

# An escaped, threatened species: Java Sparrow *Padda oryzivora* in Quindío, Colombia

*Una especie exótica amenazada en vida silvestre: Padda oryzivora en Quindío, Colombia*

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## Abstract

A photograph and sound recording of an escaped Java Sparrow are presented from Quindío, Colombia. Although the species is previously reported in the upper Cauca valley, no prior confirmed photographic record exists nor records in this department.

**Key words** New record, Java Sparrow, photograph, escaped species, Colombia.

## Resumen

Se presentan fotos y grabaciones de *Padda oryzivora* especie exótica en vida silvestre en Quindío, Colombia. Aunque la especie se ha reportado antes en el valle del río Cauca, no existen registros confirmados por fotografía ni registros en el departamento.

**Palabras claves.** Nuevo registro, fotografía, especie escapada, Colombia.

Java Sparrow *Padda oryzivora*'s natural range is in Indonesia but it is a common cagebird throughout the world and occurs as an escapee or introduced species in various countries (Lever 2005). In Colombia, there are no published details of records but Java Sparrow was reported in an email exchange on RNOACOL in 2006, with a "couple of pairs" near the airport in Pereira, Risaralda (S. Restrepo Calle) and records in dpto. Valle del Cauca (F. Estela). The species was therefore listed by Carantón-Alaya *et al.* (2008) for Colombia, by Baptiste *et al.* (2010) as introduced in Risaralda and Valle del Cauca departments and by Salaman *et al.* (2008, 2010) as escaped. However, there are no published records to date of escaped birds or introduced populations. The species has reportedly established populations in Venezuela (Hilty 2003, Restall 2003, Sharpe *et al.* 1997).

It is important to keep track of introduced and escaped species, so as to document historical information as to possible introductions and to monitor species which may raise conservation concerns (Lever 2005). Java Sparrow is also considered a threatened species as a result of local extinctions and severe population declines caused by habitat loss and trapping for the pet trade in its native range (BirdLife International 2013). As a result, introduced and captive populations may have conservation value in addition

to raising conservation concerns. This short note includes observations of an escapee in depto. Quindío.

On 17-19 December 2012, I spent three mornings sound recording birds in secondary habitats in the grounds of Hotel Campestre Las Camelias, mun. Armenia, Quindío (c.04°31'N, 75°47'W). On the first of these days at approximately 7 am, I came across a Java Sparrow hopping along a path in the hotel grounds (Fig. 1). The bird was seen at very close quarters (down to 2 m) and identified immediately due to its distinctive plumage. I knew the species previously from zoos and aviaries in Europe and the plate in McMullan *et al.* (2010). As I approached the bird over a period of 5-10 minutes, it flushed various times, but was only capable of flying short distances (up to 5m) and a few tens of cm height. Several photographs were taken using a Blackberry handset. The bird stayed on the path after each flight, not flushing to the low scrub or grasses either side of the path.

The Java Sparrow vocalized various times with a contact call, of which sound recordings were made (Fig. 2). There are very few comparative sound recordings available for this species. Macaulay Library (ML) recording no. 619 is the only one available of a call of the species in its natural range (Jawa Timur, Indonesia) and is similar to my recording, as is a recording made in captivity in the USA (AVOCET no. 12712). There are only two other recordings of this species on ML, neither of which is from the species' home range, one of which is not digitized (ML72009: Hawaii) and the other of which is not consistent with other recordings (ML14411: Bahamas).

The bird flushed a total of c.15 m during the period of observation, until it approached a small bridge with hanging bird cages which had been covered in cotton drapes to sleep the birds overnight. With its continued call, it elicited response of the same call from one of the caged birds, which were not visible (the escaped and captive birds both audible from 1:00 onwards in XC134986). Later in the day, once they had been uncovered by hotel staff, I found these cages to house 6 Java Sparrows. The escaped bird was not seen later in the day or on subsequent days.

Other bird cages near the Java Sparrows housed varieties of Fischer's Lovebird *Agapornis fischeri* and two colour morphs of Gouldian Finch *Erythrura gouldiae*. In the lower

part of the hotel, somewhat distant, were larger aviaries housing Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*, Silver Pheasant *Lophura nyctemera*, Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus*, ornamental chicken *Gallus gallus* breeds and several tens each of Budgerigars *Melopsittacus undulatus* and Cockatiels *Nymphicus hollandicus* (incorrectly labeled *Agapornis*). The latter two species have been recorded as escapees in Colombia (Cortés & Donegan 2012).



Figures 1 a-d. Java Sparrow *Padda oryzivora* Las Camelias, Quindío, Colombia, 14 December 2012.

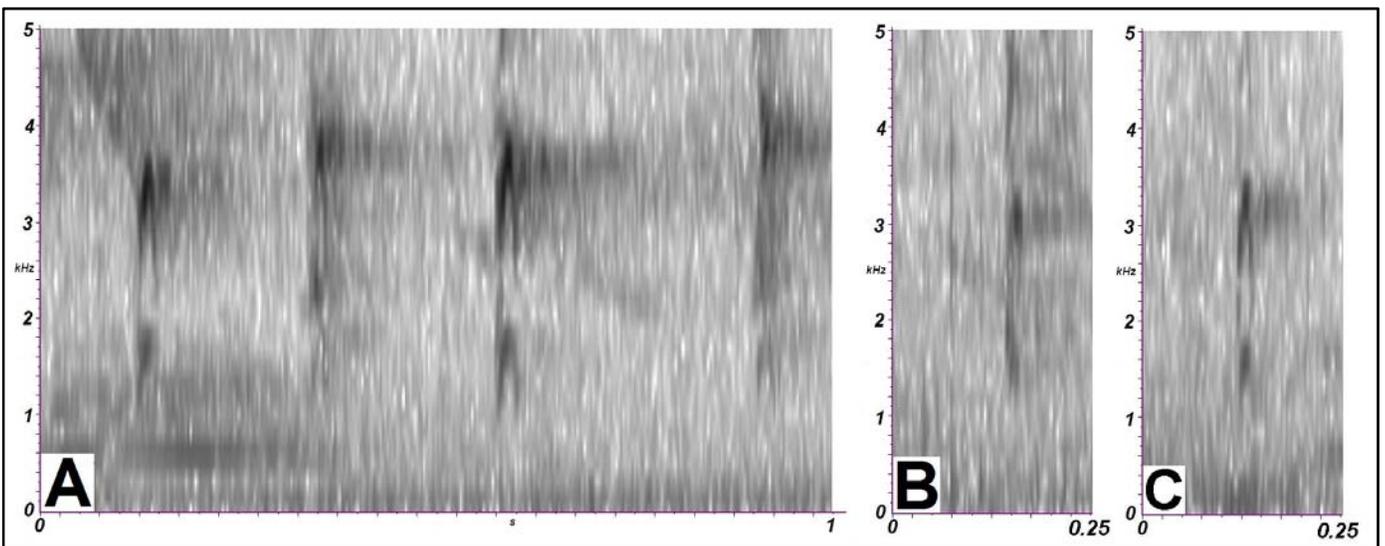


Figure 2: sonagram of calls of the individual illustrated in Figure 1 (XC134986). In Fig. 2A only the first and third notes are of the escaped bird.

This is apparently the first "confirmed" published record of Java Sparrow as an escaped species for Colombia, with photographic and sound recordings supporting the observation. It is also apparently the first record in Quindío. Previous records of escaped Java Sparrow in Colombia are from the same region – the upper río Cauca valley and coffee region from dpto. Valle del Cauca north to Risaralda and now Quindío. This may be the part of Colombia where the species is most common in captivity. It does not seem common in pet shops in Bogotá. Perhaps the species, whose natural range is in tropical lowlands, is more suited to surviving in captivity in warmer parts of Colombia, or this could be due to historical reasons related to the pet trade.

No other Java Sparrows were observed on other days at this locality or elsewhere during four days in dpto. Quindío (nor is the species reported in recent birdwatching trip reports in the department). This lack of reports together with circumstantial information about the observation show this to be an isolated escapee that does not appear representative of an introduced population. The better status for this bird in Colombia, based on records to date and pending further data on its status in Valle del Cauca and Risaralda, is as an escapee (Donegan *et al.* 2010) not an established, introduced species (cf. Anonymous in Remsen *et al.* 2013).

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