LA SELLE THRUSH *Turdus swalesi* **R**[11]

Despite being relatively common where it occurs (and this includes several national parks), this ground-haunting songbird is isolated in poorly protected pockets of habitat in the mountains of Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

DISTRIBUTION The La Selle Thrush is endemic to the high forested mountains of Hispaniola, where it occurs as two distinct subspecies, nominate *swalesi* in the Massif de la Selle (Haiti) and Sierra de Baoruco (Dominican Republic), and *dodae* in the Sierra de Neiba and Cordillera Central (Dominican Republic) (Graves and Olson 1986). Coordinates are taken from DMATC (1972, 1973).

Haiti The species appears to be confined to the Massif de la Selle, with records (west to east) from: La Visite National Park, where it was recorded on several occasions in December 1982 (J. A. Ottenwalder *in litt.* 1992); Morne La Visite (18°21'N 72°19'W), where it was first observed on 11 April 1927 and four birds (including the type) were collected on subsequent days (Wetmore and Swales 1931, Graves and Olson 1986), with several birds observed at the same locality from 1980 to 1985 (P. Y. Roumain *in litt*. 1991; also Woods and Ottenwalder 1986); near Morne Cabaio (18°21'N 72°16'W), where "nests" were found in late May 1941 (Bond 1942); Fonds Verettes (18°24'N 71°51'W), where a bird was observed (at a time when the species was unknown to science) in May 1920 (Wetmore and Swales 1931); Jardins Bois Pin (18°18'N 71°48'W), where the species was present and known to local people in 1927 (Wetmore 1927, Wetmore and Swales 1931); Morne La Selle (18°22'N 71°59'W), where birds were taken in June 1928 and June 1930 (three specimens in ANSP); La Selle plateau (on the ridge of the Massif de la Selle), where it was reported on an ungiven date by Bond (1942).

Dominican Republic Records (west to east) are from:

Sierra de Baoruco Zapotén (Sapotén in DMATC 1972, at 18°19'N 71°41'W), where a bird was observed in April 1978 (A. Stockton de Dod *in litt.* 1991); Loma de Toro, above Zapotén, where a female was collected in September 1972 (Bond 1973; also Stockton de Dod 1978), and another in April 1976 (Graves and Olson 1986); above Puerto Escondido (18°19'N 71°34'W), where four birds were noted in April 1984 and three in April 1987 (J. E. Pierson *in litt*. 1991); Charco de la Paloma (18°13'N 71°33'W), undated (Stockton de Dod 1978); Pueblo Viejo, undated (Stockton de Dod 1981); Pie Pol (18°08'N 71°10'W), where two birds were observed in May 1971 (Bond 1971; also Stockton de Dod 1981); Las Abejas, near Canote, (untraced), where the species was observed in November and December 1980 (A. Stockton de Dod *in litt.* 1991); eastern Sierra de Baoruco, where the species was heard on an ungiven date (Bond 1977);

Sierra de Neiba "Sierra de Neiba", where a female was secured in May 1975 (Graves and Olson 1986), this perhaps the same locality as that given by Bond and Dod (1977) near "Kilómetro 204" (a military outpost, 16 km south-west of Hondo Valle, this latter untraced but c.15 km north of Angel Félix, at 18°38'N 71°46'W), undated;

Cordillera Central on the way to Pico Duarte (19°02'N 70°59'W), undated, reported to Bond (1982); Montazo (probably El Montazo, at 18°52'N 70°59'W), undated (Stockton de Dod 1978); above El Convento (18°52'N 70°41'W), where a bird was trapped in 1977 (A. Stockton de Dod *in litt*. 1991; also Bond 1977); near Alto Bandera (18°49'N 70°37'W), undated (Stockton de Dod 1981).

POPULATION Since the species's discovery in Massif de la Selle in 1927 (Wetmore 1927), most comments in relation to its abundance agree that the bird is and was locally common in the appropriate habitat (see Ecology).

Haiti Although few specimens have been collected in the Massif de la Selle (Wetmore and Swales 1931, Graves and Olson 1986), it appears to have been common at the time the first specimens were secured (Wetmore and Swales 1931). Bond (1942) found the species common on the La Selle plateau, even commoner than the Red-legged Thrush *Turdus plumbeus*, and believed it to be "holding its own very well", an opinion that was subsequently reaffirmed by Woods and Ottenwalder (1983, 1986) and Woods (1987), who found it common in La Visite National Park.

Dominican Republic The first observation of the La Selle Thrush in the country occurred in 1971, in the Sierra de Baoruco (an eastward extension of the La Selle ridge) (Stockton de Dod 1978; also Graves and Olson 1986). Although first considered "very rare" (Stockton de Dod 1981), it was later called "little known", owing to the remoteness of its habitat (Stockton de Dod 1978; see Ecology).

Sierra de Baoruco The species is considered "fairly common" at Zapotén, Loma de Toro and Pueblo Viejo (all within the Sierra de Baoruco National Park) (A. Stockton de Dod *in litt.* 1991).

Sierra de Neiba and *Cordillera Central* constitute the range of the race *dodae*, which appears to be geographically isolated from the nominate population owing to the natural barrier of the Cul-de-Sac–Valle de Neiba depression (Graves and Olson 1986). Bond (1976) was surprised by the "abundance" of the species at "Kilómetro 204", from where four specimens were collected, and it was reported common on the south side of the crest of the Sierra de Neiba (Bond 1978). The species's status within the Cordillera Central remains unclear with only few reported records (see Distribution).

ECOLOGY The La Selle Thrush inhabits the dense understorey of subtropical wet forest and pine forests, at altitudes generally higher than 1,300 m (Stockton de Dod 1978, Bond 1979, Woods and Ottenwalder 1986, J. E. Pierson *in litt.* 1991). In La Visite National Park, Massif de la Selle, Woods and Ottenwalder (1986) found that 75-100% of their records (derived from carefully planned transects through all major habitats) were in areas of "bwa raje" (broadleaved forest in isolated areas unsuitable for agriculture, such as around sinkholes, steep ravines, the steep north face of the massif and areas with numerous blocks of limestone) and "rak bwa" (broadleaved forest where mesic conditions predominate, such as ravines, depressions, limestone outcrops, along streams and rivers and at the mouths of caves and sinkholes), where it was mainly found feeding in trees, especially *Persea anomala*; other observations were from "raje" (severely altered areas) and "jardins" (agricultural areas). In the same La Visite area, Woods and Ottenwalder (1983) found the La Selle Thrush easy to observe when it moved from one mesic pocket to another, commenting that this contrasts with Wetmore and Swales (1931), who found the species secretive, and attributing the difference to loss of habitat forcing the bird to move through open areas from one ravine to another.

The species feeds on the ground on earthworms and arthropods, as well as on wild fruits; feeding has also been reported in the open cultivated gardens near "rak bwa" and "bwa raje" (Stockton de Dod 1978, Woods and Ottenwalder 1986).

Nests found in late May were placed in shrubs at low or moderate elevations above the ground (Bond 1942, 1979). Birds in breeding condition and nests under construction have been found early in June (Bond 1928a, 1943).

THREATS Although the La Selle Thrush is locally common, its very restricted range means that habitat destruction on a large scale represents a major threat (Woods 1987). The species's fate appears to be tied to that of the highland forest, as noted by J. E. Pierson (*in litt.* 1991) and P. Y. Roumain (*in litt.* 1991).

Haiti Woods and Ottenwalder (1986) noted that in La Visite National Park the habitat has been modified in the past by extensive cutting of stands of large pines, and the scrubby broadleaf forest is being rapidly cut as peasant farmers pick new places for gardens; severe habitat loss has been occurring since 1977; "raw bwa" is now restricted to patches of low dense forest as a result of chronic clearing and burning. Very little effort has been made by the Haitian government to follow recommendations for the protection and management of the park; furthermore, the present economic crisis cannot have helped to protect it (J. A. Ottenwalder *in litt.* 1992). A broader view of habitat loss in the country is in Threats under White-winged Warbler *Xenoligea montana*.

Dominican Republic Notes on habitat loss are in Threats under White-winged Warbler. A. Stockton de Dod *in litt.* (1991) noted that the habitat above El Convento in the Cordillera Central and in the area in the Sierra de Neiba where she observed the species is already gone.

MEASURES TAKEN In Haiti, apart from the species's occurrence in La Visite National Park, no other measures are known. In the Dominican Republic, the species has been protected (SEA 1980), and occurs in Sierra de Baoruco and Armando Bermúdez National Parks (Stockton de Dod 1981, Bond 1982, Hoppe

1989).

MEASURES PROPOSED Surveys in both countries should try to delimit accurately the species's range, to determine the extent of remaining habitat both inside and outside protected areas, and to provide more data (e.g. on population densities, ecological needs, threats) in order to establish a clear conservation strategy. Such activities should be combined with similar work on the other threatened and near-threatened birds of Hispaniola. An overview of the importance of the mountain forests in Hispaniola and associated threatened species is in Measures Proposed under Chat-tanager *Calyptophilus frugivorus*.

Haiti The prospects of the La Salle Thrush would be enhanced by the implementation of proposals made by Woods and Ottenwalder (1986) that (1) all cutting of “rak bwa” and “bwa raje” be immediately stopped, and (2) the area west of Morne La Visite all the way to and including the slopes of Morne d'Enfer be included in La Visite National Park.

Dominican Republic Stockton de Dod (1981) remarked that if the natural habitat in Baoruco National Park was adequately protected, the population would have food supplies and enough nesting cover to survive. Enforcement of established regulations in this and the Armando Bermúdez National Park would be a first step to protect the species in the country, while the creation of the first protected area in the Sierra de Neiba (as proposed in DVS 1990) is long overdue.