

## Biodiversity and Conservation efforts for the *Saltator rufiventris*

### Species Description

*Saltator rufiventris* (*S. rufiventris*)

is a species of bird found in locations throughout the east Andes region of Argentina and Bolivia. This species is not a migratory bird, so it is present in the region year round. *S.*

*rufiventris* is approximately 22 cm in size and has a primarily bluish-grey body with a rust

colored chest and belly. The bill is dark in color, and its eyes are a reddish or amber and set under a long white eyebrow marking (Collar et al., 1992). The females have the same coloring as the males, but are slightly lighter. The name of the species comes from the reddish, or rufous, color of the birds belly. *S. rufiventris* is primarily a berry and seed eating bird. It can be identified by its warbled song and loud, high-pitched call (Species factsheet: *Saltator rufiventris*, 2014). The species has been described as lethargic, and can easily conceal itself in vegetation. It is estimated that the average lifespan for this species is about 4 years (Stotz, 1996),



Properly identifying *S. rufiventris* is relatively easy due to the fact that the only other species in the area similar is the Cochabamba Mountain-finch. While the coloring is almost identical, it is much smaller than *S. rufiventris*, and the identifiable white marking above the eye is not present (Species factsheet: *Saltator rufiventris*, 2014).

### Ecology and Role

*S. rufiventris* has been sighted in a variety of areas ranging from dense shrubby habitats to *Polylepis* or *Alnus* dominated forests in Argentina (Mazar et al., 1997). While unusual, *S. rufiventris* populations have been spotted on high slopes



in open, grassy areas. The low shrubs and full canopy of the trees help conceal the species. The diversity in location sightings is unique to the Argentinian populations, as the Bolivian populations have primarily been spotted exclusively in *Polylepis* woodland areas. Habitats are primarily located in the temperate zones of the east Andes around 2,500-4,000 m in elevation (Stotz, 1996). No data has been provided that states any special role that *S. rufiventris* provides to their environment. However, as a primarily seed eating bird, the species helps aid in seed dispersal through its feces. This in turn helps spread seeds of crucial, native trees throughout the area, which helps maintain healthy ecosystem function.

### Species Population Status

While exact global population sizes are unknown, it has been calculated that populations outside of Cochabamba, Bolivia are thought to exceed 10,000 birds (Species factsheet: *Saltator rufiventris*, 2014). Because *S. rufiventris* populations cannot be found on every fragmented patch, collecting data on population sizes becomes more difficult. Due to increased development in habitat areas, and the variety of habitat environments where this species has been previously found, not much data exists.

### Current and Historic Range



*S. rufiventris* can be found in the east Andes of La Paz, Cochabamba, Potosí, Chuquisaca, Tarija in Bolivia, and Salta and Jujuy region located in Argentina (Species factsheet: *Saltator rufiventris*, 2014). It is estimated that the extent of residence of this species is roughly 25,400 km<sup>2</sup> (Species factsheet: *Saltator rufiventris*, 2014). An increase in fieldwork has resulted in sightings in additional locations outside existing documented population areas. It is hopeful that with further research and fieldwork, more sightings will be documented (Species factsheet: *Saltator rufiventris*, 2014). While a slow decline is believed to be occurring primarily due to habitat loss, no data regarding the exact rate of decline for the species or habitat currently exists.

Range Map for *S. rufiventris*  
<http://www.sib.gov.ar/>

### Legal Status

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) currently classifies *S. rufiventris* as a 'near threatened' species, with the population trend indicating a decreasing population. This species has been actively monitored since 1988, with the 'near threatened' classification given in 2004 ( IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, 2014). Classifications are determined using data collection and research that is provided for each species. BirdLife International is the primary contributor for data regarding information on listed bird species (IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, 2014).

### Natural History and Ecology

*S. rufiventris* is currently categorized as a saltator residing in the *Cardinalidae* family. However recently, the Louisiana State University Museum made a petition to the South

American Classification Committee to change the family categorization to the *Thraupidae* or tanager family. It is believed that due to the population distribution in the high-slopes and humid regions of the Andes, this species more closely resembled the tanager rather than a saltator. When categorized, it was perceived that this species most resembled songbirds such as the cardinal, but through further data collection and study, it is now believed that it most resembles *Dubusia castaneoventris*, commonly known as the Chestnut-bellied Mountain Tanager, which is part of the *Thraupidae* family (Proposal to South American Classification Committee, 2010).

### Major Species Threats

The primary threats to *S. rufiventris* is habitat loss, ecosystem degradation, and land fragmentation as a result of the development of commercial and agricultural plots. The most common being; non-timber crops, livestock and ranching, land for grazing stock, farming and wood and pulp plantations (Stotz, 1999).

Fragmentation of land is such a serious threat to this species because it separates the existing populations by taking a large section of land and dividing it up into smaller patches. The surrounding areas around these patches, called edges, are degraded areas that are more susceptible to the elements, invasive species, lower biodiversity, and higher temperatures and humidity (Primack, 2010). Because biodiversity is usually very low, the necessary resources are not available for *S. rufiventris* to maintain large populations. With an increase in development, more of these patches are being created, and less species are able to adapt and survive.

### Development in Conservation

Currently the only active conservation efforts occurring for this species are monitoring population decline, and overall data collection on the species. Habitat data is being collected, and is crucial in order to provide a more thorough understanding of what plant and trees species *S. rufiventris* depends on for survival (Species factsheet: *Saltator rufiventris*, 2014). Knowing the rate of decline of both the species as well as the habitat loss will help understand the severity of the species loss, and help create conservation plans. It is important that large, unfragmented areas where plant species crucial for the survival of *S. rufiventris* are preserved. In addition, any threats other than those that are habitat related are being documented. This includes any unknown predators that this species may have. With a larger collection of data and knowledge of this species, a more complete and comprehensive conservation plan can be created (Species factsheet: *Saltator rufiventris*, 2014).

### Resource Information

Information on this species was hard to locate. Many sources were found on the Species Factsheet provided by birdlife international, however it was difficult to locate the primary sources on my own. I attempted locating them through the library resources as well as Google Scholar. I was able to find a bit of information in the book by Stotz, as well as the book by Collar, however they took a while to arrive to our library once reserved. The Stotz book was only available to borrow from Portland State University, and offered very little information in the form of two tables in the book.

### References

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