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THE RUFIOUS-VENTED CHACHALACA (*ORTALIS RUFICAUDA*) IN THE WEST INDIES

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THE RUFIOUS-VENTED CHACHALACA (*Ortalis ruficauda*) is included in the avifauna of the West Indies (*sensu* Bond 1936) based upon its presence on Union Island and Bequia in the St. Vincent Grenadines (Ober *in* Lawrence 1878, Ogilvie-Grant 1893). On 23 May 1998, we observed and estimated the number of calling Rufous-vented Chachalacas on the island of Bequia. We found the species only on the northern three estates (Spring, Industry, and Park), where that island's vegetation seemed to be the richest. Vocalizations were primarily before 07:00 and seemed in every instance to be harmonic duets by paired individuals. From three primary census points plus two others, we believe we heard about 30 pairs. We estimate the population of chachalacas on northern Bequia to be *ca.* 150 pairs based on *ca.* 200 ha of suitable habitat on the northern end of the island, taken with the approximate distance over which we believe we could have heard them. Bequia's remaining 1300 ha is largely unsuitable, primarily because of human development and disturbance, but we were told by residents that chachalacas occasionally were encountered elsewhere on the island, so the population could be larger.

When observed, all chachalacas were in the canopy of leafy deciduous trees (species unknown), usually over 6 m. They were feeding on newly emerging shoots. By using tape playback, we coaxed one pair to perch on exposed bare limbs and one individual to land on a telephone wire, but concealment was the most typical behavior, even when calling. We never

saw any chachalaca on the ground, but we were informed that occasionally some would pick up poultry feed at a remote farmyard on the Park Estate.

On Union Island, which we visited 26 May 1998, we could not directly confirm the continuing presence of Rufous-vented Chachalacas, but every person with whom we spoke who lived along the bases of Mts. Parnassus and Taboi assured us that the species (known locally as the "Cocrico") could be found and was sometimes hunted on the northwestern end of the island, a largely uninhabited and wild area similar in size to that still holding the species on Bequia. Union Island is far more xeric than Bequia, however, so the density of chachalacas there might be different.

Ober (*in* Lawrence 1878) passed along a contemporary anecdote of its presumed, then-recent, introduction to Union, although his account of his trip (Ober 1880) suggests that he did not encounter it himself. That seems to be the only basis, other than supposition (e.g., Bond 1970, 1976), for its West Indian status ("introduced") as generally conveyed by the literature. Its presence on Bequia is poorly documented; it is attributed there on a list of specimens in the British Museum (Ogilvie-Grant 1893) where two were secured in 1890 by D. W. Smith, working for the Salvin-Godman Collection (R. Prÿs-Jones, *in litt.*). The American Museum of Natural History has four specimens labeled Bequia, three secured in 1901 by the Selwyn Branch collection, and one secured in

1924 by Gerald H. Thayer (Alison Andors, *in litt.*). We located no specimens from Union.

Few later ornithologists mentioned this species from those islands and most who did commented on their failure to locate it. Bond (1970) wrote that he knew of no recent West Indian records, or none since early in the twentieth century (Bond 1976). Later, however, Bond (1982) did pass along a report by Mrs. Thomas Johnston of the species' continuing presence on Bequia, so we cannot account for statements to the contrary by the American Ornithologists' Union (1998) and Raffaele *et al.* (1998). At least one birder mentioned seeing it on Union Island in 1991 (Faanes 1991), but we know of no other published accounts of the species' observation or collection there.

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