

An enigmatic species (mostly found in inundation zones, but twice taken on ships at sea), this tiny marsh-haunting bird has been recorded once or a few times from Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina, with the most recent information tending to suggest that it may be much more under-recorded than genuinely rare.

DISTRIBUTION The Speckled Crane (see Remarks 1) has been found over a massive range in South America, but extremely sparsely, with only one or a few records per country. There is a possible record from the Falkland Islands/Islas Malvinas (see Remarks 2).

Colombia The only record is of one bird collected east of the Andes on the margins of the río Guayabero, 2°36'N 72°47'W, 400 m, in southern Meta department at the southern base of the Serranía de la Macarena, 18 March 1959 (Olivares 1959, Meyer de Schauensee 1962, Hilty and Brown 1986; coordinates from Paynter and Traylor 1981; see Remarks 3).

Venezuela There are two records: a female from Mérida, June 1914 or 1916 (Phelps and Phelps 1961, Meyer de Schauensee 1962); and two females from Aparición, 9°24'N 69°23'W, Portuguesa state, August "1960" (Meyer de Schauensee 1962; coordinates from Paynter 1982; see Remarks 4).

Guyana The only record is from the Abary River, 6°33'N 57°44'W, September 1907 (Meyer de Schauensee 1962; coordinates from Stephens and Traylor 1985).

Brazil Records are from four localities: (*São Paulo*) in the east of the state, at (north to south) Pindamonhangaba (Pinto 1964, 1978); Taubaté, 500 m, May 1976, August 1982, April 1984 and apparently throughout each year (Teixeira and Puga 1984; specimen in MNRJ); Ipiranga (a suburb of São Paulo city), September 1924 (Pinto 1938, Meyer de Schauensee 1962); (*Rio Grande do Sul*) Hamburgo Velho (now a suburb of Novo Hamburgo), 1928 (Meyer de Schauensee 1962, Belton 1984-1985).

Paraguay There are three records: a male was collected at Laguna General Díaz, 22°18'S 59°01'W, Presidente Hayes department, in June 1945 (Blake 1977; specimen in FMNH; coordinates from Paynter 1989); a female was collected 7 km east of Horqueta, Concepción department, in December 1937 (Brodkorb 1938, Meyer de Schauensee 1962); and Puerto Bertoni, Alto Paraná department, is indicated without further details by Bertoni (1939) and Podtiaguin (1941-1945).

Uruguay There are five records: a specimen was collected at Sarandí, Durazno department, in April 1918 (Tremoleras 1920, Cuello and Gerzenstein 1962; see Remarks 5); a specimen (in MACN) was collected at an unspecified locality in Durazno in June 1915; a brood of three was found (one being captured alive) on a farm near Juan Lacaze, Colonia department, in December 1985 (Arballo 1990); one was seen in Parque Lecoqc (*sic*), Montevideo department, in March 1985 (Arballo 1990); and one flew aboard a ship off Cabo Santa María, Rocha department, in around November or December 1875 (*Proc. Zool. Soc. London* 1876: 255, Meyer de Schauensee 1962; see Remarks 6). The species has also been reported, without supporting evidence, from Bañados del Este (*World Birdwatch* 12,1-2 [1990]: 4).

Argentina There are at least 10 records, here listed from north to south: Esteros de Iberá 5 km west of Santo Tomé, Corrientes, May 1991 (F. R. Lambert verbally 1992); Córdoba province, before 1890 (Stempelmann and Schulz 1890, Meyer de Schauensee 1962), and the Bañados del río Dulce, Córdoba, where a bird was seen in November 1973 (Nores and Yzurieta 1975, Nores *et al.* 1983; hence in Scott and Carbonell 1986), and where it is speculated very probably to breed (Nores and Yzurieta 1980); Otamendi Strict Nature Reserve, río Luján marshes, north-west of the capital, Buenos Aires province, October 1991 (B. M. López Lanús *per* M. Pearman and J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1992); "Buenos Aires", September 1904 (Pinto 1938); Isla Paulino, near Berisso, south of Buenos Aires city, 1980s (F. Moschione *per* M. Pearman

in litt. 1992); Punta Lara (34°49'S 57°59'W in Paynter 1985) in Buenos Aires province, January 1962 (female in IML); San Miguel del Monte in Buenos Aires province, March 1984 (male in MACN; also Navas 1991), this bird being caught by hand by a tractor driver in a ploughed field (J. R. Mata and J. D. Córdoba *per* J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1992); on board the *Beagle* in the río de la Plata, 1831 (Gould 1841); and "Patagonia", probably near Carmen de Patagones near the río Negro estuary, 1829, in either Río Negro or Buenos Aires province (Hellmayr and Conover 1942, Meyer de Schauensee 1962, Navas 1991). J. C. Chebez (*in litt.* 1986) referred to the species's probable occurrence in La Pampa province.

POPULATION The Speckled Crake has been described as very rare (Cuello and Gerzenstein 1962, Blake 1977, Hilty and Brown 1986, Navas 1991), "excessively rare" (Phelps and Phelps 1961) and even as "one of the rarest Neotropical birds" (Hellmayr and Conover 1942, Ripley 1977; also Canevari *et al.* 1991). However, its discovery at Taubaté in Brazil "indicates that it is not so much scarce as difficult to find" (Teixeira and Puga 1984). It seems likely that this will prove to be the case, but until rather more evidence can be mustered it is prudent to consider the species genuinely rare.

ECOLOGY The habitat has been characterized as rice and alfalfa fields, swamps, and humid woodland edge, 200-1,500 m (Meyer de Schauensee and Phelps 1978), also grassy savanna and dense marshy vegetation (Hilty and Brown 1986; see Remarks 7). Several specimens have been taken at night in open savanna or rice fields using lights (Ripley 1977). At Taubaté in Brazil the species inhabits dense vegetation in flooded rice fields (Teixeira and Puga 1984). In Uruguay the brood of three was found in wheat stubble on a farm, and the single bird near Montevideo was in a flooded meadow (Arballo 1990). In Córdoba, Argentina, it was recorded from the densest part of flooded grasslands (Nores and Yzurieta 1980), while the bird in Corrientes was flushed from the wettest part of a marsh with rushes and floating vegetation (F. R. Lambert verbally 1992) and one on the río Luján marshes was in flooded *Spartina densiflora* (B. M. López Lanús *per* M. Pearman verbally 1992). In Colombia the single record was made only 100 m from where the country's first Ocellated Crake *Micropygia schomburgkii* was found (Olivares 1959).

The stomach of a bird collected in May at Taubaté contained 80% small grass seeds, 15% remains of arthropods, and 5% fine gravel (Teixeira and Puga 1984).

Data on breeding are sparse: the bird above from May had well-developed testes (Teixeira and Puga 1984), while a brood of three was found in Uruguay in December (Arballo 1990); moreover, despite being judged immature (Meyer de Schauensee 1962) the two August birds from Venezuela had enlarged gonads (ANSP label data).

There has been some speculation that the Speckled Crake undertakes migrations between the north and south of the South American continent (Meyer de Schauensee 1962, 1966, Blake 1977, Ripley 1977, Meyer de Schauensee and Phelps 1978, Hilty and Brown 1986, Canevari *et al.* 1991), and this has even been taken as a certainty (Gore and Gepp 1978), but the state of the gonads of the Venezuelan birds from August and the presence of the species in April, May, June and August in Brazil and Paraguay (see Distribution) tend to annul this possibility. The view that either it has a very much fuller distribution than demonstrated so far or its occurrences in Colombia and at sea indicate that birds occasionally erupt large distances in a random pattern from their centre of distribution in the tropical savannas of northern and eastern South America (Ripley 1977: 16) seems appropriate, except that the centre of distribution cannot be assumed to be in tropical savannas. It is worth noting that both birds caught at sea were taken in November or December (see Distribution), this possibly indicating some post-breeding dispersal. In view of the remarkable parallel with the White-winged Flufftail *Sarothrura ayresi* (see Remarks 1), it is also worth noting that the latter species appears to be nomadic in response to rainfall, selecting as habitat the less flooded parts of (seasonal) marshes (see Collar and Stuart 1985).

THREATS None is known.

MEASURES TAKEN It is not clear whether the site at which the Colombian specimen was collected lies within the boundaries of the Macarena National Park (which, however, is itself threatened: Struhsaker

1976). The Bañados del río Dulce in Córdoba, Argentina, are at present a WHSRN reserve (M. Nores *in litt.* 1992). The Otamendi Strict Nature Reserve near Buenos Aires is also important for Dot-winged Crake *Porzana spiloptera* (see relevant account).

MEASURES PROPOSED Using tape-recordings presumably available from the captive bird described by Teixeira and Puga (1984), searches could be made by ornithologists with playback equipment during any lacustrine surveys in any part of lowland South America. Further study of the species at a possibly constant site, such as Taubaté in Brazil, is desirable.

REMARKS (1) The establishment of the race *duncani* for northern populations of this species has been discredited in Meyer de Schauensee (1962) who, however, pointed out the striking similarity in the history of this bird with that of the (also threatened) White-winged Flufftail of Ethiopia and southern Africa (see Collar and Stuart 1985); a further similarity that now emerges is that both were thought possibly to be migratory between the north and the south of their ranges, although this appears increasingly unlikely to be so for both. It is perhaps noteworthy, too, that both possess white secondaries, conspicuous in flight. (2) A specimen was captured alive near Port Stanley in April 1921, but following its death the skin was not kept (Bennett 1926), so the record cannot be verified (Meyer de Schauensee 1962); nevertheless, Bennett (1926) “carefully examined it while still alive”, suggesting his identification was likely to have been correct and, since birds have twice been caught on ships along the South Atlantic coast (see Distribution), the likelihood of birds straggling to the Falklands/Malvinas is high. (3) Meyer de Schauensee (1962) referred to both “río Guaviare” and “río Guayabero”, the latter being described as a major tributary of the former by Paynter and Traylor (1981). (4) Despite the year 1960 being given, the labels on these skins indicate 1954 (M. B. Robbins *in litt.* 1992). (5) Rand and Paynter (1981) were uncertain which of several localities with the name Sarandí might have been intended, but it seems most likely that it was the relatively large Sarandí del Yí. (6) This bird was kept alive and donated to the London Zoo in January 1876, where it survived until December 1880 (BMNH label data). (7) Hilty and Brown (1986) cited Ripley (1977) as their authority for these habitat types, but this is mistaken.