

THE PRESENT DISTRIBUTION AND STATUS OF THE
LESSER ANTILLEAN SOLITAIRES.

BY JAMES L. PETERS.

Plates XXII-XXIII

THE following brief account of the Lesser Antillean Solitaires is prompted by a short field-trip that I made during the winter of 1925 in the interests of the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy to the islands of Martinique, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent.

The impression has been current among naturalists for several years that the Solitaire on St. Vincent is extinct, and that the forms inhabiting St. Lucia and Martinique are threatened with a like fate. Fortunately such is not the case, and judging from my own observations there seems to me no reason why these retiring songsters should not continue to hold their own for many years to come.

Myiadestes genibarbis genibarbis Swainson. MARTINIQUE SOLITAIRE, SIFFLEUR DE MONTAGNE

From January 17 to 28, 1925, I was at Morne Rouge, a little town perched on a southerly spur of Mont Pelée. Hereabouts the "Siffleur," to give him the name by which he is best known on Martinique, is not uncommon in the steep ravines, where tree-fern and bamboo (particularly the former) comprise the bulk of the vegetation. While at times Solitaires stray out into the adjoining pastures, where there is a plentiful growth of wild Guava, their home is in the deep shady gorges. In such situations their song is a characteristic sound. It is a beautiful whistle of three or four notes with a perceptible interval between; sometimes this is followed by a succession of flute-like notes given rather rapidly, like parts of the song of the Hermit Thrush (*Hylocichla guttata*). It is not unusual to hear two Solitaires calling back and forth, each bird in its turn uttering a single, clear whistle. They also have a variation of their customary call, given as a doublet,



TYPICAL HAUNT OF THE SOLITAIRE IN MARTINIQUE.

suggesting the call-note of the Wilson's Thrush (*Hylocichla fuscescens*).

The Siffleur is not a shy bird, but often sits motionless and silent and in the uncertain light of its favorite haunts may be easily overlooked though it is rather easily "squeaked." In singing the body is held nearly erect with the tail slightly drooped, the head thrown back, and the throat dilated.

While I met with Solitaires only on the south and east slopes of Mont Pelée at elevations ranging from 800 to about 2200 feet, there is no reason to believe that they should not be found also among the gorges and ravines at equal altitudes in the rugged central portion of Martinique.

Myiadestes genibarbis sanctaeluciae Stejneger. ST. LUCIA SOLITAIRE, SIFFLEUR DE MONTAGNE

While the St. Lucia Solitaire cannot be called a common bird, nevertheless it is of not infrequent occurrence in the mountainous interior. I heard at least three individuals from the road passing near the summit of Piton Flor, and about an equal number during a half day's walk among the rugged hills lying to the eastward of the town of Soufrière. At neither station were they observed below 1500 feet. A great deal that has been already remarked under the head of the Martinique Solitaire pertains equally well to this form.

Myiadestes genibarbis siblians Lawrence. ST. VINCENT SOLITAIRE, SOUFRIÈRE BIRD

Prior to the great eruption of 1902, the Soufrière, as the volcano on St. Vincent was (and still is) called, was wooded to its summit. A path led across the island from the windward to the leeward side, ascended almost to the summit of the Soufrière, skirted the crater rim and dropped to the other side. Fishermen from Chateaubelair and neighboring villages on the leeward side often made the journey across the mountain to Georgetown on the windward to dispose of their catch. During the month of April, many of the inhabitants made a religious pilgrimage to the summit of the mountain. As a consequence of all this passing, the wild ringing song of the Solitaire became a familiar sound to all

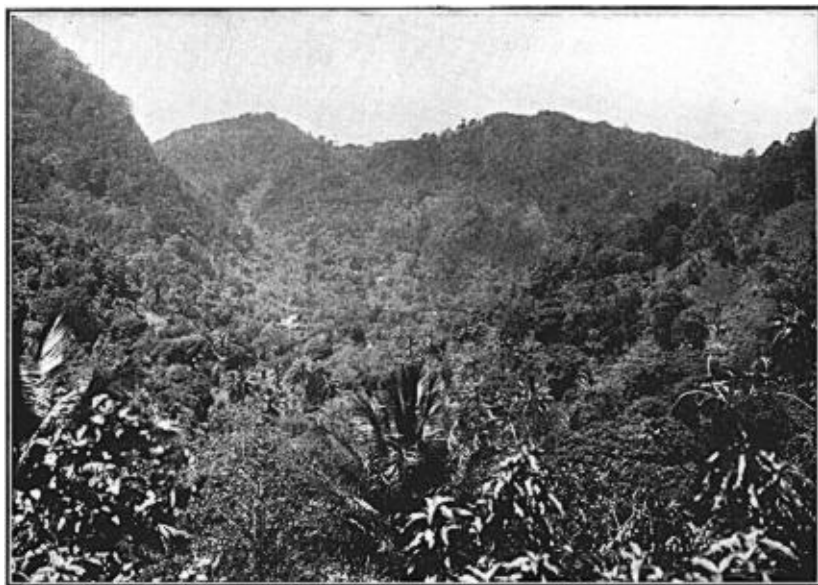
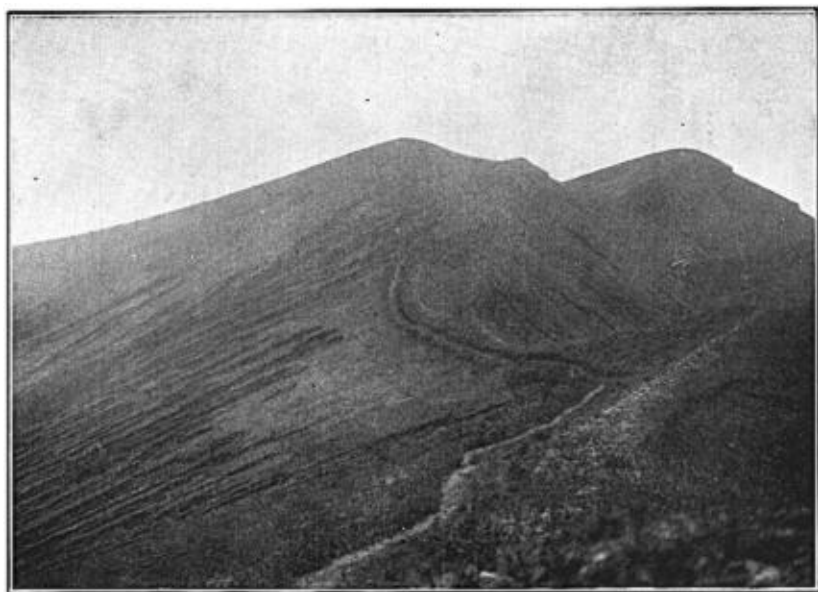
who crossed over the mountain. Furthermore, the bird being but seldom seen, an air of mystery surrounded it; as a result the "Soufrière Bird" as it was known, became familiar, through hearsay at least, over a wide portion of the island.

The terrific eruption of the Soufrière in May, 1902 devastated much of the northern part of St. Vincent. Rivers of boiling mud descended the mountain sides; blasts of incandescent gasses shrivelled all before them and showers of sand and ashes covered much of the surrounding country to a considerable depth. When once more intercourse via the summit of the Soufrière was resumed, all was changed. The mountain was a barren waste, the forest destroyed and of course the Solitaires with it, and word soon went around that the Soufrière Bird had gone.

There are however, two other ranges of mountains on St. Vincent,—the Bonhomme and the Morne Garu, that were not greatly harmed by the eruption. Of course Solitaires had always dwelt there, but since no one ever ascended these trackless mountains the birds there were never heard. Their presence however was ascertained by Lister in 1879 and Mr. G. Whitfield Smith was also aware of their occurrence, but no definite instances of capture are to be found in the literature of the first quarter of the present century.

In March 1925, Mr. Gerald H. Thayer and I climbed to the summit of the Grand Bonhomme, (2900 feet) and found three birds singing in the woods growing on the steep north slope. These we shot, but lost one in the mass of rank undergrowth and rotting vegetation. We also heard one or two others further below us but were unable to reach them from the part of the mountain on which we then were. It may be of interest to note in passing that one of our specimens, shot in the act of singing, proved on dissection to be a female.

From the observations made by Mr. Thayer and myself, I am of the opinion that *M. g. sibilans* will be found scattered sparingly on both the Morne Garu and Bonhomme Mountains above 2200 feet. Mr. Thayer told me that he expects to make a census of the Solitaires on these two ranges, and his results will prove of much interest.



UPPER: THE SOUVRIÈRE, ST. VINCENT, AS IT APPEARS TODAY.
LOWER: MOUNTAINOUS INTERIOR OF ST. VINCENT.

Myiadestes genibarbis dominicanus Stejneger. DOMINICA SOLITAIRE, MOUNTAIN WHISTLER.

There appears to be no recent information available concerning the Dominica Solitaire. Since however, Dominica is the most rugged and thinly settled of any of the Lesser Antilles and includes in its diversified topography many examples of the type of country preferred by *Myiadestes*, there is no reason to anticipate any immediate change in its status.

Museum Comp. Zool.

Cambridge, Mass.