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PROPOSAL FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIES ON THE APPENDICES OF THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS

- A. PROPOSAL: Listing of Saffron-cowled Blackbird *Xanthopsar flavus* in **Appendix I** of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.
- B. PROPONENT: Government of the Argentine Republic
- C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT: The *Tordo Amarillo* is internationally classified as an endangered species. It ranges over several countries.

1. Taxonomy

- 1.1_ Class: Aves
- 1.2 Order: Passeriformes
- 1.3 Family: Icteridae
- 1.4 Genus & Species: *Xanthopsar flavus* (Gmelin)
The name *Agelaius flavus* is also used. Monotype species.
- 1.5 Common names: Tordo amarillo (Argentina), Dragón (Uruguay), Chopi Sayjú (Paraguay), Veste Amarela (Brazil).
Trade names: damita, damita del Brasil, federal amarillo (Argentina).

2. Biological data

2.1 Distribution (present and historical)

Historical distribution: ARGENTINA (Buenos Aires, Entre Ríos, Corrientes, Misiones, Formosa, Chaco?, Santa Fe, Córdoba?); URUGUAY (the whole country?), PARAGUAY (especially to the east of the Paraguay river) and BRAZIL (Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul).

Present distribution: stable, nesting populations remain in ARGENTINA (North-eastern Corrientes and South-eastern Entre Ríos, extinct elsewhere), URUGUAY (but no longer near Montevideo), PARAGUAY (South-eastern region), and BRAZIL (a couple of regions in the state of Rio Grande do Sul). These populations tend not to be in contact with each other.

2.2 Population

Present estimates for the Argentine: 500 to 1000, Paraguay: 250 to 300. There is no accurate data for Uruguay and Brazil, but it seems unlikely that the total exceeds 5000.

2.3 Habitat

Undulating green fields, preferably with no trees. The species may nest and sleep in marshes; however it requires the presence of dry land near-by, since it feeds on dry ground. Movement in groups of up to a hundred individuals has been observed occasionally.

2.4 Migrations

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An old source mentions migrations to the north from the province of Buenos Aires. This population no longer exists. Later references indicate important movements of flocks during autumn and winter. Daily movements of 10 kilometres or more have been estimated in Paraguay. The species flies across national borders.

The more specific data refers to movements between Argentina and Paraguay, across the High Paraná River. Flocks have been documented in river islands in the border zone of both countries (Talavera and Yacyretá Islands), and below the retention wall of the Yacyretá dam. The species has also been observed in the Vizcaíno and Estopona Islands of the Uruguay river. This is an indication that the species very likely crosses over from Argentina into Uruguay in the border region.

3. Threat data

3.1 Direct threats

The main direct threat is capture for caging. The species is traded, though this is legally forbidden in Argentina, and no doubt also in neighbouring countries. Argentine data indicates conclusively that the species was eradicated from some areas by professional bird catchers.

3.2 Habitat destruction

Destruction and transformation of habitat are the two most serious threats for the species.

Destruction of habitat involves: 1) replacement of natural grasslands by dense plantation with exotic varieties of trees, 2) flooding of certain areas where the species used to be present, in particular at Yacyretá, 3) draining of wetlands in the southern part of the Province of Buenos Aires according to historical data. The main cause of loss of habitat for the species is presently the one indicated above under point one. The provinces of Corrientes and Entre Ríos are at present carrying out an ambitious programme for the replacement of thousand of hectares of open fields by pine and eucalyptus plantations for the production of cheap wood and wood pulp. International companies have invested over a billion US dollars for this purpose, and tree plantation already covers over 50,000 hectares. The intention is to increase this area to 20 million hectares. Thus, in Corrientes, the distribution range of the species, which does not exceed 400.000 hectares, will become nil. Only very small remnants of habitat may survive, and they will be very fragmented.

The transformation of habitat involves the conversion of native grasslands into agricultural fields, including rice paddies. The species withstands these transformations, and does not suffer from the presence of cattle.

3.3 Indirect threats

Among indirect threats one could mention the possibility of intoxication with pesticides in regions where agriculture is of major importance. In the bibliography, mention is made of parasites in the breeding of the *Tordo Renegrado* (*Molothrus bonariensis*): 30% of nests in the province of Entre Ríos were affected. The parasites reduce the reproductive capacity of the species, though there is a need to carry out studies in order to gauge their precise impact.

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3.4 Threats connected specially with migrations

Threats do exist in connection with long distance journeys for the species. Large tree plantations seem to constitute an obstacle to seasonal migrations, all the more so since they are concentrated in border areas such as the Uruguay River between the province of Corrientes in Argentina and the State of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil. The Yacyretá dam is a likely obstacle to movements between Argentina and Paraguay. It has also flooded islands which were used as feeding grounds by the species.

3.5 National and international utilisation

This is limited to the capture of the species in order to cage the birds.

4. Protection status and needs

4.1 National protection status

There are no parks or nature reserves in Argentina that shelter permanent reproductive populations of the species. Protections priorities in Argentina include the setting up or reservations with large populations of the species, and the preservation of grass corridors that connect these areas with each other.

4.2 International protection status

Monitoring the genetic quality of the surviving populations is also advisable, as are the study of their movements and of the effect of parasites on their reproductive rates. There are protected areas for the species in Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay. The species is listed in CITES (Appendix I).

4.3 Additional protection needs

These involve the carrying out of studies on the use of habitat by the species, in connection with agricultural and cattle rearing practices at local level.

5. Range states

ARGENTINA, URUGUAY, PARAGUAY, BRAZIL.

6. Comments by the range states

All the states in the range area of the species consider it as threatened and protected. Conservation studies and studies on the biology of the species have been carried out, to a greater or lesser extent, in all these countries. In Uruguay and Paraguay education and public information campaigns have also been carried out. In the Argentine a successful experiment has taken place, consisting of freeing the birds rescued from the trade, in areas of historical importance for the species in the province of Buenos Aires.

Government financial help for these projects is either scarce or non-existent.

7. Other comments

8. References

- AZPIROZ, A.B. 1997. Aves del Uruguay. Lista, distribución y estatus. PROBIDES, Montevideo.
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- FRAGA, R.M.; G. PUGNALI & H. CASAÑAS. 1998. Natural history and conservation status of Saffron-Cowled Blackbirds (*Xanthopsar flavus*) in Argentina. Bird Conservation International 8:255-267.
- LOPEZ, N. 1996. Evaluación del hábitat, densidad relativa y situación del Chopí Sayjú (*Agelaius flavus*) en San Miguel Potrero, Departamento Itapúa, Paraguay. Informe inédito, Entidad Binacional Yacyretá, Ayolas, Paraguay.
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