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The First Recorded Cory's Bittern (*Ixobrychus "neoxenus"*) from South America

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Described by Cory (1886), *Ixobrychus "neoxenus"* is considered a variant morph of the Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus e. exilis*), characterized by contrasting dark chestnut underparts and blackish upperparts. About 30 specimens are known, mostly from southern Florida and Ontario, but there are also records from Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin (Bent 1926, Hancock and Elliot 1978). Thus, it was quite a surprise for us to obtain a specimen of the South American *Ixobrychus exilis erythromelas* in this rather uncommon plumage. Apparently, this is the first time this morph has been reported outside North America.

The bird was collected on 13 May 1967 in the rice fields of the Paraiba do Sul drainage, county of Taubaté, São Paulo (approx. 23°01'S, 45°33'W), southeastern Brazil. In this area, "normal" colored *I. exilis erythromelas* are common, as are other herons such as *I. involucris, Botaurus pinnatus, Butorides striatus, Casmerodius albus,* and *Egretta thula.* Another species, *Bubulcus ibis,* has been recorded as a recent invader of the surrounding dry pastures. The specimen collected was a young male, with nonossified skull and very small gonads. Its stomach contained a small, 50-mm long characid (Tetragonopterinae) and unidentified seeds of a monocotyledon.

Like normal-colored *I. exilis erythromelas,* this specimen in the *neoxenus* plumage showed a light yellow iris and yellowish bare lores, but its bill was blackish brown and the tarsus brownish, without yellow tinges. The plumage agreed more or less with the description of Sharpe (1898), but some conspicuous differences were observed: the specimen did not show any greenish or bronze gloss in the blackish parts of the plumage, and its secondaries were plain black without rufous. The ashy black feathers of nape, hindneck, back, and rump were fringed with ochraceous to light gray, giving the bird a discrete scaled appearance. The sides of upper breast, thigh, center of abdomen, and crissum were ashy black, rather washed out, and marked with deep, dark chestnut rather than dusky rufous. These differences (at least the scaled upperparts) probably are related to age, as the young of normal-colored *I. exilis erythromelas* also show the upperparts inconspicuously barred with ochraceous, and all previously described *I. "neoxenus"* have been adults.

Bent (1926) considered *I. "neoxenus"* to be an example of melanism and erythrism, and a comparison of our specimen with typically colored *I. exilis erythromelas* seems to point to hyperpigmentation. Indeed, a superproduction of eumelanins and phaeomelanins perhaps could explain the deep blackish tinges of the upperparts and the rufous chestnut color of the foreneck, breast, etc. observed in this unusual plumage (Vevers 1964).

As mentioned above, *I. "neoxenus"* is considered a rare morph, and our observations in southeastern Brazil seem to reinforce this supposition. Although *I. exilis erythromelas* is common in the rice fields of Taubaté, only one specimen in the *"neoxenus"* plumage has been recorded after almost 20 yr of observation. In addition, our field research in coastal Rio de Janeiro and in Alagoas has never revealed any other specimen in this peculiar coloration. Thus, it is impossible to evaluate if the *"neoxenus"* morph has, in Brazil, a local occurrence or not, as was observed in the North American Least Bittern.

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