

In Venezuela, Large-billed Seed Finch is typically a lowland species (0–500 m) of open and semi-open grassy areas with scattered bushes and patches of tall grass, frequently near water, as well as grassy forest edges with second growth, clearings, cultivation, and seasonally flooded areas with bushes, trees and grass<sup>6,8,13</sup>. It is scarce<sup>13</sup> with scattered records throughout the country<sup>6,8,9,11,16</sup>. However, recent sightings with photographic evidence, in addition to an exhaustive search of bibliographic, museum and online resources has revealed important new data concerning the altitudinal and geographical distribution of the species of Venezuela.

#### Altitudinal range extension

An adult male Large-billed Seed Finch was seen three times, between 29 July and 1 August 2016, at 900–1,030 m, in the south-east suburbs of Caracas, on the road to Caserío Los Naranjos, El Hatillo, Miranda state, northern Venezuela (10°26'10"N 66°47'46"W). The first record was on 29 July, at 07h30, when the bird suddenly emerged from dense Guinea grass *Megathyrsus maximus* (Poaceae) beside a road at 1,030 m. It was with Yellow-bellied Seedeaters *Sporophila nigricollis*, Black-faced Grassquits *Tiaris bicolor* and Blue-black Grassquits *Volatinia jacarina*. It flitted between grass stems, then quickly disappeared. A small watercourse (quebrada Santa Rosa) runs close by (<15 m), with a narrow riparian forest fringing it. The second record was on 30 July (07h40) when the bird was alone at 980 m, singing atop a *Cecropia peltata*. After a few seconds, it flew off. The third record was on 1 August (08h20) at 900 m, in tall grass surrounded by a few Avocado *Persea americana* trees and herbaceous plants, e.g. *Leonotis nepetifolia* (Lamiaceae), *Gronovia scandens* (Loasaceae) and *Oyedaea verbesinoides* (Asteraceae), growing in a residential area. It was observed for ten minutes and photographed (Fig. 1), searching for *Rottboelia cochinchinensis*

seeds, a grass species also present at the other localities. As Large-billed Seed Finch is a highly prized cagebird<sup>2–5,13</sup>, the bird could have been released. Nonetheless, a female was seen on 25 August, perched on a *Verbesina caracasana* (Asteraceae) bush, weakening the cagebird hypothesis. Some authors<sup>12</sup> have noted that lowland avifauna increase their altitudinal range following anthropogenic upland deforestation. Irrespective of the present record's provenance, it represents the highest altitude published for the country.

#### Updated distribution

Large-billed Seed Finch is patchily distributed in Venezuela<sup>6</sup>. However, a review of bibliographic and online resources, as well as local ornithological collections suggests that the species' status in the country might be more favourable than is generally

#### Altitudinal and geographical range extension for Large-billed Seed Finch *Sporophila crassirostris* in Venezuela, with a review of the species' range in country

Large-billed Seed Finch *Sporophila crassirostris* occurs in northern South America, from north-east Peru through Ecuador to northern Colombia, Venezuela, northern Brazil and the Guianas<sup>14,15</sup>. Never abundant, it is locally fairly common in Colombia<sup>7</sup>, scarce in Ecuador, Guyana and Surinam, but increasingly rare in the latter two countries<sup>13</sup>; rare in Peru<sup>17</sup>, and very rare in French Guiana<sup>13</sup>. It mainly inhabits lowland grassland with scattered trees and bushes near water, marshes and wet areas with tall sedges and grasses, as well as farmland, and savannas with tangled vegetation<sup>15</sup> at 0–700 m, although a Colombian record (1,000 m)<sup>7</sup> suggests it could reach 1,100 m<sup>15</sup>.



Figure 1. Male Large-billed Seed Finch *Sporophila crassirostris*, quebrada Santa Rosa, Caserío Los Naranjos, Municipio El Hatillo, south-east of Caracas, northern Venezuela, 1 August 2016 (Carlos Vereá)

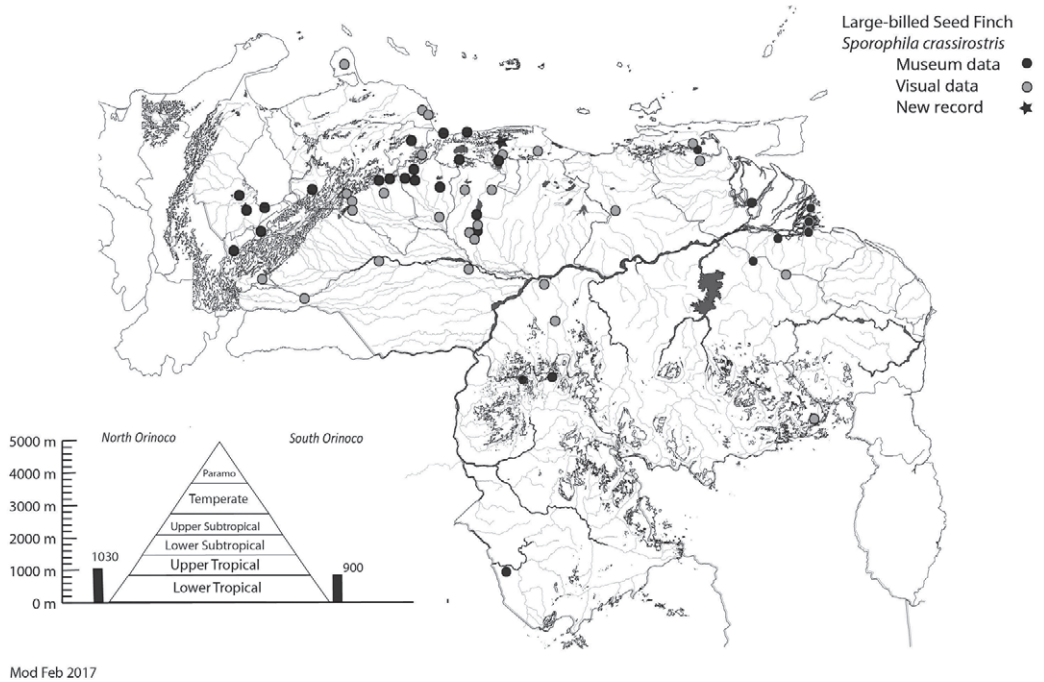


Figure 2. Distribution in Venezuela of Large-billed Seed Finch *Sporophila crassirostris* based on museum and field data.

perceived. Online data were obtained from the Macaulay Library, Audubon and Cornell Lab of Ornithology (Ithaca, New York, USA) and Xeno-canto (Netherlands) accessed via the Macaulay Library (<http://macaulaylibrary.org>; ML), eBird (<http://ebird.org>) and xeno-canto ([www.xeno-canto.org](http://www.xeno-canto.org); XC) portals, respectively. From these, sight records within the range of *S. maximiliani* in eastern Venezuela (Sucre, Delta Amacuro) were excluded because they were undocumented. Foreign museum data were obtained via ORNIS (<http://ornisnet.org>). Phelps & Phelps (1963) was used as a baseline, and augmented with subsequently published data<sup>6,8,13,16</sup>. Museum and online data were added thereafter. Museum data are indicated by the relevant acronym and registration number. Other acronyms are as follows: COP = Phelps Ornithological Collection, Caracas; MHNLS = La Salle Natural History Museum, Caracas; MEBRG = Rancho Grande

Biological Station Museum, Maracay; CM = Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh; AMNH = American Museum of Natural History, New York; and FMNH = Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago. Distributional data are organised separately north and south of the Orinoco. Within parentheses, localities are separated by semicolons.

Including the new record above, the species' distribution in Venezuela is as follows (Fig. 2). **North of the Orinoco** (0–1,030 m): Andean foothills in southern Zulia<sup>6,8,11</sup> (Santa Bárbara<sup>11</sup>; Lago de Maracaibo: Guachi, CM P90909; Catatumbo: Campamento El Rosario, MHNLS 9397), north-west Mérida<sup>6,11</sup> (El Vigía<sup>11</sup>), south-west Trujillo<sup>6,11</sup> (Escuque<sup>11</sup>), Táchira<sup>6,8</sup> (Las Mesas, COP 68605; east slope<sup>6</sup>), west Barinas (San Silvestre: Hato Doña Barbara, G. Carpentier eBird checklist S13437550, and B. Washburn eBird checklist S7420803) and Portuguesa<sup>6</sup> (Biscucuy, P. Carrillo eBird checklist S27487982; Turen: near Río Cojedes, P. Schwartz

ML63522; Los Hierros: Embalse Tucupido, F. Mariño eBird checklist S30684447; Sipororo: PDVSA facility, J. Miranda eBird checklist S25954851; Acarigua: Finca Chaira, COP 80029). Northern range in Falcón<sup>6</sup> (Morrocoy National Park, A. Topo eBird checklist S28463972; Cerro Misión<sup>6</sup>; Cerro Santa Ana: Moruy, L. Moran eBird checklist S28471574), Coastal Cordillera in Yaracuy (Nirgua, P. Carrillo eBird checklist S22608907; Aroa: Finca El Jaguar, MEBRG 11382), northern Carabobo<sup>6,8,11</sup> (San Esteban National Park: San Esteban<sup>11</sup>; El Trompillo, CM P46983), Aragua<sup>6,8,11</sup> (Henri Pittier National Park: Cata<sup>6,11,16</sup>), Miranda (Guatopo National Park: Casupito, J. V. Remsen eBird checklist S14701504; El Hatillo: quebrada Santa Rosa; Aniagua, D. García eBird checklist S31024376), and Sucre (south Guaraunos, FMNH 339668 and P. Coopmans ML40476). Llanos in Apure (Guasdalito, P. Schwartz ML63530–31; San Fernando, G. Carpentier eBird checklist

S13373923), Cojedes<sup>6</sup> (San Carlos: Río Mapurite, MEBRG 7806 and P. Schwartz ML63519–20; El Baul: Hato Piñero, M. Andersen eBird checklist S3778885, and G. Lasley eBird checklist S17308419; Galerías del Pao, MEBRG 7828; Las Vegas: Hato Itabana, MHNLS 8094; Fundo La Leona, MHNLS 8287), west Guarico<sup>6</sup> (El Sombrero, P. Schwartz ML63519; Corozo Pando: Hato Masaguaral, P. Schwartz ML63523, 63525–29, 63532; Hato Flores Moradas, MEBRG 754; Hacienda La Fe, C. Sharpe pers. comm.; Calabozo–San Fernando highway, J. Sapiroa eBird checklist S7160624; Guaitoco: west Río Tiznados, P. Schwartz ML63521), west Anzoátegui (Pariaguán, J. Miranda eBird checklist S9533516), and north-east Monagas<sup>6</sup> (Caño Colorado, P. Boesman XC227037 and H. Matheve XC202338). Delta Amacuro<sup>6,11</sup> (Jobure<sup>11</sup>; north-east Tucupita: Hacienda Palo Blanco, COP 69091; San Francisco de Guayo: Misión Guayo, COP 48299; El Toro: Río Aicoma, MHNLS 11507; Río Amacuro, COP 67335). **South of the Orinoco** (0–900 m): Amazonas<sup>6,8,11</sup> (El Platanal: Caño Parucito<sup>11</sup>; San Juan de Manapiare<sup>11</sup>; Solano: Río Casiquiare, AMNH 433623); north-west Bolívar from near Caicara del Orinoco<sup>6,8</sup> (Las Guacas<sup>11,11</sup>; Quiribana de Caicara, AMNH 514247) east to Sierra de Imataca<sup>11</sup> (El Palmar<sup>11</sup>; Santa Fe, D. García eBird checklist S32607909); and Santa Elena de Uairén<sup>6</sup>.

Thirty-nine new localities were identified. El Sombrero (Guárico) is based on P. Schwartz's comment (ML63519): '... same bird with a different "pitador", this one from El Sombrero'. A 'pitador' is a captive bird, whose singing is used to attract wild birds by bird traders. Embalse Tucupido (Portuguesa) was originally called Embalse La Coromoto (eBird checklist S30684447). Also, San Sylvestre (eBird checklist S13437550) = San Sylvestre; Guaraunes (ML40476) = Guaraunos; and Siroporo (eBird checklist S25954851) = Sipororo. Hato Masaguaral, Hato Flores

Moradas, Hacienda La Fe and the Calabozo–San Fernando highway all pertain to the Corozo Pando area. The highway locality is 6.5 km south of Hacienda La Fe. Claims of occurrence in central Táchira, central Mérida and eastern Trujillo<sup>8</sup> are imprecise, and do not match older<sup>9,11</sup> or recent data<sup>6</sup>. The basis for including eastern Táchira<sup>6</sup> in the range is unknown, but presumably relates to a sight record. South of the Orinoco, the species was previously known only to 200 m<sup>6,13</sup>, but Santa Elena de Uairén is at 900 m. Based on the available data (Fig. 2), the new record from El Hatillo fills an important gap in the Large-billed Seed Finch's range in north-central Venezuela.

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