

PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS

Dwarf Olive Ibis *Bostrychia bocagei*

Sao Tome Fiscal *Lanius newtoni*

Sao Tome Grosbeak *Neospiza concolor*



**Associação dos
Biólogos
Santomenses**

Left: Dwarf Olive Ibis (© Nik Borrow/www.rarebirdseyearbook.com); right: Sao Tome Fiscal (© Jonathan Roussow/www.rarebirdseyearbook.com); below: Sao Tome Grosbeak (© Martim Melo/www.rarebirdseyearbook.com).

Background

The island of São Tomé, in the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, is situated in the Gulf of Guinea about 250km off the coast of Gabon. Of the islands' numerous endemic bird species three are regarded as Critically Endangered: Dwarf Olive Ibis, Sao Tome Fiscal and Sao Tome Grosbeak. These forest-dwelling species are all poorly known and confined to tiny areas of suitable habitat. Habitat is under threat from farming and tree-cutting, which are increasing owing to land privatisation and road developments. Introduced Mona Monkey, African Civet, rats and weasels are all potential predators.

Dwarf Olive Ibis: Until a confirmed sighting was made in 1990, this diminutive forest ibis was known only from historical records and the anecdotal accounts of hunters. The species has since been recorded at a number of sites, and the population is estimated to exceed 50 individuals. Currently, the most serious threat to the species is hunting; with 16 birds reportedly killed in 1996-1997 alone.

Sao Tome Fiscal: This long-tailed shrike of primary lowland and mid-altitude forest was previously known from just two records in 1888 and 1928. However, in 1990, it was rediscovered in the Rio Xufexufe catchment, south-west São Tomé. It has since been found at additional sites in the centre and south-east of the island.

Sao Tome Grosbeak: A large, stocky finch with a massive bill, the Sao Tome Grosbeak was, until recently, known from just one 19th century specimen. It was rediscovered in 1991, close to the Rio Xufexufe. Although there have been a number of subsequent sightings, this unobtrusive canopy species remains poorly known.

Actions being implemented

1. A **protected area** has been set up, the Parque Natural d'Obo de São Tomé. This legally safeguards the primary forest that is crucial to all three critical species.
2. The species' primary **threats have been identified** as the growth of oil palm plantations, and hunting. Dialogue has been opened with Agripalm, who are interested in conversion for oil palm growth within the protected area; ABS are working to prevent this from happening.
3. Research and monitoring have produced basic **distributional information and survey data** for the three species, which was not previously available and will act as a baseline for future monitoring. Dwarf Olive Ibis is the best-known of the three in terms of ecology and threats.



Alexandra Lopes of SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal) giving a talk on ecotourism to members of the Associação dos Biólogos Santomenses (© ABS).

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