

The Least Pauraque in the Dominican Republic

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THE LEAST PAURAUQUE (*Siphonorhis brewsteri*) of Hispaniola has been known to science for 62 years. Rollo H. Beck collected the first specimen at Túbano (now known as Padre Las Casas) near Azua in the Dominican Republic February 10, 1917 (Beck, 1921). The specimen was described by Frank Chapman with the name *Microsiphonorhis brewsteri* that same year (Chapman, 1917). In 1924, E. Kaempfer also took three specimens near Túbano (Wetmore and Swales, 1931). In Haiti, the Least Pauraque was first identified from bones in cave deposits at L' Atalaye (Wetmore and Swales *ibid.*). In 1928, J. Bond assigned the species to the genus *Siphonorhis* (Bond, 1928).

In a letter to me dated September 13, 1972, James Bond related, "In 1928 I collected a series of this species on Gonave Island in addition to young and sets of eggs . . . I encountered many Greater Antillean Nightjars in Cuba and collected a set of eggs of this Caprimulgid on the Isle of Pines, but I heard this bird only once in Haiti, at an arid locality called Magasin Caries between Port-au-Prince and St. Marc. The Least Pauraque was there also."

I know of no other reports of the Least Pauraque from the Dominican Republic or Haiti between 1928 and 1969. Albert Schwartz of the Miami-Dade Community College, Florida, who has done extensive field work in the Dominican Republic from 1950 to 1977 in the disciplines of herpetology and ornithology, states in a letter October 7, 1977, that, "I know of no one other than myself and my parties who have worked in the Dominican Republic in the time span that you mention." He continued in another letter, "I have neither collected *Siphonorhis* nor any other Caprimulgid in either [the Dominican Republic or Haiti], not even in the places where Dr. Bond found them common in Haiti."

Charles Wood of the Department of Zoology, University of Vermont, worked

on wintering warblers in southwestern Haiti from 1974 through 1977. On November 21, 1977, he told me that he did not hear, see or collect any *Caprimulgidae* in Haiti in that period.

IN 1971, IN THE 14th supplement to the *Birds of the West Indies*, James Bond makes this note: "*Siphonorhis brewsteri*: Tape recordings of the voice obtained by George Reynard in a semi-arid region about 20 kilometers south of Monte-Cristi bordering on the Copey-Pepillo-Salcedo road." The date of this recording was March 29, 1969. This appears to be the first report of the existence of the endemic Least Pauraque of Hispaniola in 41 years.

My first contact with *S. brewsteri* occurred in August, 1972, when my husband and I were camping near Galindo, a small village in the Sierra de Martin Garcia, to the west of Azua and only about 40 kilometers from Padre Las Casas. At eventide at our camp, we heard a strange call perhaps best rendered orthographically as "To-ri-co, to-ri-co, to-ri-co." Never having heard this sound before, we recorded it. In the early morning, another call, a clear, rising whistle woke us, and in the light of a late moon we looked for the maker of the song. We saw something that flew like a giant moth, erratic and floppy, moving between the trees. That same morning, when charcoal makers working near our campsite arrived, they identified the singer as the "Torico" and described the bird so vividly that we had no difficulty in identifying it as the Least Pauraque. We had stumbled on another population of the unreported *S. brewsteri*!

After that trip we discovered the "Torico" in many different areas (Fig. 2) and were able to collect a specimen on the Mota Farm in Jarabacoa in April, 1975. The bird, a male, measured 203.1 mm long, the tail 107.6 mm, the bend of the wing to primaries 116.0 mm, and the culmen to base 10.7 mm. It is rufous-

brownish-gray above, with a mottled mixture of black, ecru and white. The underparts are barred and vermiculated with black, rufous, buffy and dirty white. There is a distinct white band on the throat. The particularly long tarsus is very noticeable.

MY HUSBAND AND I and George B. Reynard, who is associated with the Laboratory of Living Sound at Cornell University, have made many recordings of the Least Pauraque's voice since 1972. The species responds readily to the recordings of its own voice, and to whistled imitations of one of its various calls. Reynard has given the following analysis of its vocalizations:

"The first and most notable sound is the clear, continuous rising trill. Then there is the three-syllable phrase, adequately described by Bond as "Pau-ra-kay". A modification of this is also heard and has been recorded. It is a four-syllable sequence that says "Pau-ra-ra-kay". The three-syllable form is the most common, which has led to the local name of "To-ree-co." The rapidly uttered disturbance sounds "kaweck, weck, weck, weck, weck, weck" are somewhat rhythmic, but with irregular numbers of "wecks" given in any particular series. There are other sounds, too, of low intensity with a distant rising inflection. There are also scratchy, fricative sounds and something like the note of a small ground dove."

We have observed or heard the Least Pauraque in pine forests, broadleaf forests, and mixed forests from sea level up to an altitude of 800 meters. However, it is more abundant in dry areas at lower altitudes.

There are reasons why *Siphonorhis brewsteri* should be rare. Because it nests on the ground and roosts on or near the ground, it is subject to predation by introduced rats (*Rattus norvegicus* and *R. rattus*) and the mongoose (*Herpestes auro-punctatus*). However, man is the bird's worst enemy. In spite of the laws in the Dominican Republic that forbid the slashing and burning of any new area, these outdated agricultural methods are still used. Even though lumbering operations are officially prohibited, the bird's habitat is still threatened by widespread charcoal burning, for example. In Haiti the conditions are much



Fig. 1. Least Pauraque, Jarabacoa, Dominican Republic, April, 1975. Photo/A. S. Dod.

worse. In our thirteen years of study in the Sierra de Baoruco at the border between the two countries, my husband and I have watched the forests of the neighboring country diminish and the denuded hills become dry and bare. From a plane, one can tell where the Dominican Republic ends and where Haitian territory begins by the disappearance of the forest.

GIVEN THE MANY LOCALITIES from which this species is hereby reported for the first time, it becomes evident that the Least Pauraque has either gone unnoticed for several decades or has greatly increased its range since the 1920s. There is also the possibility that the almost complete destruction of its habitat in Haiti has increased the population in the Dominican Republic as

birds from Haiti have moved east to Dominican forests. On the other hand, it should be noted that none of the explorations by Beck, Abbott, Peters, Bond or Wetmore ever reached most areas in which we have discovered this bird. In all likelihood, it was there all along.

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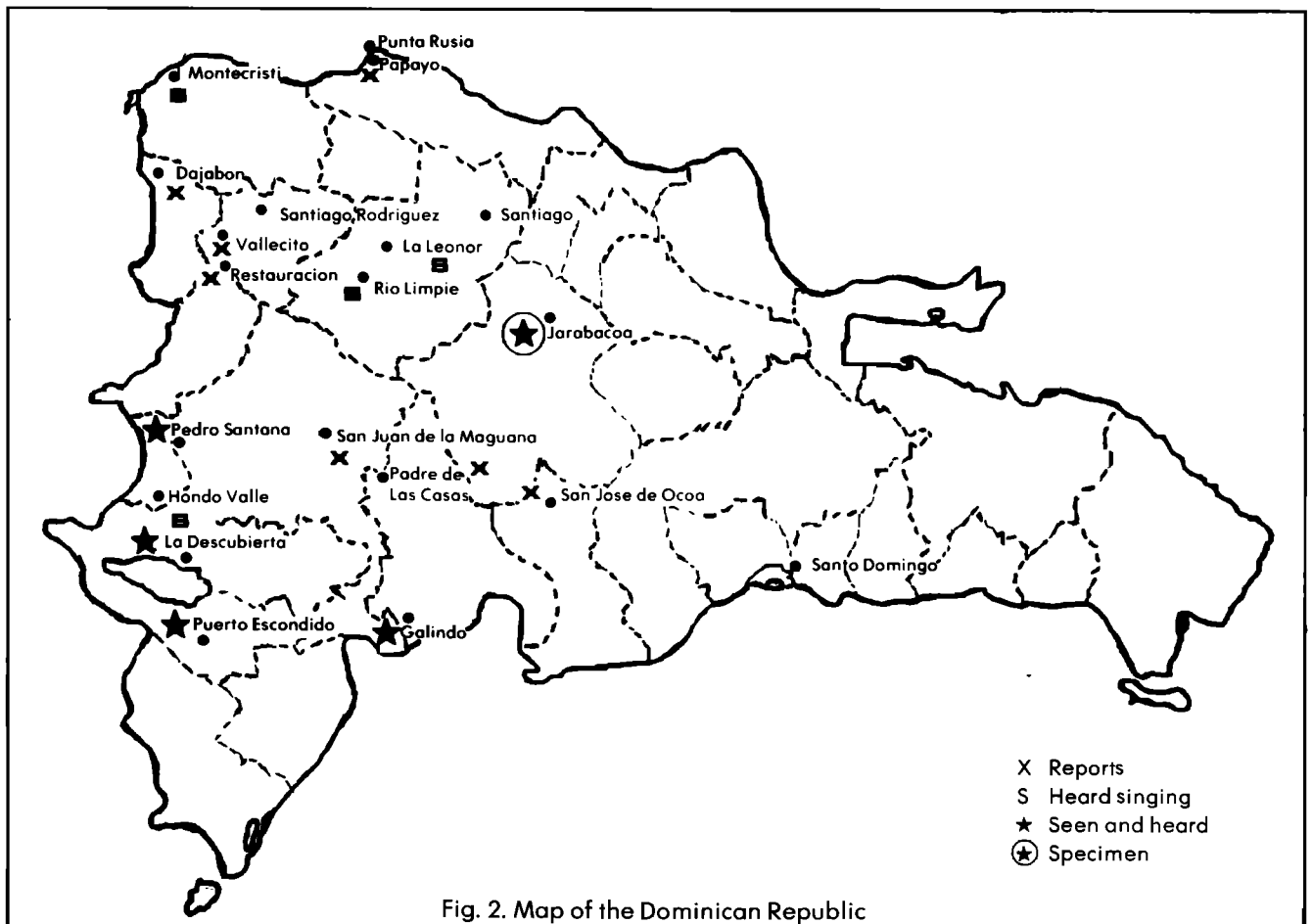


Fig. 2. Map of the Dominican Republic