

This grassland flycatcher has experienced a catastrophic loss of range in Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina, apparently as a result of the conversion of its habitat to agriculture and cattle-raising land; it remains at all common only in northern Argentina and adjacent Paraguay, and is in urgent need of study and protection along with a suite of similarly placed birds.

DISTRIBUTION The Strange-tailed Tyrant (see Remarks 1) is known from southern Brazil, central and eastern Paraguay, Uruguay and central and north-eastern Argentina. Unless otherwise stated, coordinates in the following account are taken from Rand and Paynter (1981), Paynter (1985, 1989) and Paynter and Traylor (1991); in most cases, records at individual localities are of single birds collected or observed, with records involving a large number of birds generally being discussed under Population.

Brazil Localities (north to south) are: (*Mato Grosso*) Pansecco (= Pau Sêco, 8 km from Caiçara, this at c.16°04'S 57°42'W), June 1826 (von Pelzeln 1868-1871); (*São Paulo*) unspecified (Meyer de Schauensee 1966, Sick 1985); (*Rio Grande do Sul*) unspecified (Wied 1831-1833, Burmeister 1856); São José do Norte, between June and August 1914 (Gliesch 1930).

Paraguay Localities (roughly north to south) include: (*Presidente Hayes*) c.100 km on the Trans-Chaco Highway, May 1991 (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1991, P. A. Scharf *in litt.* 1992); Estancia La Golondrina (= Golondrina, 24°56'S 57°42'W), August and November 1988 (F. E. Hayes *in litt.* 1991); Benjamín Aceval (24°58'S 57°34'W), undated (Bertoni 1930); Pilcomayo, July 1942 (specimen in AMNH); Estancia Santa Catalina, February 1981 (J. Escobar *in litt.* 1991); near Estancia San José near río Confuso, c.15 km south-west of km 75 on the Trans-Chaco Highway, July 1989 (AMN); Villa Hayes, July 1989 (F. E. Hayes *in litt.* 1992); (*Alto Paraná*) unspecified (Bertoni 1939); Puerto Bertoni (25°38'S 54°40'W), March of an unstated year (Bertoni 1926); (*Paraguari*) Sapucay (= Sapucaí, 25°40'S 56°55'W), April 1903, April and June 1904 (Chubb 1910); (*Guairá*) Villarrica, August 1893 (Salvadori 1895b), October 1905, August 1923 and July 1924 (three specimens in BMNH); (*Ñeembucú*) currently (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1991); (*Misiones*) "Misiones" (Contreras *et al.* 1989); between San Juan Bautista and Santa Elisa (= Estancia Santa Elisa, at c.26°55'S 57°28'W, read from DSGM 1988), March 1990, March and June 1991 (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1991, P. A. Scharf *in litt.* 1992; see Population).

Uruguay Records are few and mainly old: (*Paysandú*) "Paysandú", October 1883 and 1885 (Gibson 1885; two specimens in BMNH; hence presumably Tremoleras 1920, Gore and Gepp 1978); (*Soriano*) April 1955 (Cuello and Gerzenstein 1962); (*Flores*) unspecified (Tremoleras 1920); (*San José*) Playa Pascual (34°45'S 56°35'W), October 1986 (Arballo 1987); (*Maldonado*) "Maldonado", undated (d'Orbigny 1835-1844); near Maldonado, between 1832 and 1836 (Gould 1841).

Argentina Records (north to south) are from:

(*Formosa*) Riacho Pilagá (= Estancia Linda Vista c.25°13'S 59°47'W), August 1920 (Wetmore 1926); c.30 km north to Formosa, December 1986 (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991); Clorinda, October 1991 (T. Narosky *in litt.* 1992; see Population);

(*Chaco*) unspecified, December 1987 (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1988); Avia Terái (26°42'S 60°44'W), May 1916 (specimen in AMNH); Vermejo (= Puerto Bermejo), December 1859 (specimen in USNM); Irarana, untraced but evidently near the ríos Paraguay or Paraná, 1860 (specimen in USNM; see Remarks 2); General Pinedo (27°19'S 61°19'W), May 1916 (two specimens in AMNH);

(*Misiones*) arroyo Urugua-í (25°54'S 54°36'W), July 1960 and August 1961 (Navas and Bó 1988b); río Paranay (= arroyo Paranay-guazú, 26°41'S 54°48'W), September 1926 (specimen in FMNH); Santa Ana (27°22'S 55°34'W), May 1918 (Navas and Bó 1988b); Barra Concepción (28°07'S 55°35'W; coordinates from OG 1968), July 1961 (Navas and Bó 1988b);

(*Corrientes*) Estero Ipucú (27°43'S 57°09'W in OG 1968), Loreto, September 1985 (J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1992); río Aguapey, October 1984 (T. Narosky *in litt.* 1992); on the road from Corrientes to

Threatened birds of the Americas

Posadas, June 1975 (M. Nores and D. Yzurieta *in litt.* 1986; see Population); Itaibaté (= Itá Ibaté, 27°26'S 57°20'W), October 1959 (six specimens in AMNH); 21 km east-south-east of Itá Ibaté, October 1967 (specimen in AMNH); Ituzaingó (27°36'S 56°41'W), October 1959 (two specimens in AMNH); Estancia Garabatá (27°40'S 58°26'W), November and December 1961 (ten specimens in AMNH and LSUMZ); Gobernador Virasoro, November 1975 (T. Narosky *in litt.* 1992); Estancia Las Marías (28°07'S 56°04'W), May 1961 (two specimens in CM); "Esteros de Iberá", August 1972 (four specimens in MHNG); "Pellegrini" (= Colonia Carlos Pellegrini, 28°32'S 57°10'W), November 1979 (T. Narosky *in litt.* 1992); Laguna Iberá, near Colonia Carlos Pellegrini, on the road from the latter to Santo Tomé and on the road from Colonia Carlos Pellegrini to Mercedes, currently (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1988, Gardner and Gardner 1990a, M. Pearman *in litt.* 1990, B. M. López Lanús *in litt.* 1991, D. Willis *in litt.* 1991, F. R. Lambert verbally 1992; for this general area see Population); Santa Lucía, currently (J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1992); La Cruz, November 1976 (T. Narosky *in litt.* 1992); Guayquiraró (30°18'S 59°32'W) (see Cory and Hellmayr 1927); Los Cerros (untraced), July 1985 (T. Narosky *in litt.* 1992);

(*Santiago del Estero*) Girardet (27°37'S 62°10'W), February 1927 (see Nores *et al.* 1991); Selva (29°46'S 62°03'W), January 1900 (Hartert and Venturi 1909);

(*Santa Fe*) Mocoví (28°24'S 59°42'W), September, October and November 1903 and January 1904 (Hartert and Venturi 1909; seven specimens in AMNH and MNHN); Ocampo (= Villa Ocampo, 28°28'S 59°22'W), November 1903 and November 1905 (Hartert and Venturi 1909; three specimens in AMNH); Ceres (29°53'S 61°57'W), January 1900 (Hartert and Venturi 1909); General López (c.40 km from Venado Tuerto, 33°45'S 61°58'W), early this century (Wilson 1926);

(*Entre Ríos*) "Entreríos", before 1912 (two specimens in BMNH); Concepción del Uruguay, September and October 1880 and April 1881 (Barrows 1883; four specimens in MCZ); Estancia La Soledad (32°30'S 58°41'W), February 1899 and January 1902 (Hartert and Venturi 1909);

(*Córdoba*) río Cuarto (33°25'S 63°02'W), undated (Burmeister 1861); "Córdoba", unspecified (Olog 1959, 1979);

(*San Luis*) in the pampas around San Luis (the town), undated (Burmeister 1860; hence presumably Olog 1959, 1979);

(*Buenos Aires*) Baradero (33°48'S 59°30'W), November 1897 (specimen in UNP); Campana (34°10'S 58°57'W), Luján bridge, February 1877 (Durnford 1878; three specimens in BMNH); Lomas de Zamora (34°46'S 58°24'W), undated (Withington 1888); La Plata, undated (specimen in BMNH); Estancia Espartilla (c.35°31'S 58°19'W), sometime between 1888 and 1891 (Holland 1891); Carhué (37°11'S 62°44'W), April 1881 (Barrows 1883) and December 1920 (Wetmore 1926); Colina (possibly Estancia Colina, 37°23'S 61°33'W; coordinates from OG 1968), February 1889 (two specimen in BMNH); Estancia Santa Elena (untraced), September 1892 and October 1895 (Holland 1893; two specimens in BMNH); La Rosa (untraced), March 1886 and 1888 (two specimens in BMNH).

POPULATION The Strange-tailed Tyrant is now very rare or has virtually disappeared from large areas of its former range. Although its numbers still appear to be fairly healthy in southern Paraguay (Ñeembucú and Misiones) and in northern Argentina (Corrientes), it is not known whether these populations are stable or also subject to diminution.

Brazil The Strange-tailed Tyrant is very rare; there appears to be just a single nineteenth-century record from Mato Grosso (see Distribution), and in Rio Grande do Sul it has been recorded only once during the twentieth century (1914), having previously been mentioned only twice in the state (Belton 1984-1985; also Distribution). The listing of São Paulo (Meyer de Schauensee 1966, Short 1975, Sick 1985) is not accompanied by further details, and there are no records or museum skins from Paraná (P. Scherer Neto *in litt.* 1986).

Paraguay The Strange-tailed Tyrant appears to be scarce and local in the humid chaco of Presidente Hayes (F. E. Hayes *in litt.* 1991, AMN). East of the río Paraguay (Región Oriental) it is probably very rare except in the grasslands in the southern departments of Ñeembucú and Misiones, which are still fairly

pristine (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1991). Within this area, between San Juan Bautista and Santa Elisa, 12 and 15 birds were observed in March 1990 and March 1991 (P. A. Scharf *in litt.* 1992), and 47 were along c.10 km of road on 6 June 1991 (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1991, P. A. Scharf *in litt.* 1992).

Uruguay Cuello and Gerzenstein (1962) considered the species “very rare” and Gore and Gepp (1978) believed it to be a “rare resident”. These assessments were supported by Arballo (1987), who referred to it as one of the rarest birds in the country. By contrast, Gould (1841) reported it “not uncommon” near Maldonado and so did Gibson (1885) at Paysandú, comments that obviously indicate a decrease.

Argentina The species seems to have suffered a great decline and it apparently no longer occurs in some of the provinces where it was once reported (e.g. San Luis, Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Entre Ríos, Santiago del Estero). The extraordinary range contraction suggested by the records (see Distribution) is poorly documented for some of the provinces (e.g. San Luis and Córdoba), as the species's occurrence there was based on single records only; however, its disappearance from Buenos Aires province is particularly noteworthy given the number of localities cited under Distribution and, e.g., Holland's (1893) report that it was “plentiful everywhere” at Estancia Santa Elena in the province. In one area of northern Santa Fe (see Distribution) it was found “common” by Hartert and Venturi (1909), although in the south at General López it was “uncommon” (Wilson 1926). The lack of recent observations in Santa Fe suggests that it has suffered a major decline there (see Remarks 3), this also being true in Santiago del Estero, where Pereyra (1938) found it common on the border with Santa Fe (see Nores *et al.* 1991, Distribution). The species's present range has been reduced to eastern Formosa, eastern Chaco, north-eastern Santa Fe, Corrientes and southern Misiones: 10 immatures were observed in Clorinda, Formosa, in October 1991 (T. Narosky *in litt.* 1992); it is still relatively common in Estero Ipucú, Estero de Santa Lucía (J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1992) and in the Esteros de Iberá, Corrientes, where sightings of more than 15 birds at a single spot can be made (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1990, D. Willis *in litt.* 1991, F. R. Lambert verbally 1992).

ECOLOGY The Strange-tailed Tyrant inhabits wet grasslands (pajonales) and pastures near or within marshes or “esteros” and “bañados”, sometimes near forest edge, bushy vegetation and palm savannas (Short 1975, Olrog 1979, Canevari *et al.* 1991). Records from sites in Misiones (see Distribution) usually associated with Atlantic Forest presumably refer to natural clearings. The species is most reliably found in fields with native grasses, but also occurs in fields of introduced grasses (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991).

It feeds on invertebrates (small Coleoptera and *Lycosa* spiders have been reported in stomachs) which are captured in flight or on the ground (Gould 1841, Durnford 1878). Birds have been observed foraging in dense clumps of grass by making short sally-gleans (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991). Nesting has been reported in October (a nest contained three eggs), and it is placed on the ground under a tuft of grasses (Gibson 1885, Holland 1893). On 26 December 1987, a female was observed with two recently fledged young (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991). Single birds, pairs, family groups and small flocks have been reported; de Azara (1802-1805) observed a flock of 30 females, and he believed that every male would mate with eight or ten females, a point that, given the highly distinctive breeding dress of male birds, requires consideration. The species is a year-round resident in most of its range; however, at Estancia Santa Elena, Buenos Aires, Holland (1893) referred to it as migratory, birds arriving in September (i.e. early spring) and departing in February (i.e. late summer), and he mentioned that males arrived a little earlier than females and immatures.

THREATS Habitat destruction, mostly through agriculture and cattle-raising, is probably the major threat to the species (Arballo 1987, D. Willis *in litt.* 1991); the latter has often been accompanied by the introduction of foreign grasses (AMN). There is some uncertainty about the impact of cattle on the species's habitat, however: on the one hand Arballo (1987) remarked that the area where the species was observed in San José, Uruguay, was free of cattle and thus quite unique in such an overgrazed country, and P. Canevari (*in litt.* 1987) could never find the species in the Río Pilcomayo National Park, where cattle overgrazing occurs; on the other, it can be present in fields being grazed by cattle if grasses more than

about 50 cm tall are present (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991) and at Estancia La Golondrina, Paraguay, cattle were abundant (F. E. Hayes *in litt.* 1992). Nevertheless, the presence of cattle in Paraguay within the species's range is a reason for concern as the best natural grasslands are rapidly being utilized for pasture (AMN). Other factors, such as the use of pesticides, may be in play.

MEASURES TAKEN The species is protected under Brazilian law (Bernardes *et al.* 1990). In Argentina, the Iberá Provincial Reserve and proposed Mburucuyá National Park (15,000 ha in the Estero de Santa Lucía) are of great importance for the conservation of the species (J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1992).

MEASURES PROPOSED It is vital to ensure the survival of the populations in the grasslands of Corrientes (Argentina; see corresponding section under Saffron-cowled Blackbird *Xanthopsar flavus*), and of those in Presidente Hayes, Ñeembucú and Misiones (Paraguay). To achieve this goal, a study is needed on the status of these regions' natural and semi-natural grasslands and the effect of cattle-grazing. This should be combined with a study on the species's habitat selection and should consider the habitat requirements of near-threatened grassland specialists whose ranges largely overlap with the Strange-tailed Tyrant, namely Cock-tailed Tyrant *Alectrurus tricolor*, Bearded Tachuri *Polystictus pectoralis* (see Remarks 2), Sharp-tailed Tyrant *Culicivora caudacuta*, Rufous-rumped Seedeater *Sporophila hypochroma* (see relevant account) and Black-masked Finch *Coryphasiza melanotis* (for other important grassland species with a slightly different distribution, see the corresponding section under Saffron-cowled Blackbird). The aim of these studies should be the creation of some strictly protected and other carefully managed areas in which the presence of cattle is prohibited or controlled. The Strange-tailed Tyrant may

prove a good indicator of well preserved areas, in which case any healthy populations may provide guides to those areas of greatest general interest for conservation. The presence of the species in the so-called “Ecorregión Ñeembucú” in southern Paraguay adds to the arguments in favour of creating a protected area there (see Acevedo *et al.* 1990).

REMARKS (1) The Strange-tailed Tyrant occupies its own genus, although it is sometimes regarded as belonging in *Alectrurus* (e.g. Sibley and Monroe 1990). (2) The specimen from Irarana was collected by the same man (T. J. Page) who took the bird at Puerto Bermejo (Page was the man who explored the río Paraná at least twice but appears to have left behind an account only of his first endeavours: see Remarks 5 and 6 under Glaucous Macaw *Anodorhynchus glaucus*); since he also collected a specimen of Bearded Tachuri at Irarana, specifying the month of March (1860), it seems likely that this was fairly close to Puerto Bermejo and thus in Chaco or perhaps Corrientes. (3) Despite the lack of recent records from northern Santa Fe, the species's reasonable current status in adjacent Corrientes suggests that a population may be worth searching for in the north-eastern part of the province.