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Low altitude sightings of the Gulf of Guinea Thrush *Turdus olivaceofuscus xanthorhynchus* on Príncipe Island

Príncipe Island, with an area of 139 km², lies 220 km from the African coast and 146 km north of São Tomé Island, in the Gulf of Guinea (Fig. 1). Príncipe comprises a flatter region in the north, where the majority of the human population live and agriculture is common, and a more mountainous region in the centre and south of the island, with the highest mountain, Pico do Príncipe, reaching 948 m. Significant areas of primary rainforest remain only in the south, totalling c. 50 km² (Christy 2001). As one of the Gulf of Guinea islands, Príncipe is part of a globally important area of avian endemism (Jones 1994, Bibby *et al.* 1992, Fishpool & Evans 2001).

The Gulf of Guinea Thrush *Turdus olivaceofuscus* is endemic to São Tomé and Príncipe, with a separate subspecies described for each island. On São Tomé, *T. o. olivaceofuscus* is relatively widespread and common, being present almost wherever there is tree cover, from primary rainforest to urban gardens (Jones & Tye 2006). However, the species has been listed as Near-Threatened (IUCN 2006) as the Príncipe subspecies *T. o. xanthorhynchus* has been recorded on only a handful of occasions, and its status is unclear. One specimen collected in 1901, four in 1928, a photograph in 1997, one or two unpublished reports, and several unsuccessful expeditions to find

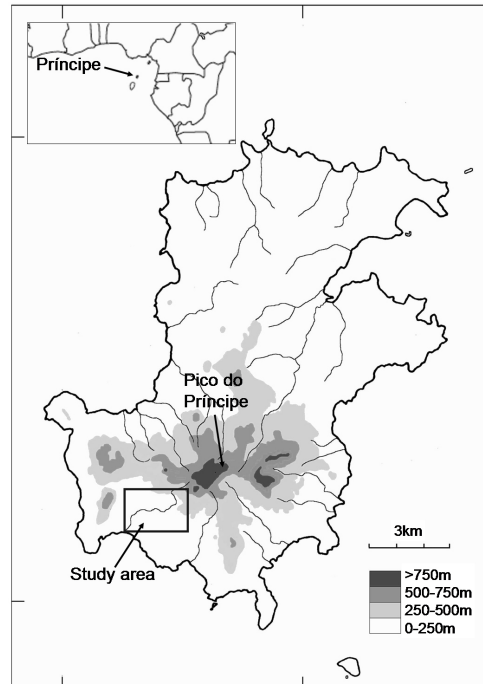


Figure 1. Map of Príncipe, showing altitudinal bands and the location of the study area (adapted from Jones & Tye 2006).

it, illustrated that the subspecies had never been widespread and was likely restricted to the remaining primary rainforest in the south of the island (Jones & Tye 2006). In 1999, J.M. Baillie (unpubl.) spent six weeks on the island, and observed several thrushes in primary rainforest from 290 to 750 m, especially around Pico do Príncipe and A Mesa, including four in a single day, and found them relatively tame and approachable. However, he observed only two during several days in lowland (10–250 m) forest in the southwest, along Ribeira de São Tomé. Here we report 12 observations of the thrush in lowland primary rainforest, in the region of Ribeira de São Tomé in January 2002.

We undertook 59 point counts in the lowland primary forest of SW Príncipe, near Ribeira de São Tomé (Fig. 2), during the mornings of the 19–24 Jan 2002 (Dallimer & King in press). The Gulf of Guinea Thrush was registered during six (10 %) of the point counts, always singly, and was present at a further six locations. On the first morning, it was recorded four times in 3 h. It was recorded at altitudes of 100–210 m, on valley floors and at ridge tops. On all occasions, the thrush was seen at low to mid

positions in the forest. Canopy height ranged from 20 to 33 m. The thrush was curious and unafraid, and allowed a close approach without it seemingly being disturbed. It was obviously smaller than the São Tomé subspecies, with a weaker, less penetrating voice and call. We clearly saw the yellow bill, pale legs and larger, darker breast and belly bars, which distinguish the Príncipe subspecies. The thrush was not caught during 35 mist-net hours (King & Dallimer 2003), nor seen during visits to surrounding areas of overgrown secondary forest to the west and south of A Mesa and Praia da Nova. Subsequent low altitude records (at c. 150 m) include regular sightings in the area of Ribeira Porco, where an individual was mist-netted in December 2003 (M. Melo & M. Fernandes *in litt.*).

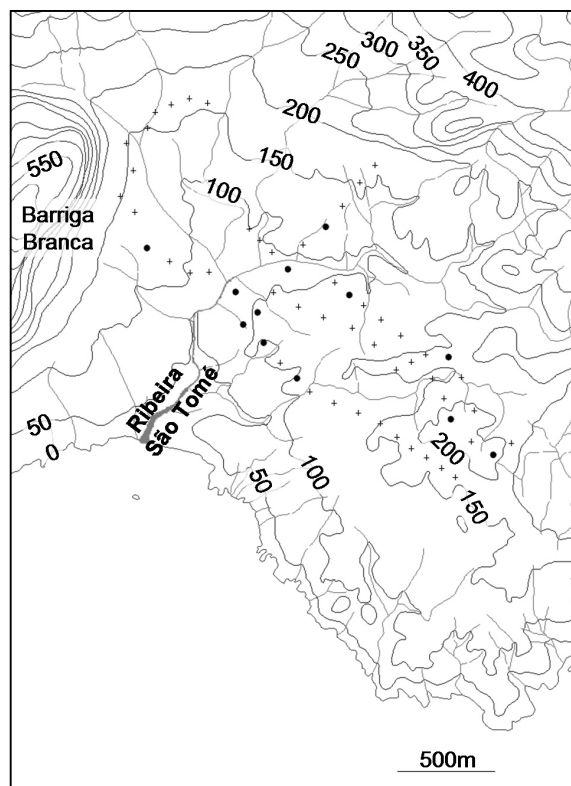


Figure 2. Location of 59 point count sites in lowland primary forest around Ribeira de São Tomé, Príncipe, showing presence (dots) and absence (crosses) of *Turdus olivaceofuscus xanthorhynchus* (coastline, watercourses and contours in metres © A. Gascoigne, M. Koo & T. Wojciechowski).

T. o. olivaceofuscus on São Tomé is bigger, with a fuller, richer song, and is noisy and common, contributing the major part of the early dawn chorus. We saw it at 33% (31 of 93) of our lowland primary rainforest point count locations on São Tomé (170–540 m altitude), and heard it at a further 8%. It was also recorded regularly in montane and mist rainforest, and was one of the most frequently netted species in primary forest on the island (King & Dallimer 2003).

The Príncipe bird is currently regarded as an endemic subspecies. However, descriptive accounts (*e.g.* Clement *et al.* 2000, Jones & Tye 2006) and recent morphological and genetic evidence (Melo 2006) suggest that it should be afforded full species status. Our observations support the noticeable differences between the two subspecies in morphology, song and abundance. There is also a need to establish the exact distribution of the Príncipe thrush, to estimate its population size, and to reinforce the proposed conservation programme for the remaining primary rainforest of this unique island.

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Errata

Bird observations in Mali (*Malimbus* 29: 123–125).

An editorial error caused a change in meaning of the description of Greater Swamp Warbler *Acrocephalus rufescens* in this article. The description of the bird should read: "...we observed a rather dark brown, long-billed, heavy *Acrocephalus* with a long rounded tail and all-dark legs, a grey wash on the underparts and lack of a prominent supercilium, diagnostic of this species." The description as printed stated that the bird had a prominent supercilium. Apologies to the authors of this note.