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SHORT-COMMUNICATION

First record of Corncrake *Crex crex* (Rallidae) for South America

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ABSTRACT: A juvenile Corncrake *Crex crex* was photographed on Fernando de Noronha Island on 28 November 2012. The reservoir where the bird was found also held two male Pintails *Anas acuta*, also photographed. Fernando de Noronha is a known locality for vagrants from the Palearctic and/or Africa, *Crex crex* being an addition to a growing list.

KEY-WORDS: *Anas acuta*, Brazil, Corncrake, *Crex crex*, Fernando de Noronha, vagrancy

The Corncrake *Crex crex* is a strongly migratory rail with a broad Palearctic breeding range including a broad swathe from coastal north-western Europe to Sinkiang in Western China (Taylor 1998). In those countries Corncrakes inhabit tall pastures and meadows, including hay fields, both dry and wet, with a preference for cooler and damper habitats with dense grass and herb cover 20-50 cm high (Taylor 1998). The conversion of such areas, formerly used for extensive grazing and to produce hay, into intensive, mechanised agriculture has led to a serious decline of the species throughout western Europe (BirdLife International 2004).

After the breeding season Corncrakes migrate mostly to eastern Africa (Walther *et al.* 2012), but there are sparse records covering most of the continent and vagrants have been found in Tibet, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Australia (Bräulich & Rank 1998, Taylor 1998). A few birds sometimes cross the Atlantic, with several records in the eastern seaboard of North America from Newfoundland, New Scotia, St. Pierre et Miquelon, Maine, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Bermuda and Greenland (AOU 1998). Here we present the first record of Corncrake for Brazil and South America (*cf.* SACC 2013).

The islands of Fernando de Noronha and associated islets lie 350 km from the South American mainland, the nearest point being the coast of Rio Grande do Norte. The archipelago is made of 21 islands and stacks summing up to 26 km^2. The main island, the only inhabited one, is about 11 km long and three wide, and mostly protected by a national park and the Atlantic Forest Biosphere Reserve, its main peculiarities being the remnants of a very dry, Caatinga-like, insular Atlantic forest and the sole mangrove on an oceanic island in South Atlantic (MMA/IBAMA 2005, Silva e Silva 2008). The main island also holds the Açude do Xaréu (03°51'60"S; 32°25'42"W), near Baía do Sueste (Figure 1); one of the very few freshwater reservoirs in all the islands, and where birds and other fauna congregate.

On 28 November 2012, K. B. visited Açude do Xaréu with the aim of photographing Northern Pintails *Anas acuta* known to be in the area. This is a vagrant already recorded for this site (Silva e Silva & Olmos 2006) and apparently a regular visitor to Fernando de Noronha. These ducks are very wary of people in this area, requiring a stealthy and slow approach. This allowed the observation and photographic records of one adult male in breeding plumage and another still leaving eclipse (Figure 2).

The pintails were scared by an approaching vehicle and took flight, causing K. B. to stand up. In doing so, he noticed a bird walking fast, but without trying to fly, from the plant-covered reservoir to the surrounding forest and scrub about 15 m from his position. Realising it was a rail, he quickly made a sequence of nine digital photographs before the bird disappeared into the vegetation.

The images were recorded at 10 h 35 min (local time) with a Nikon D300 DSLR camera equipped with a Nikkor 400 mm f/2.8 telephoto lens with a Nikkor TC-17E II 1.7x teleconverter (resulting in an effective

focal length 1,020mm), tripod and GPS Nikon GP-1. The original files were generated in the Nikon proprietary format NEF, also known a digital negative or "raw file". The geographic coordinates from the Nikon GP-1 (connected to the camera thru a cable) were directly recorded/embedded into the source-code of the NEF file, making it a trustworthy source of information regarding the site where the photographs were taken.

This is the first record of *Crex crex* for South America. The photographed individual (Figures 3 to 5) shows little or no grey in its plumage, suggesting a juvenile bird on its first migration. The sunken chest seen in

FIGURE 1. Açude do Xaréu in November 2012 during the dry season. Photo by K. B.

FIGURE 2: Adult male Pintail *Anas acuta* photographed on 28 November 2012 at Açude do Xaréu, Fernando de Noronha. Photos by K. B.

the photograph shows a low fat reserve, suggesting the bird was busy looking for food in the sole wetland of an otherwise dry island.

Fernando de Noronha has previously attracted several Palaearctic and African vagrants (*e.g.* Silva e Silva & Olmos 2006), *Crex crex* now joining this interesting group. Despite *C. crex* being a long distance migrant, Fernando de Noronha lies close to commercial shipping routes, so the possibility of this bird being ship assisted for all or part of its journey cannot be excluded.

FIGURE 3. Immature Corncrake *Crex crex* photographed on 28 November 2012 at the shore of Açude do Xaréu, Fernando de Noronha. Photo by K. B.

FIGURE 4. Immature Corncrake *Crex crex* photographed on 28 November 2012 on the shore of Açude do Xaréu, Fernando de Noronha. Photo by K. B.

FIGURE 5. Immature Corncrake *Crex crex* photographed on 28 November 2012 on the shore of Açude do Xaréu, Fernando de Noronha. Photo by K. B.

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