

A high altitude sighting of the São Tomé Short-tail *Amaurocichla bocagei*

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São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea is well known for its endemic, restricted range, bird fauna (Peet & Atkinson 1994), and it has been recognised by Fishpool & Evans (2001) as an Important Bird Area. Eleven species of breeding land birds are listed by IUCN as in some degree threatened (IUCN 2002), all of which are endemic and occur in the remaining primary rainforest of the island.

One of the most elusive of these species is the São Tomé Short-tail *Amaurocichla bocagei*, a species listed as Vulnerable (BirdLife International 2000, IUCN 2002) because of its presumed small population size, based on estimates of the amount of habitat considered suitable for the species that remains in São Tomé. Previous sightings of *A. bocagei* have been in primary rainforest below 600m, in the south-west of the island, especially near watercourses (Peet & Atkinson 1994, Christy & Clarke 1998, Borrow & Demey 2001). During a systematic survey of the primary rainforest of the island, we sighted *A. bocagei* in high altitude rainforest in central São Tomé.

On 27 Dec 2001, a single adult *A. bocagei* was seen at Estação Sousa (0°16'N, 6°33'E) at an altitude of 1100 m in the central mountainous massif east of Pico de São Tomé. The bird was not especially close to a watercourse, but numerous small streams have their headwaters in the vicinity. It was seen about 1 m above ground level walking along a near-horizontal fallen tree branch. It had long legs, a long, thin bill and was an overall dark brown. It made several characteristic calls and was observed for more than 5 min. It appeared darker than other *A. bocagei* observed subsequently in the lowlands. The occurrence of *A. bocagei* at high altitudes in the central mountainous massif was confirmed by a local guide, who reported regular but uncommon sightings in the region (Pedro Leitão pers. comm.).

This sighting significantly extends the area of forest that may be considered occupied by *A. bocagei*. However, the species still has a restricted range as it occurs only in primary rainforest. The potential population size for the species could be much larger than previously thought, although *A. bocagei* is probably uncommon at high altitudes. We saw only a single individual during a six-day survey, whereas in the heart of its lowland forest distribution, we observed several individuals and pairs daily. We therefore do not recommend that its conservation status be changed unless significant populations are discovered at high altitude.

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