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NOTES ON BIRDS OF THE SIPALIWINI SAVANNA AND OTHER LOCALITIES IN SOUTHERN SURINAME, WITH SIX NEW SPECIES FOR THE COUNTRY

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Samenvatting. – Notities over de vogels van de Sipaliwini savanne en andere plaatsen in het zuiden van Suriname, met zes nieuwe soorten voor Suriname. – Ik beschrijf, naast andere belangwekkende observaties, zes vogelsoorten, nieuw voor Suriname, die zijn waargenomen tijdens recente expedities in het binnenland. Ook worden bijzonderheden gegeven over de avifauna van de Sipaliwini savanne, waar al twintig jaar geen ornithologen geweest waren. Vogelobservaties in het binnenland bevorderen de kennis van de verspreiding en rijkdom van de avifauna van Suriname. De Sipaliwini savanne huisvest een aantal vogelsoorten, die nergens anders in de Guianas gevonden worden. De savanne zelf heeft een lage bevolkingsdichtheid en is, vergeleken met andere savannegebieden in de Neotropics, weinig aangetast door extensieve veeteelt of door met regelmaat aangestoken branden. De Sipaliwini heeft gezonde populaties van enkele soorten die late stadia nodig hebben van de begroeiing na branden en ook van soorten die anderszins gevoelig zijn voor menselijke activiteiten, zoals de Zonparkiet (*Aratinga solstitialis*) en de Geelbuikdwergtiran (*Euscarthmus rufomarginatus*). Met nadruk wordt gepleit voor een ononderbroken bescherming van de savanne tegen het op grote schaal platbranden van de begroeiing en tegen extensieve veeteelt.

Resumo. – Notas sobre aves das savanas de Sipaliwini e outras localidades na região sul do Suriname, incluíndo seis novas espécies para o país. – Neste artigo eu relato informações sobre seis espécies de aves registradas pela primeira vez no Suriname, assim como outras observações de campo particularmente interessantes, realizadas em expedições de campo recentes no interior do país. Também forneço detalhes sobre a avifauna das savanas de Sipaliwini, que antes da minha visita nao tinham sido exploradas por um ornitólogo por mais de 20 anos. O estudo das aves no interior do Suriname é de grande importância para o conhecimento da distribuição e da diversidade de aves no país. As savanas de Sipaliwini possuem numerosas espécies de aves que não são encontradas em nenhuma outra região das Guianas. Estas savanas têm uma densidade populacional humana baixa, e estão relativamente pouco afetadas pela presença de gado em grande escala ou por fogos frequentes, que têm degradado outras savanas neotropicais. Sipaliwini aparentemente possui populações sadias de várias espécies de aves que, em geral, requerem habitats típicos de estágios sucessionais tardíos após o fogo, ou que de alguma forma são sensíveis às atividades humanas, incluíndo espécies como Jandaia-sol (*Aratinga solstitialis*) e Maria-corruíra (*Euscarthmus rufomarginatus*). A proteção contínua das savanas do fogo extensivo e da cria de gado são incitadas.

Abstract. – I report sight records of six bird species new to Suriname, as well as other noteworthy observations from recent field expeditions in the interior of the country. I also provide details on the avifauna of the Sipaliwini savanna, which prior to my visit had not been surveyed by ornithologists for at least 20 years. Observations of birds from the interior region add to our knowledge of the distribution and richness of Suriname's avifauna. The Sipaliwini savanna harbors a number of bird species that are not found elsewhere in the Guianas. The savanna itself has a low human population density and is relatively unaffected by the large-scale cattle grazing and frequent fires that have degraded other savanna regions throughout the Neotropics. The Sipaliwini appears to contain healthy populations of several species that require late-succes-

sional post-fire habitats or are otherwise sensitive to human activity, including the Sun Parakeet (*Aratinga solstitialis*) and Rufous-sided Pygmy-Tyrant (*Euscarthmus rufomarginatus*). Continued protection of the savanna from extensive fire and grazing is urged. *Accepted 6 April 2005.*

Key words: Suriname, Sipaliwini savanna, birds, distribution.

INTRODUCTION

Haverschmidt & Mees (1994) synthesized all published literature on birds in Suriname. Their book remains the most current published source of information on the avifauna of that country, and it provides a detailed history of ornithology in the coastal region. Suriname is still largely undeveloped, and the interior, particularly the southern half of the country, has been little studied due to difficulty of access. The relative inaccessibility of large areas of the interior has discouraged ornithological exploration, and as a result the avifauna of the country is incompletely known. This paper adds to the known avifauna of Suriname as published by Haverschmidt & Mees (1994).

Few specimens were collected in the interior of Suriname prior to 1960 (Haverschmidt & Mees 1994 and references therein). H. A. Beatty collected birds for the Field Museum of Natural History (FMNH) at a few localities in the southern part of the country between 1960 and 1962 (Humphrey & Freund 1962, Blake 1963). I could find no other detailed accounts of ornithological expeditions in forested habitats of the region, but subsequent work by G. F. Mees and others was incorporated in the species accounts of Haverschmidt & Mees (1994). The overwhelming majority of ornithological work in Suriname to date has been concentrated in coastal areas, or on the lower reaches of the larger rivers. It is therefore not surprising that the species list for the country remains incomplete. Recent new records are almost exclusively from the coastal region and the more easily accessible parks at Brownsberg and Raleighvallen (e.g., Trail 1979, Donahue 1985, O. Ottema in prep.). To my knowledge, there have been very few recent field surveys of birds in remote areas of the interior, and the results of those surveys have yet to be published.

The Sipaliwini savanna has been the subject of ornithological interest for some time, because it harbors a number of bird species not found elsewhere in the Guianas (Haverschmidt & Mees 1994); its avifauna is similar to that found in the cerrados of eastern and central Brazil, hundreds of kilometers away (Silva *et al.* 1997, Mees 2000, Robbins *et al.* 2004). G. F. Mees visited the Sipaliwini in the mid-1960s and found several new species for Suriname there, including a subspecies of the Rufous-sided Pygmy-Tyrant (*Euscarthmus rufomarginatus savannophilus*) that may be endemic to the area (Mees 1968, 1974; Traylor 1979). Further survey work in the Sipaliwini by Renssen (1974) added more species to the country's avifauna.

In this paper I report recent sight records of six bird species for which status and distributional information in Suriname is unpublished or lacking. I also report other observations of interest from recent field trips in the country. Observations of birds were made during December 2002 and May–June 2003. During this time I made several trips into the interior of Suriname. Intensive surveys were undertaken at all sites, each visited for 5–13 days. At Lely Gebergte, I made a collection of about 100 specimens, but work at the other localities was observational only. An equipment malfunction prevented me from recording bird vocalizations during December 2002. Due to the sensitivity of the Sipaliwini Amerindian community, I consid-

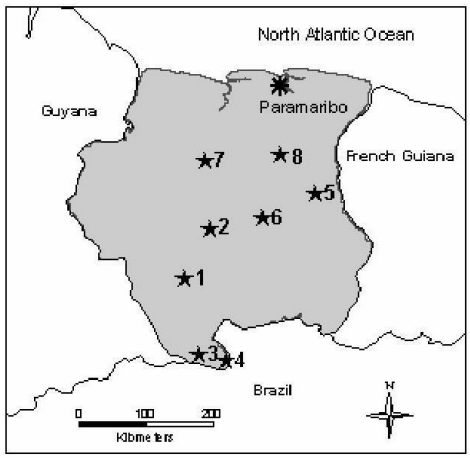

FIG. 1. Map of Suriname showing localities mentioned in the text: Kayser (1), Kappel savanna (2), Sipaliwini Village (3), Vier Gebroeders (4), Lely Gebergte (5), Palumeu Lodge (6), Raleigh Falls Nature Reserve (7), Brownsberg Nature Park (8).

ered it necessary not to use recording equipment during my visit.

LOCALITIES

The following interior localities, all shown in Figure 1, were visited.

Kayser. Kayser (03º05.69'N, 056º28.31'W) is located along the Zuid River south of the Eilerts de Haan Gebergte. I visited the area from 18 to 23 December 2002. The habitat is mostly tall forest. Near the river, the forest is seasonally flooded, with a high density of lianas. The grass airstrip is at least 200 m wide and over 2 km long; it is fringed by grass that is burned periodically. In many places, the forest edge has been scorched by fire. The airstrip had been burned approximately six weeks prior to my visit. To the west and south of the airstrip, there appears to be an extensive savanna of palms with a well-developed layer of shrubs, but I was not able to access this habitat during my visit.

Kappel savanna (*Tafelberg airstrip*). Kappel savanna (03º47.48'N, 056º08.97'W) is located on a gently sloping plateau several kilometers south of the Tafelberg, which is a flat-topped mountain rising to approximately 1000 m. I visited the savanna and adjacent forest from 23–30 December 2002. The airstrip is at the west end of the plateau and is covered with short grass. East of the airstrip, the vegetation is tall and dense, with long grass and numerous impenetrable "bush islands" of *Clusia* and other tree species. As one moves further east and downslope, the bush islands progressively increase in size and connectivity.

The trail to Tafelberg starts at the savanna and passes through unbroken tall forest to the mountain.

Sipaliwini savanna. Vier Gebroeders (approx. 02º01'N, 055º57'W) and Sipaliwini village (exact coordinates unavailable) were visited from 21 May to 1 June 2003. The Sipaliwini savanna is characterized by undulating rocky terrain and a mosaic of grassy habitats with a generally sparse growth of trees (e.g., *Curatella americana, Byrsonima crassifolia*). Savanna trees are typically most dense on the hilltops, where the grass layer is least developed. In areas with semi-permanent standing water, sedges and *Mauritia* palms form extensive swamps. Smaller, more ephemeral wet areas generally support tall sedges. There are numerous forest islands, usually situated on hillsides; unlike the bush islands of Kappel savanna, these often have a relatively open understory and the trees may reach ~20 m in height. The Vier Gebroeders formation, a group of rock outcrops about 400 m high, is the most prominent feature of the landscape. The slopes support a low forest and some scrubby vegetation which becomes increasingly sparse toward the summit.

The Sipaliwini River flows through the savanna and a thin gallery forest grows along it. The transition from open savanna to low-

land forest occurs near Sipaliwini village (approx. 20 km west of Vier Gebroeders) and is quite abrupt. Although there are extensive open habitats in the vicinity of the village, I did not find many of the distinctive bird species of the Sipaliwini savanna in this area.

Lely Gebergte. Lely is a plateau in east-central Suriname. I visited the mountain from 1–15 June 2003. The habitat on top of the plateau (elev. 670 m), and throughout the surrounding region, is tall forest. An airstrip extends westward from the eastern edge of the plateau. The soil layer is very thin, and at the time of my visit (rainy season) there was much standing water in the forest. An area of dense scrub extends some distance from the west end of the airstrip; I was unable to determine its extent. There is a large clearing near the airstrip where a radio tower was recently erected; on one side of this clearing is a small area of stunted (canopy ~6 m high) forest with a heavy growth of mosses and bromeliads. This merges into taller forest several hundred meters from the edge of the clearing.

METHODS

My routine was to walk whatever trails existed at each site to locate and identify birds. On the Sipaliwini, where trails were not necessary for navigation, I walked across the open savanna but avoided crossing extensive *Mauritia* swamps and large areas of tall grass or sedges. I typically began each day well before first light, and attempted to cover as much area and as many different habitats as possible during my visit to each site. At all localities except Lely, I spent between 6 and 10 h per day observing birds; at Lely, I primarily observed birds in the course of checking mist nets and preparing specimens.

A list of all species encountered at these interior localities and their relative abundances will be published elsewhere.

Specimens from Lely are deposited in the Museum of Natural Science, Louisiana State University (LSUMNS), and at the Nationale Zoölogische Collectie van Suriname (NZCS). Tissue samples in 20% dimethylsulfoxide (DMSO) buffer were taken from all specimens; all tissues are deposited in the LSUMNS Section of Genetic Resources.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Taxonomy and nomenclature follow that proposed by Remsen *et al.* (2005).

Least Grebe (Tachybaptus dominicus). During my stay at Lely Gebergte, I observed a breeding pair of Least Grebes. They inhabited a small pond in the forest near the airstrip, on top of the plateau at an elevation of approximately 670 m. I assume that they had built their nest in the grasses surrounding the pond. On the day of my arrival, they had two large young; I saw and heard the group every day of my visit. This grebe is known from relatively few localities in Suriname, all in the coastal region (Haverschmidt & Mees 1994). This constitutes the first published breeding record for the country, but other nests have recently been reported from the coastal region by O. Ottema and P. Ouboter (pers. com.).

Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle (Spizastur melanoleucos). On 15 June 2003, at Lely Gebergte, I observed a Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle as it attacked a group of Little Chachalacas (*Ortalis motmot*). The chachalacas were feeding 6–8 m up in a fruiting tree along the edge of the airstrip, which is about 50 m wide and bordered on both sides by tall forest. The raptor attacked from the opposite side of the airstrip; my impression was that it initiated the sortie from a point in the canopy and close to

the forest edge. It had already set its wings in a glide when it emerged from the forest just below canopy level, when I first detected it; the bird maintained a shallow, accelerating glide as it closed in on its quarry. Braking heavily, it smashed into the group's midst. I did not see the outcome of the chase. This is apparently the first published observation of hunting behavior for this species.

Sun Parakeet (Aratinga solstitialis). Sun Parakeets were fairly common on the Sipaliwini savanna. I saw them a few times daily, in groups of 3–22 individuals; small (< 5) groups were the norm. They were usually seen in flight and did not stop while in view. On one occasion, a trio of these birds briefly alighted in a *Curatella americana* before moving on. In general, the species seemed more wary than the Peach-fronted Parakeet (*Aratinga aurea*), which was considerably more common. I observed one captive bird in Sipaliwini village, but I saw no further evidence of hunting or trapping of Sun Parakeets during my visit. There are no confirmed recent records of the Sun Parakeet from any of the major savanna regions of northern South America (Hilty 2003, Robbins *et al.* 2004). It was apparently rather common through the 1970's in the Rupununi-Roraima savannas of western Guyana and adjacent Brazil, but has since been extirpated there, presumably by trappers (Robbins *et al.* 2004). The Sipaliwini is an important stronghold for this beautiful psittacid.

Violaceous Quail-Dove (Geotrygon violacea). This species is known in Suriname only from sight records at two localities, Brownsberg Nature Park and Raleigh Falls Nature Reserve (Trail 1979), and from an old specimen, considered by Haverschmidt & Mees (1994) to be of "dubious origin". On 5 June 2003, I collected a specimen, a female, in stunted mossy forest near the airstrip at Lely Gebergte (field catalog # BJO-989). This specimen is the second for Suriname, and the first with specific locality information.

Least Nighthawk (Chordeiles pusillus). I identified Least Nighthawk by its small size and clearly visible white trailing edge on the inner remiges, thus separating it from the more widely distributed Lesser Nighthawk (*C. acutipennis*). Least Nighthawks were occasionally flushed from the ground during the day in areas with short grass and scattered trees on the Sipaliwini savanna. On such occasions, two or three birds were typically flushed in the space of several minutes, suggesting that they roost in loosely aggregated groups. When flushed, they always flew high into the air and away. In the evenings, up to 15 at a time could be seen from hilltops, foraging high above the surrounding grassland. They did not vocalize. The Least Nighthawk is restricted to open grassland habitats and has a poorly known distribution in South America, though it is locally fairly common on the Rupununi savanna of Guyana and in adjacent Brazil (M. Cohn-Haft pers. com.). This is apparently the first record of this species for Suriname (Dickerman 1988, Mees 2000, Robbins *et al.* 2004).

Sooty-capped Hermit (Phaethornis augusti). On 25 May 2003, I saw one individual very well as it perched in a shrub on a rocky slope of the Vier Gebroeders. It was identified by its gray underparts, strong facial pattern, and multiple white tips to the rectrices. This is the first record for Suriname.

Spot-throated Woodcreeper (Denconychura stictolaema). I observed one individual foraging with an understory mixed-species flock in tall forest near Kappel savanna on 26 December 2003. It was superficially similar to the Wedge-billed Woodcreeper (*Glyphorynchus spirurus*) but differed in size and proportions,

and in having a slender bill. It differed from the Long-tailed Woodcreeper (*D. longicauda*) in that it had no streaking on the crown, and only faint and restricted streaking on the upper breast. I observed this bird for about 3 min as it foraged on a tree trunk, about 8 m away and 2 m above the ground. This species is reported from French Guiana (Tostain *et al.* 1992) and Guyana (Braun *et al.* 2000) but has not been reported from Suriname to date (Haverschmidt & Mees 1994, Ottema 2002).

Rusty-backed Antwren (Formicivora rufa). This species was reliably found on the Sipaliwini savanna in areas of very tall (~2 m) grass with perches protruding above the grass. Its presence was typically revealed when a pair emerged from such habitat to protest my arrival. Otherwise Rusty-backed Antwrens were very inconspicuous; protesting birds tended to retreat into the grass after a few minutes and were seldom heard singing at any distance. Their preferred habitat was usually found at the base of a slope, where runoff and poor drainage created conditions favorable for lush growth of grass and sedges. However, they were not restricted to such marshy areas. The Rusty-backed Antwren has a disjunct distribution in South America; the Sipaliwini savanna is the only area in the Guianas where it is known to occur. On the Sipaliwini, it seems to prefer very tall grass or sedges, which typically vanish as savannas are converted to cattle rangeland. The Sipaliwini contains extensive areas of critical habitat for the regional population of this species.

White-bellied Antbird (Myrmeciza longipes griseipectus). I identified this species by voice, and by chestnut back, white belly and black throat and upper chest; individuals were identifiable to subspecies *griseipectus* by limited ventral extension of black, chestnut crown, black spots on greater secondary coverts, and conspicuous gray sides of chest and neck. The White-bellied Antbird was one of the characteristic species of forest islands in the Sipaliwini savanna, and several were seen in this habitat, where they frequently approached to within a few meters in response to my whistled imitation of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum*). I heard between 5 and 8 birds singing daily. This is the first record of this species for Suriname, but it is found in the Rupununi savanna of Guyana, and in the Brazilian states of Para and Amapá (Zimmer & Isler 2003), so its occurrence on the Sipaliwini is not surprising.

Sooty-headed Tyrannulet (Phyllomyias griseiceps). I heard and then saw an individual of this species with a mixed-species flock at Brownsberg Nature Park on 15 January 2003. Its call is a distinctive *whip, whip chip chippy!* The cadence is diagnostic. I located the bird foraging about 10 m above the ground. It was distinguishable from other small flycatchers by its brown crown and plain wings. This species is locally distributed across Venezuela and into Guyana, where specimens have recently been obtained near Linden (Braun *et al.* 2000, Hilty 2003). This species was first detected in Suriname by S. L. Hilty, who obtained a tape recording at Brownsberg in December 1999; his recording, my observation from January 2003, and a subsequent tape recording that I obtained at Brownsberg in August 2004 are the first records for Suriname.

Rufous-sided Pygmy-Tyrant (Euscarthmus rufomarginatus). A locally distributed and poorly-known species with strict habitat requirements, the Rufous-sided Pygmy-Tyrant was quite common in tall grass on the Sipaliwini savanna, particularly where perches were available above the grass or on the periphery of a grassy area. The birds used these perches as song posts, often singing for 10 min or more before moving to another post or dropping into the grass. The Rufous-sided Pygmy-

Tyrant seemed more restricted to wet areas than another tall-grass species, Rusty-backed Antwren, that often occurred with it. This pygmy-tyrant is threatened elsewhere in its disjunct range by burning and grazing of its tall grass habitat; for example, it is not known to occur on the Rupununi savanna of Guyana, where fires are frequent and extensive. The Sipaliwini contains important habitat for this species.

Yellow-margined Flycatcher (Tolmomyias assimilis). This species was included in Haverschmidt (1968), but was removed in the subsequent revision (Haverschmidt & Mees 1994). This decision is rather perplexing, because Yellow-margined Flycatchers are common in Suriname, though perhaps somewhat less so than in Guyana. In their account for Yellow-olive Flycatcher (*T. sulphurescens*), Haverschmidt & Mees (1994) described Yellow-margined Flycatcher's distinctive call, a loud, wheezy "*rrreeeew!!!*" typically repeated two or three times, and ascribed it to the former species. They concluded that the Yellow-olive Flycatcher is distributed throughout the country. In fact, the Yellow-olive Flycatcher seems to be restricted to seasonally flooded forest and savanna forest islands in the Guianas; it avoids *terra firme*, where the Yellow-margined Flycatcher is a common member of mixed-species flocks. Its call is also different, being thinner, more lisping, and not nearly as loud as those of its congener. It appears that Haverschmidt's (1968) assessment of this species' status and distribution was correct, and I propose that the Yellow-margined Flycatcher be restored to the list of birds known to occur in Suriname.

Cliff Swallow (Petrochelidon pyrrhonota). On 7 October 2003 and for several days thereafter, D. Ascanio (pers. com.) observed Cliff Swallows migrating along the Palumeu River. The birds were noted as scattered individuals within large groups of Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*). Many such flocks were observed moving south along the river. On 7 October, Ascanio observed seven Cliff Swallows roosting at Palumeu Lodge (03^0 20.92'N, 055^0 26.35'W; Fig. 1).

Large-billed Seed-finch (Oryzoborus crassirostris) and *Chestnut--bellied Seed-finch* (Oryzoborus angolensis). These two finches are relentlessly trapped throughout the Guianas, where they are prized for their complex songs (Robbins *et al.* 2003). The Large-billed Seed-Finch (known in Suriname as Twa-twa) is particularly sought-after, and the species has been extirpated from easily accessible habitat near the coast in Guyana and Suriname (M.B. Robbins & O. Ottema pers. com.). I saw only two Chestnut-bellied and no Large-billed Seed-finches during my visit to the Sipaliwini. I did not see any direct evidence of trapping on the Suriname side of the savanna, but both species were captive in Sipaliwini village, and during my stay there a young man arrived from nearby Missão Tirios (Brazil) with many cages containing seedeaters (*Sporophila* spp.) and both species of seed-finches. These birds were presumably intended for coastal markets. Perhaps trapping is more widespread across the border, but I am at a loss to explain the virtual absence of this genus on the Suriname side, where human population density is very low. A more extensive survey is needed to clarify the status of *Oryzoborus* seed-finches in the area.

Seedeaters (Sporophila spp.). Seedeaters are also popular cage birds in the Guianas, and I found rather few of them on the savanna. The commonest member of the genus appeared to be Plumbeous Seedeater (*S. plumbea*), a species found in a variety of interior savanna habitats in the Guianas. They were always seen in roving flocks of 8–20 mostly female-plumaged birds, but such flocks were not commonly

encountered. The presence of these flocks, and the absence of singing birds, suggests that Plumbeous Seedeaters had finished breeding some time ago. If other *Sporophila* species breed at similar times, then subsequent dispersal or migration may have rendered them difficult to find during my visit; alternatively, trapping could be responsible for the dearth of seedeater sightings. Many Lined Seedeaters (*S. lineola*) and Capped Seedeaters (*S. bouvreuil*), again mostly female-plumaged birds, were in the shipment of birds brought to Sipaliwini village from the Brazilian side (see previous account). I also noticed many seedeaters in the Central Market in Paramaribo earlier in the month. Although most seedeaters were inconspicuous on the Sipaliwini, I saw several White-bellied Seedeaters (*S. leucoptera*) singing along the Sipaliwini River. The bulk of the range of this species, and that of the Capped Seedeater, lies south of the Amazon (Ridgely & Tudor 1989). Their populations in the Sipaliwini savanna, if isolated, may be threatened by trapping for the cage bird market.

Small flocks of Lined Seedeaters suddenly appeared in scrub around the Lely airstrip on 10 June 2003. This was my first observation of the species since my arrival at that locality on 1 June. I collected a specimen; this bird was an immature female (field # BJO-1037, skull 10% ossified, bursa of Fabricius 5 x 3 mm, smooth ovary 3 x 1 mm) with moderate fat. A number of adult males were present around the airstrip, so confusion of their female-plumaged consorts with the very similar Lesson's Seedeater (*S. bouvronides*) was unlikely. The Lined Seedeater is known to make seasonal movements, but details of such movements are poorly known (Hilty 2003); presumably these birds were transients.

Dotted Tanager (Tangara varia). Haverschmidt & Mees (1994) mention an old specimen examined by Hellmayr (1936) as the only record for the country, and a suspicious one at that, considering that they did not see the specimen, which apparently lacks locality information. On 20 May 2003, I observed a Dotted Tanager crossing the Zanderij-Apoera road, approximately 10 km west of Zanderij. The bird was foraging with a mixed-species flock that included Green Honeycreepers (*Chlorophanes spiza*), Red-legged Honeycreepers (*Cyanerpes cyaneus*), Blue Dacnises (*Dacnis cayana*), and Fulvous-crested Tanagers (*Tachyphonus surinamus*). It was identified by its typical *Tangara* shape and behavior, which separated it from female Green Honeycreeper and Blue Dacnis, and uniformly green coloration with bluish edging on the remiges, which ruled out the two most similar *Tangara* species, Spotted Tanager (*T. punctata*) and Bay-headed Tanager (*T. gyrola*). M. B. Robbins (pers. com.) recently obtained a specimen of the Dotted Tanager in the Acari Mountains in Guyana, close to Suriname. This species appears to be rare in the Guianas.

DISCUSSION

I report six new species for Suriname, with other records of interest from several recent trips into the country's interior. First records for Suriname reported here are Least Nighthawk, Sooty-capped Hermit, Spot-throated Woodcreeper, White-bellied Antbird, Sooty-capped Tyrannulet, and Cliff Swallow. Ornithology in Suriname is still in a fledgling stage compared to other countries in the Neotropics, but the country is increasing in prominence as a tourist destination. Accordingly, the "holes" in the list of species known from Suriname are being filled as more field ornithologists explore the country.

The most striking feature of the avifauna of the Sipaliwini area, relative to the rest of the Guianas, is the presence of more or less isolated populations of several savanna species whose ranges lie mostly in the cerrado

region south of the Rio Amazonas, or far to the east of the Sipaliwini in Amapá, Brazil (Ridgely & Tudor 1989, 1994; Silva *et al.* 1997). These species include Peach-fronted Parakeet, Scissor-tailed Nightjar (*Hydropsalis torquata*), Swallow-tailed Hummingbird (*Eupetomena macroura*), Horned Sungem (*Heliactin bilopha*), Campo Flicker (*Colaptes campestris*), Narrow-billed Woodcreeper (*Lepidocolaptes angustirostris*), Rusty-backed Antwren, Gray Monjita (*Xolmis cinerea*), Rufous-sided Pygmy-Tyrant, Suiriri Flycatcher (*Suiriri suiriri*), Chalk-browed Mockingbird (*Mimus saturninus*), White-rumped Tanager (*Cypsnagra hirundinacea*), Capped Seedeater, and White-bellied Seedeater. The Sipaliwini is the only area in the Guianas where most of these species are known to occur (Mees 2000, Robbins *et al.* 2004). The population of Rufous-sided Pygmy-Tyrant that occurs here represents a named subspecies *(E. r. savannophilus*; Traylor 1979) whose known range lies almost entirely within Suriname.

Most of the aforementioned species were among the most conspicuous birds in open savanna during my visit. The forest islands were generally depauperate in both numbers and species of birds, with typical species being White-bellied Antbird, Yellow-breasted Flycatcher (*Tolmomyias flaviventris*), Blue-backed Manakin (*Chiroxiphia pareola*), and Pale-breasted Thrush (*Turdus leucomelas*). In general, breeding activity in the area was variable. Many insectivorous birds were singing or engaging in courtship behavior, and I did not observe any nests or recently-fledged young. Frugivorous and granivorous species, however, appeared to have completed breeding; for example, I saw many juvenile Pale-breasted Thrushes, and *Sporophila* seedeaters were typically observed as wandering flocks composed primarily of female-plumaged (i.e., probably young) birds. There was virtually no vocal activity for most of these species.

At no point during my visit to the Sipaliwini did I see any evidence of cattle grazing, nor was there any sign of permanent human settlements or large-scale burning outside of villages. The lack of intensive human activity has resulted in the preservation of a beautifully diverse savanna ecosystem, a true rarity in tropical America. The diversity of microhabitats on the savanna itself indicates that the area is rich in biological diversity. Many savanna habitats, such as long grass, typically are degraded or disappear entirely after the introduction of cattle grazing and associated frequent fires. The Foundation for Nature Research in Suriname (STINASU) deserves much credit for recognizing the value of the Sipaliwini ecosystem to Suriname's natural heritage, and for establishing an extensive reserve to protect it. I highly recommend that additional biological surveys be made in the Sipaliwini savanna, and that the Amerindian residents of the region take pride in this natural treasure and insure its protection.

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