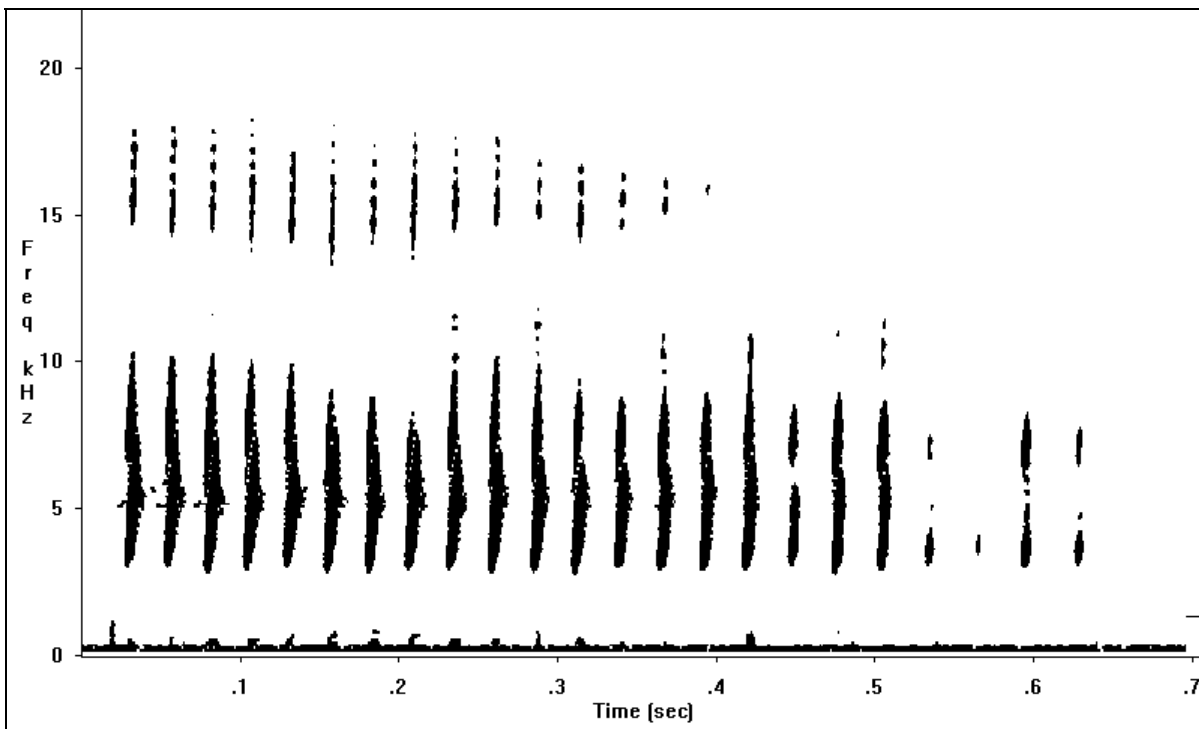


Figure 1. Song of the Sickie-winged Nightjar, *Eleothreptus anomalus*, recorded at September 27, 2000, 5:25 h (BST). Spectrogram from Syrinx Version 2.1c, 1999 software.

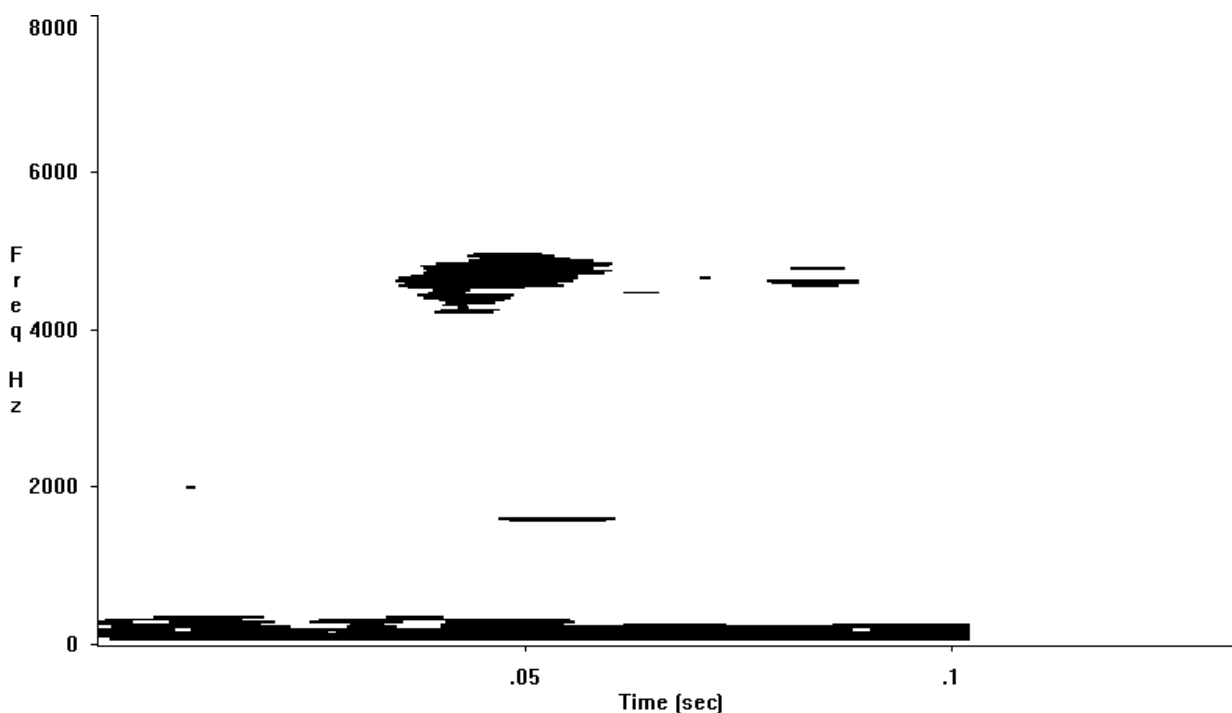


Figure 2. Call (?) of Sickie-winged Nightjar, *Eleothreptus anomalus*, recorded at September 27, 2000, 5:25 h (BST). Spectrogram from Syrinx Version 2.1c, 1999 software.

ornithological collection of the Museum of Natural Sciences of the Zoobotanical Foundation of Rio Grande do Sul (MCN-2720). These birds made the same movements and vocalizations as the previous day. At 20:40 h (BST) the sounds stopped but one individual was still seen at 20:43 h (BST).

During these two days I searched unsuccessfully for the diurnal refuge of this species in the restinga woodland strip.

On January 21, 2001, I returned to the same site with colleague André Barcellos-Silveira, who joined in the fieldwork. Between 17:30 and 19:30 h (BST) we walked

through the wetland strip trying to find a female perched on macrophytes. At our approach a bird effected a short flight of approximately 10 m, intermingling a glide after each wing beat, but then perched again on macrophytes. As we went toward it the bird repeated the same movements in response to our approach.

At 20:30 h (BST) we watched two presumed females arrive from the marsh and make low flights over grassland but without the abrupt maneuvers described above. Simultaneously these individuals emitted just the “chirrup”, at more widely-spaced intervals than previously, and for a shorter period, stopping around 20:40 h (BST). Then with a spotlight we drove an automobile along the grassland strip that borders the marsh for about 500 m but failed to find the nightjars either in the grassland or the marsh.

At no time did I ever heard the soft “chip, tchup” or “tchut” repeated at a rate of about eight notes per second for two or three minutes described by Straneck and Viñas (1994) and Cleere and Nurney (1998); nor the mechanical sounds originating from wing movement (Straneck and Viñas 1994); nor the nasal vocalization “gzeéé, gzeéé” emitted by females (Straneck and Viñas 1994).

Straube (1990) stated that the scarce representation of this species in museums doesn't permit conclusions about its habitat preferences, and commented on the occurrence of the Sickle-winged Nightjar in two flood plains of the state of Paraná. Pearman and Abadie (1995) and Bornschein *et al.* (1996) suggested that the preferential habitat for *E. anomalus* is riparian and “monte” forests. Cleere and Nurney (1998), and Kirwan *et al.* (1999) asserted that the Sickle-winged Nightjar has plasticity in the selection of its habitat.

These new records bring up again the discussion about habitat preferences of the Sickle-winged Nightjar. I found four as yet unpublished records for this species: 1) one specimen observed on October 20, 1978 by M. de la Peña (*in litt.* 2000) among “pajonales de paja brava” (*Panicum prionitis*) in Departamento Garay, Santa Fé, Argentina; 2) one specimen among “pajonales” and shrubs near water on January 27, 1987 observed by M. de la Peña (*in litt.* 2000) in Arroyo Cululú, Departamento Las Colonias, Santa Fé, Argentina; 3) four specimens in alternating flooded and dry grasslands with small patches of *Geoffroea decorticans* (Miatello *et al.* 1994, de la Peña *in litt.* 2000); 4) one specimen collected by Ericson (1998) in April, 1998 in a marsh with macrophytes in a landscape of wet grasslands, extensive marshes, and forested islands in “Refugio de Vida Silvestre Yabebiry”, southern Paraguay.

I agree that the Sickle-winged Nightjar has plasticity in selection of its habitat, which can be marshes (present note), wet grasslands (Kirwan *et al.* 1999), or even forests (Pearman and Abadie 1995).

I agree with the statement of Straneck and Viñas (1994) that the scarcity of data about the Sickle-winged Nightjar is due to environmental factors and to its scanty and sporadic sound manifestations, and with Chebez (1994) who considered the species more under-observed than scarce. Among all my observations of the Sickle-winged Nightjar cited in this note, only rarely did any exceed 30 minutes. In addition, its resting site was in a habitat so difficult of access that it had a great cryptic capacity. Knowledge of its vocalizations and of its habitat preferences was essential to finding and identifying it in the field.

There is three earlier records of the Sickle-winged Nightjar from Rio Grande do Sul: (Ihering and Ihering 1907, Belton 1984, 1994, Lowen 1999). 1) Ihering and Ihering (1907) mentioned one specimen collected and deposited in the former “Museu Paulista”, now the “Museu de Zoologia da USP”. Straube (1990) inspected 10 specimens in this museum, nine being from São Paulo and one from Paraná, but didn't find any from Rio Grande do Sul. Bencke (2001) observed that there is an old specimen, supposedly from Rio Grande do Sul in the “Museu Carlos Ritter, UFPEL” that might be the specimen mentioned by Ihering and Ihering (1907). 2) Lowen (1999), based on a record from the British Museum of Natural History's egg collection, mentioned two eggs collected by H. A. Schwarz from a nest in an indeterminate locality in Rio Grande do Sul on November 28, 1925, which lamentably were broken during the Museum's move from London to Tring. Lowen (1999) didn't mention the Ihering and Ihering (1907) record and considers the no longer existing egg specimens of H. A. Schwarz as being, chronologically, the first record of *E. anomalus* from Rio Grande do Sul. Lack of information about the collecting locality and about the collector makes this an untrustworthy record. 3) Belton (1984, 1994) mentioned a mangled specimen found by H. Sick in 1971. Belton (*in litt.*) says he and Sick were traveling together when they saw the remains of a bird on the road alongside a marsh, with only one wing or a little more to be rescued. This was taken to Rio de Janeiro by Sick, who later advised him of the identification. Bencke (2001) affirms that there is no indication in the literature that this specimen has been preserved. Bencke's conclusion is supported by two other facts: Straube (1990) inspected the Museu Nacional's collection where Sick always deposited his bird skins but found no specimen of *E. anomalus* from Rio Grande do Sul; and J. F. Pacheco (*in litt.*) states he never found Sick's specimen in the nine years he worked in the Museu Nacional. I believe the specimen mentioned for Pantano Grande (Belton 1984, 1994) was really a Sickle-winged Nightjar, but taking into account that neither this nor the other two former records (Ihering and Ihering 1907, Lowen 1999) are now supported by specimens, the present note represents the first documented record of *E. anomalus* in Rio Grande do Sul.

Although records of the Sickie-winged Nightjar have increased in recent years, there is not enough behavioral or population data (such as breeding or foraging habitats and population size) to provide satisfactory information about the species. This suggests that the species' conservation status in Brazil and Rio Grande do Sul should remain as "endangered".

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To William Belton and Fernando C. Straube for suggestions and reviewing the manuscript; to Martin de la Peña for unpublished information and help with some citations; to Glayson A. Bencke for suggestions and stimulating me to publish this note; to José F. Pacheco for information and discussion about this notes; to André Barcellos-Silveira for companionship in some of my field work; to Cristian M. Joenck for preparing the collected specimen; to the Zoobotanical Foundation of Rio Grande do Sul for support; and to members of the "Filhos de Sepé" settlement for collaboration and assistance during my stay in the study area.

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