

Four bird species new to Surinam

A total of 727 bird species are currently known for Surinam. In 1994 the figure was only 668³. The 59 'new' species represent a mix of older, previously overlooked records or recent discoveries. Many large areas of the country have still never been visited by ornithologists, suggesting that the total could increase substantially in the future. Here we report four recent additions to the national list, two of them documented photographically.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

On 31 March 2009 FCJ, SR & OO observed a Merlin in north-west Tambaredjo, south of Coppename Monding Nature Reserve, between the Atlantic Ocean and the River Saramacca (05°57'N 55°37'W). It flew several times over the observers' heads before landing on a nearby electricity wire. The bird

was about the size of a Bat Falcon *Falco rufigularis*, but its plumage was quite different. OO is familiar with *F. columbarius* from the Netherlands. The species was not mentioned for Surinam by Haverschmidt & Mees³ or Hilty⁴, but Restall *et al.*⁶ mentioned it as being rare in all three of the Guianas. However, we are unaware of any previous record in Surinam. The South American Checklist Committee (www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCCountryLists.html) considers Merlin's status as 'hypothetical' in Guyana and as a 'migrant' in French Guiana.

Burrowing Owl *Athene cunicularia*

On 7 March 2007 a lone Burrowing Owl was seen at the international airport, in the Zanderij savannas 50 km south of Paramaribo (05°27'N 55°10'W), by K-DBD, and confirmed by OO *et al.* It perched on a lamp beside the runway and the runway itself. On 11 March, it was photographed by FCJ in the same place (Fig. 1), and on 17 March the same observer watched the bird again, it being apparently unconcerned by nearby air traffic. The species was not mentioned for Surinam by Haverschmidt & Mees³, Hilty⁴ or Restall *et al.*⁶, and was only recently (on 27 August 2006) found in French Guiana, initially near Kourou (c.04°59'N 52°35'W), but subsequently also near Sinnamary (c.05°24'N 53°03'W).



Figure 1 Burrowing Owl *Athene cunicularia*, Zanderij savannas, south of Paramaribo, Surinam, March 2007 (Foek Chin Joe)

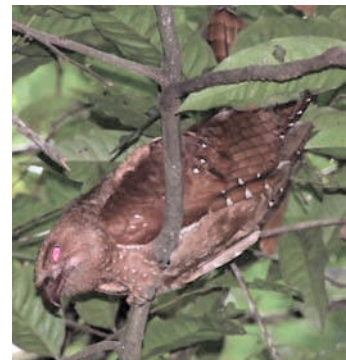


Figure 2. Oilbird *Steatornis caripensis*, Brownsberg Nature Reserve, Surinam, 28 March 2008 (Paul Ouboter)

Oilbird *Steatornis caripensis*

On 28 March 2008 an Oilbird was photographed (Fig. 2) by PO in Brownsberg Nature Reserve, on the trail towards Witi Creek c.1 km from the plateau, at an altitude of c.400 m. The bird was perched in a tree c.6 m above ground and was continuously moving the body slightly down and back. It was discovered at 08h50 and was still present at 14h30. Oilbirds sometimes perch in trees at night and occasionally roost in the open, including in palm trees¹, but this bird's choice of roost site seems distinctly unusual on current knowledge. The species was not previously mentioned for Surinam^{3,4,6,7}. Oilbirds are known to wander post-breeding⁴. In Caripe (Venezuela), one of the closest known breeding colonies, breeding commences in late March⁴, making the bird photographed in Surinam somewhat unlikely to be on post-breeding dispersal, although the bird might have originated from another cave at which the breeding season is different. There are caves in Brownsberg, which might be suitable for Oilbirds to breed, but this bird could still have been on dispersal or wandering, when birds might not always locate a suitable cave for roosting. Likewise, where forests have been heavily fragmented, it may not be possible for Oilbirds to return to the breeding cave at the end of each night, and in such situations they may resort to day-roosting in trees⁵.

Amazonian Black Tyrant*Knipolegus poecilocercus*

On 26 September 2005 a male *K. poecilocercus* was observed by OO near Kabalebo airstrip, <10 m from the Kabalebo River in várzea forest (04°41'N 57°22'W). The bird was all black including the eyes and legs, whilst the bill was lead grey. The bird was seen several times during the following days and was never found >1 m above ground in the rather dense vegetation. It jumped up c.20 cm from a horizontal stem close to the ground, made a 'back flip' and landed on the same spot while

making a ticking sound, which display was described by Hilty⁴ and Ridgely & Tudor⁷. The species was not previously mentioned for Surinam^{3,4,6,7}.

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