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# Breeding data on Peruvian Thick-knee *Burhinus superciliaris* accumulated by R. A. Hughes in the vicinity of Mollendo, Peru

by M. Patrick O'Hagan & Morris D. Williams

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The purpose of this note is to make available the accumulated nesting data on Peruvian Thick-knee *Burhinus superciliaris* collected by R. A. Hughes (RAH) in Distrito Mollendo, Provincia Islay, Región Arequipa, Peru. To achieve this we present verbatim his short unpublished manuscript from 1982 (Appendix) with a brief commentary.

Until his untimely death, Robert A. 'Robin' Hughes (1934–91) was the only resident ornithologist on the Pacific coast of South America anywhere near the Peru / Chile border. He made several important published contributions from this relatively little-visited region (see González 1995, Plenge 2018), of which three include information pertaining to *B. superciliaris* (Hughes 1970, 1979, 1991).

Shortly before his death, RAH described *B. superciliaris* as a fairly common resident in several coastal habitats, his clearest published statement on the species' status in the area (Hughes 1991). Further south, occurrence of *B. superciliaris* in Tacna was reported subsequently by Pizarro (1995); breeding here was confirmed by MDW, who found a nest containing a piped egg with chirping embryo on 12 February 2017.

Had RAH's manuscript appeared earlier, some subsequent misstatements on range, status and breeding season might have been avoided. Hume (1996), following Blake (1977), expressed doubt as to the continued occurrence of *B. superciliaris* in Chile; had the existence of a viable breeding population at Mollendo been known, occurrence in Chile, 250 km away, would surely not have been questioned, as there are no apparent intervening physical or ecological barriers in Moquegua or Tacna. It is now known to breed at several sites in northernmost Chile (Sallaberry *et al.* 1992, Howell & Webb 1995, Aguirre *et al.* 2006). The most up-to-date general overview can now be found in Hume & Kirwan (2019).

Comparing the Peruvian and Chilean *B. superciliaris* populations, Camacho (2012) gave the overall breeding season as four months, but knowledge of the 'very extended breeding season' documented by RAH stretches this to twice as long. Camacho (2012) also warned that the species was possibly becoming threatened in Chile. Fortunately, more recent (2013, 2017) data suggest that it remains fairly common in the Lluta River Valley, Región Arica and Parinacota (A. Jaramillo pers. comm.; MDW pers. obs.).

Finally, Hume & Kirwan (2019) still report that the breeding biology of *Burhinus superciliaris* remains little known. The data of RAH presented here, plus recent studies by O'Hagan & Williams (in prep. a,b), will hopefully go a considerable way to rectify this situation.

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Manuel Plenge who rescued the RAH manuscript and provided us with a copy. He also extended many other bibliographic courtesies, and we further thank Ann & Brian Basinger for providing considerable assistance with references. Abby Wilcox and François Salhany conducted fieldwork on *B. superciliaris* with MDW in Chile in 2013. We thank Lady Amaro, Irma Franke, Janet Hinshaw, A. Jaramillo and R. Prŷs-Jones for references and unpublished data. We are pleased to place on permanent record these important data collected by Robin Hughes; we hope this paper enhances our collective memory of Robin.

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## Appendix

Original manuscript of R.A. Hughes, dated 25 September 1982, entitled **Notes on the nesting of the Peruvian Thick-knee (*Burhinus superciliaris*) on the south coast of Peru.**

In the *Condor* 83:183 (1981) Williams described for the first time the nest and eggs of the Peruvian Thick-knee (*Burhinus superciliaris*). The nest was found on June 5, 1978, in desert scrub habitat near the western base of the Andes in the department of Lambayeque, north-west Peru.

Since so little is known of the nidification of this species, the following observations from the Mollendo district, department of Arequipa, southwest Peru, may be of interest.

On October 13, 1981, I found a nest containing two eggs on bare sandy desert some 2 kms inland and 80m above sea level. It was situated approximately 200m from a canal which separates the desert from irrigated farmland and was a shallow scrape in the sand, similar in all details to those described by Williams.

This is the only nest I have found, but I had the following earlier evidence of breeding in the Mollendo district:

On April 7, 1980, a young chick, less than a week old, was found crouching on the sand with its neck outstretched at a site very close to where the nest was found in October 1981.

On June 25, 1980, two large chicks, capable of running well but still unable to fly, were found at the edge of an alfalfa field adjacent to the irrigation canal. Some distance away, on the other side of the canal, an adult bird also was present.

On January 6, 1981, a large chick, only partly fledged, was noted as a traffic casualty on the Mollendo-Mejía coast road, some 3 kms from Mollendo.

The foregoing details suggest that the Peruvian Thick-knee has a very extended breeding season, at least along the south coast of Peru.