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FIRST RECORD OF THE LEAST SEEDSNIPE *THINOCORUS RUMICIVORUS* IN THE ANTARCTIC

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The four species of seedsnipes (Thinocoridae) are endemic to the Neotropical region, inhabiting Patagonia and the Andean zone (Fjeldså 1996). The known distribution of the Least Seedsnipe (*Thinocorus rumicivorus*) includes the lowlands of SW Ecuador and extreme NW Peru (subsp. *pallidus*), the desert coast of Peru (*cunpicauda*), the altiplano from S Peru through N Chile and W Bolivia to NW Argentina (Jujuy; *bolivianus*), and the Patagonian steppe south to S Isla Grande (Tierra del Fuego; *rumicivorus*); the latter subspecies migrates to C Chile and the plains of NE Argentina and Uruguay during the austral autumn and winter (Humphrey *et al.* 1970, Narosky & Yzurieta 1987, Fjeldså 1996). In addition, *T. rumicivorus* has been recorded several times as an apparent vagrant and suspected breeder in the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands, where it is very rare (Woods 1988). Elsewhere, the Least Seedsnipe is generally common throughout its extensive range.

Harmony Point (Nelson Island: 62º19'S, 59º10'W), with an approximate surface of 12 km^2, is one of the most important breeding places in the South Shetland Islands. Surveys carried out during 1995–96 summer season indicate a total of 11 breeding species, being Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua* (3,300 pairs), Chinstrap Penguin *P. antarctica* (90,000), Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus* (740), Pintado Petrel *Daption capense* (480) and Storm Petrels *Oceanites oceanicus* and *Fregetta tropica* (10^3) the most abundant in the area (Silva *et al.* in press., see Favero *et al.* 1991).

On 1 December 1996, while performing a transect census along the coast at Harmony Point, we observed a solitary Least Seedsnipe resting near the shoreline. This was an adult male characterised by a uniform grey face, neck, and breast, and by black lines forming an inverted T on the centre of the throat and

FIG. 1. Least Seedsnipe male at Harmony Point, Nelson Island, South Shetland Islands, 1 December 1996. Photograph by M. Favero.

upper breast. The bird was found during the three succeeding days near the shore, apparently in good condition and pecking on the extensive moss surfaces present in the area (Fig. 1).

Seedsnipes have not been previously reported in the Antarctic. Prior to our report, the southernmost record of the Least Seedsnipe was apparently a small chick observed by Jehl & Rumboll (1976: 149) at Ea. La Indiana, south-eastern Isla Grande on 25 January 1975, about 1000 km to the north of our field site on Nelson Island. In Patagonia, to judge from known egg dates (Fjeldså 1996), *Thinocorus rumicivorus* is known to breed approximately from August until February; thus its occurrence on Nelson Island in December coincides with the approximate middle of the breeding season.

The Least Seedsnipe may now be added to the list of several bird species, including some shorebirds, swans and egrets, that are widely distributed in the southern part of South America and that also occur as vagrants in the Antarctic. Among others, the White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* was seen in the South Shetland Islands at Livingston (Gajardo & Yañez 1982), Nelson and King George Islands (Bannasch *et al.* 1984, Bannasch 1984, Trivelpiece *et al.* 1987, Lange & Naumann 1990, Silva *et al.* 1995). Black-necked Swans *Cygnus melancorhyphus* have been reported at Charlotte Channel (64°40'S)(Bennett 1922), South Shetland Islands and other localities in the Antarctic Peninsula (Lazo & Yañez 1989, Parmelee & Fraser 1989, Lange & Naumann 1990, Favero *et al.* 1991, Silva *et al.* 1995). Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* were

reported in the Antarctica at South Orkney Islands (Rootes 1988), South Shetland Islands (Schlatter & Duarte 1979, Torres *et al.* 1986, Trivelpiece *et al.* 1987, Lange & Naumann 1990, Favero *et al.* 1991, Silva *et al.* 1995) and Argentine Islands (Prince & Croxall 1983). Among the explanations for vagrancy offered by the above cited authors, the most common cause seems to be exceptional weather conditions that force birds to move out of their normal distribution. We hypothesise that the same explanation may account for the occurrence of *Thinocorus rumicivorus* in the South Shetland Islands.

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