

STRIATED CARACARA (*PHALCOBOENUS AUSTRALIS*) POPULATION AT STATEN AND AÑO NUEVO ISLANDS

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The Striated Caracara (*Phalcoboenus australis*) is currently considered to be globally Near-threatened (Collar et al. 1994). Distributed on southern islands off southern South America (Narosky and Yzurieta 1987), its heavy persecution on the Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands), where it was believed to attack weak or stranded sheep (del Hoyo et al. 1994), led to its local extinction and isolation on the smaller islands of the group. Its present status is currently unknown and surveys are needed, especially in the islands where Striated Caracaras are supposedly locally numerous (del Hoyo et al. 1994). Here, we report on the first exhaustive Striated Caracara census conducted at Staten and Año Nuevo islands during a scientific survey aimed at evaluating the islands' faunal conservation status (Parera et al. 1997).

Both islands (63 000 ha) are located at the southern extreme of South America, 30 km away from Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego which is shared by both Argentina and Chile across the Le Maire Straits (Fig. 1). The topography of Staten Island is rugged with a peak elevation of 823 m at Monte Bove and the coastline is highly irregular with many fiords and bays (Kühnemann 1976). The Año Nuevo Islands are a group of islets with similar topography, north of Staten Island. The weather on both islands is cold with a mean temperature of 6–8 and –2–4°C during summer and winter, respectively. Oceanic humid winds are responsible for an annual rainfall of 2000 mm (Kühnemann 1976).

The survey was conducted from 12 November–9 December 1995. Counts were conducted by three experienced observers from a 12-m long sailboat (maximum 110 m off the coastline), a rubber boat and ground searching by foot when possible. Binoculars (10×50) and a 12–40× spotting scope were used for bird identification. The position of detected birds was obtained with a Global Positioning System (Garmin 50, GPS).

Thirty-seven different Striated Caracaras were observed at 12 locations along 196 km of coastline survey (68% of total island coastline, Fig. 1) for a linear density of one caracara for every 5.3 km. Two Andean Condors (*Vultur gryphus*), 17 Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*), one Grey Buzzard-Eagle (*Geranoaetus melanoleucus*), six Crested Ca-

racaras (*Caracara plancus*), and one Red-backed Hawk (*Buteo polyosoma*) were also observed during surveys. Striated Caracaras were the most abundant raptors accounting for 59% of total observations and were as common as Crested Caracaras in continental habitats (one individual for every 4.4 km; Travaini et al. 1995).

Crested Caracara and Turkey Vulture counts at Staten Island were similar to those obtained for the same species in Patagonia where linear densities were 40 and 14 km/individual, respectively (Travaini et al. 1995). Relative abundances for the other three raptor species we observed were quite low when compared to figures obtained in continental Patagonia where linear densities of Andean Condors, Grey Buzzard-Eagles, and Red-backed Hawks ranged between 40–60 km/individual (Donázar et al. 1993).

Striated Caracaras were more abundant in our study area than in the Peninsula Mitre in Tierra del Fuego (Clark 1984). All the Striated Caracaras we observed were at or in close proximity to colonies of marine mammals and seabirds. We observed 68 seabird and marine mammal colonies along 196 km of coastline at Staten and Año Nuevo Islands compared to only 12 colonies along 170 km of coastline at Peninsula Mitre, Tierra del Fuego (Parera et al. 1997, Schiavini unpubl. data). Differential availability of food sources could explain the higher abundance of Striated Caracaras. Staten and Año Nuevo Islands should be considered key areas to protect this geographically isolated raptorial species.

RESUMEN.—Aunque el estado de conservación del Carancho austral (*Phalcoboenus australis*) se considera incierto, la fuerte persecución de sus poblaciones por el hombre hace suponer que podría estar amenazada. Aquí describimos los resultados de un censo realizado para esta especie en Isla de los Estados e Islas de Año Nuevo (54°45'S, 64°98'W). Sobre un recorrido de 196 km, el 68% de la línea de costa total de las islas, se contaron 37 caranchos australes (un individuo cada 5.3 km). El carancho austral resultó ser la rapaz más abundante del área estudiada, alcanzando sus densidades valores similares al de poblaciones bien conservadas del Carancho común (*Caracara plancus*) en áreas continentales. La abundancia del Carancho austral registrada en nuestro estudio es de las más altas descritas para esta especie. La cantidad de colonias de aves y mamíferos marinos presentes en las islas y la fuerte asociación de la es-

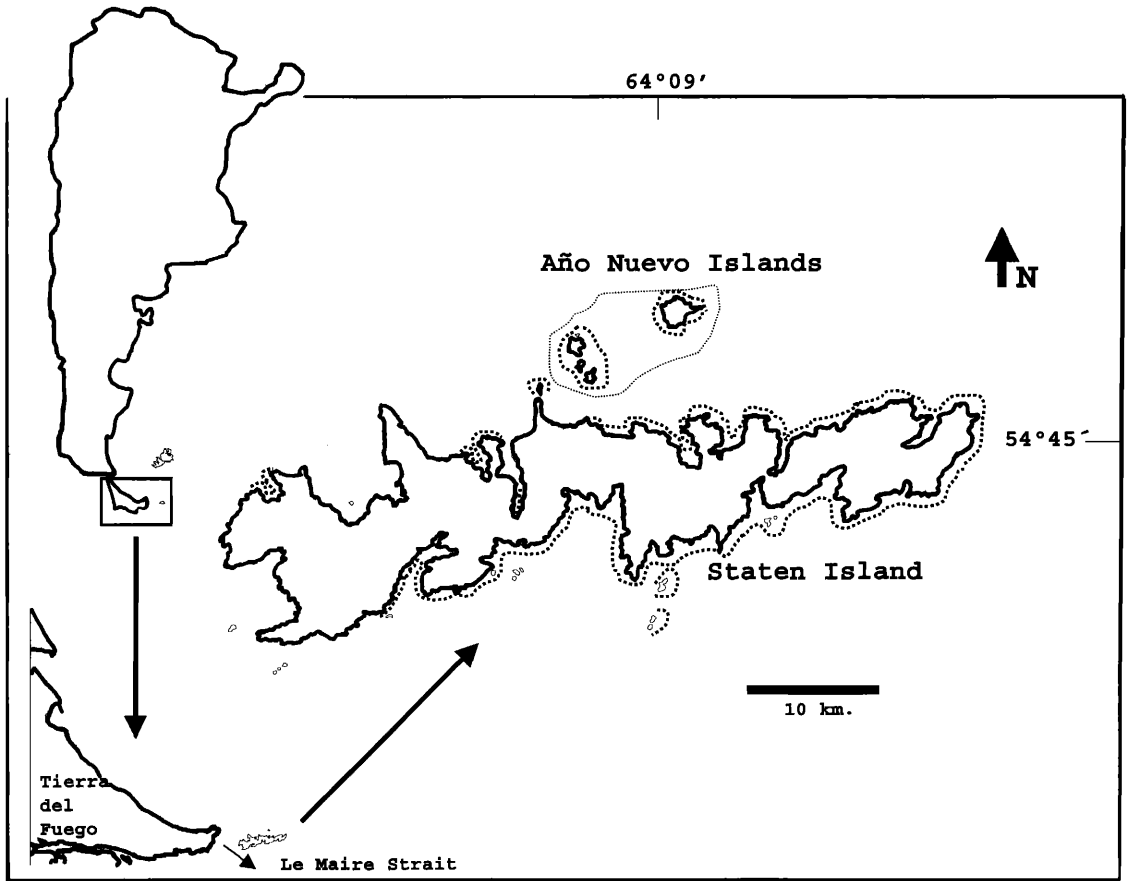


Figure 1. The location of Staten and Año Nuevo Islands. The dotted line shows the coastline that was surveyed.

pecie con estas colonias, parecen ser las causas del buen estado de conservación de la población de Carancho austral. Isla del los estados e Islas de Año Nuevo deben ser consideradas como áreas prioritarias para la conservación de esta especie.

[Traducción de Autores]

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