

This poorly known rail is confined to the Caribbean slope of north-western Venezuela, where recent records are confined to two areas of man-made habitat. It is likely that the bird has suffered habitat loss owing to the general degradation of wetlands within its range.

DISTRIBUTION The Rusty-flanked Crane is endemic to the Caribbean slope of north-western Venezuela, where it has been recorded infrequently from few localities; a claimed specimen from Paraíba, Brazil (Ripley and Beehler 1985) has been discounted as a misattribution (Teixeira *et al.* 1989). Records of this species are as follows (coordinates, unless otherwise stated, deriving from Paynter 1982):

Lara Yacambu National Park (c.9°40'N 69°32'W; coordinates from DGPOA), where the species apparently frequents a man-made pool (B. Swift *in litt.* 1988);

Yaracuy Nirgua (10°09'N 68°34'W), a locality mentioned by Phelps and Phelps (1958), probably referring to a specimen (in COP) taken at 600 m at Hacienda Panchito (same coordinates as for Nirgua) during December 1939 (see Paynter 1982);

Carabobo Urama (10°27'N 68°19'W; 23 km west of Puerto Cabello), where a specimen (in COP) was taken at 20 m during July 1940; La Cabrera (10°16'N 67°40'W; on the north-eastern shore of Lago de Valencia), where five females (in ANSP, COP) were taken at 400 m during July 1942;

Aragua Lago de Valencia, where specimens (in COP, FMNH) were taken in April 1908, September 1942 and September 1946; Isla (Punto) Chambergo (10°14'N 67°47'W; in Lago de Valencia; coordinates from OG 1961), where a male (in COP) was taken at 460 m during October 1947; Embalse de Taguaiguai (10°08'N 67°27'W; 15 km east of Lago de Valencia, and also known as Bella Vista: A. B. Altman *in litt.* 1988), where birds were seen in January and February 1985 and apparently later that year (A. B. Altman *in litt.* 1988, B. Swift *in litt.* 1988);

Distrito Federal “vicinity of Caracas”, whence comes the type-specimen (Sclater and Salvin 1868c);

Miranda San José de Río Chico (10°18'N 65°59'W), where six birds (five males and one female in AMNH, COP, USNM) were collected at 20 m during mid-September 1940.

POPULATION The status of the Rusty-flanked Crane is generally unknown: B. Swift (*in litt.* 1988) considered the species to be “common at least locally”, although the only records since the 1940s have been observations of a small population at Yacambu National Park, and of 2-3 individuals seen in January and February 1985 at Embalse de Taguaiguai, with 6-12 individuals there (in an area of c.3-4 ha), presumably later that year (B. Swift *in litt.* 1986, 1988, A. B. Altman *in litt.* 1988). The fact that this species was at least historically locally common is demonstrated by the collection of five females in two days (July 1942) at La Cabrera, and five males and a female taken in three days (September 1940) at San José de Río Chico (see Distribution). With so little known of its current distributional status, it is difficult to assess whether or not the population has experienced any significant decline.

ECOLOGY The Rusty-flanked Crane apparently inhabits lakes, lagoons, swamps, flooded pasture and sometimes dry grassland (Meyer de Schauensee and Phelps 1978), where it is seemingly resident from the coastal plain (c.20 m) up to 600 m (see Distribution). Since the 1940s the only records have been from two man-made habitats (see Population), at one of which (Embalse de Taguaiguai) birds were seen in dense fringing aquatic vegetation (A. B. Altman *in litt.* 1988). Nothing is known of feeding or breeding in this species.

THREATS Lago de Valencia is polluted by industrial waste, and wetlands in irrigated areas are affected by pesticides (Scott and Carbonell 1986). Several of the major lakes within the range of the Rusty-flanked Crane are in conservation districts intended to preserve water levels, although success in achieving this has been mixed (B. Swift *in litt.* 1988). More specifically, the water level in the reservoir at Embalse de Taguaiguai had dropped sufficiently by January 1986 that the “shore” was c.300 m from the area where this species was originally seen: the crakes have not been seen there subsequently (B.

Threatened birds of the Americas

Swift *in litt.* 1986, A. B. Altman *in litt.* 1988). A dam is being constructed near Yacambu, although it is unknown what (if any) effects this will have on the species (M. L. Goodwin *in litt.* 1992).

MEASURES TAKEN None is known, although the Rusty-flanked Crake has recently been found at the edge of its known range within the Yacambu National Park (B. Swift *in litt.* 1988). However, the Yacambu National Park does not have any significant wetland areas (Scott and Carbonell 1986), and the crake was found inhabiting a man-made pond (see above).

MEASURES PROPOSED An assessment of the precise year-round ecological requirements of the Rusty-flanked Crake is necessary before a realistic conservation strategy can be developed. However, protection of suitable habitat, perhaps extending to the creation of habitat as a spin-off from the dam construction (see Threats) in Yacambu National Park is an important task, as is the discovery of the current status of the species at Embalse de Taguaiguai (which should also be protected and monitored if the bird is found still to be present there). Surveys in and around (Isla Chambergo) Lago de Valencia are also needed to determine the overall status of the species, and to make a more detailed assessment of the threats facing it.