

Pezopetes, I

March 26, 1960
Cerro Punta

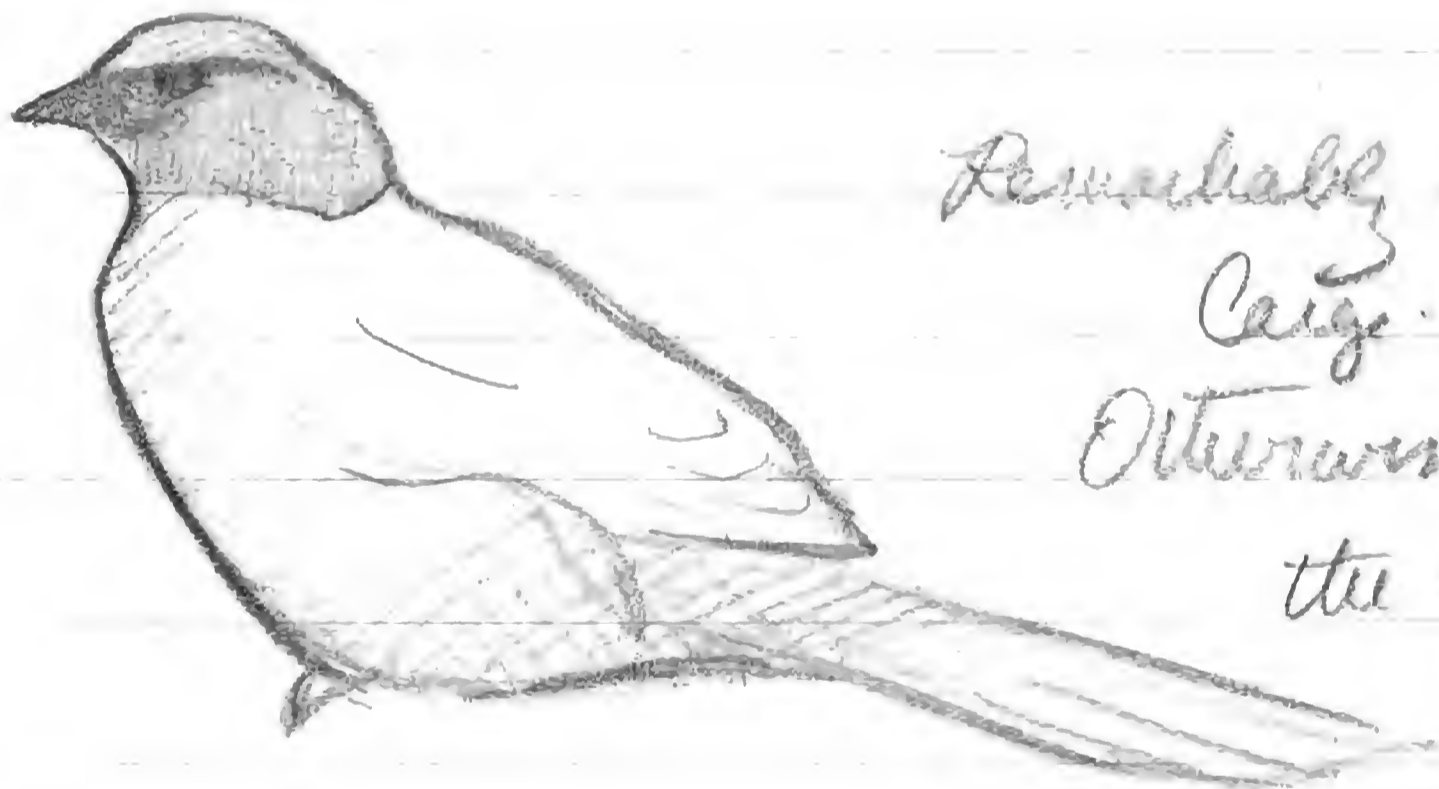
~~XXXX~~ = capitatus = Big footed Finch.

We have seen a pair of these birds several in a very dense thicket near the upper pasture. Always in almost exactly the same place. Apparently not following the mixed flocks in the same area.

These birds are very retiring. Never appearing outside the thicket and quite remarkably silent, at least when we are looking at them. I have yet to identify a single vocal pattern of theirs.

I did get a chance to watch one bird for a few minutes, however. Did pronounced TF-vig. V-D with pronounced lateral component. Tail fanned at the same time. Each TF apparently accompanied by a moderately well-defined WF.

Relaxed



Remarkably small-headed & large-bodied. Otherwise rather like the green-back.

Pezopetes, I

March 27, 1960
Cerro Punta

We watched a single Big foot for a few minutes, both yesterday afternoon and this morning. Quite "nervous" both times. Still remarkably silent. The only sound we may have heard a Big foot utter was a brief, harsh "chank", which David thinks he heard the

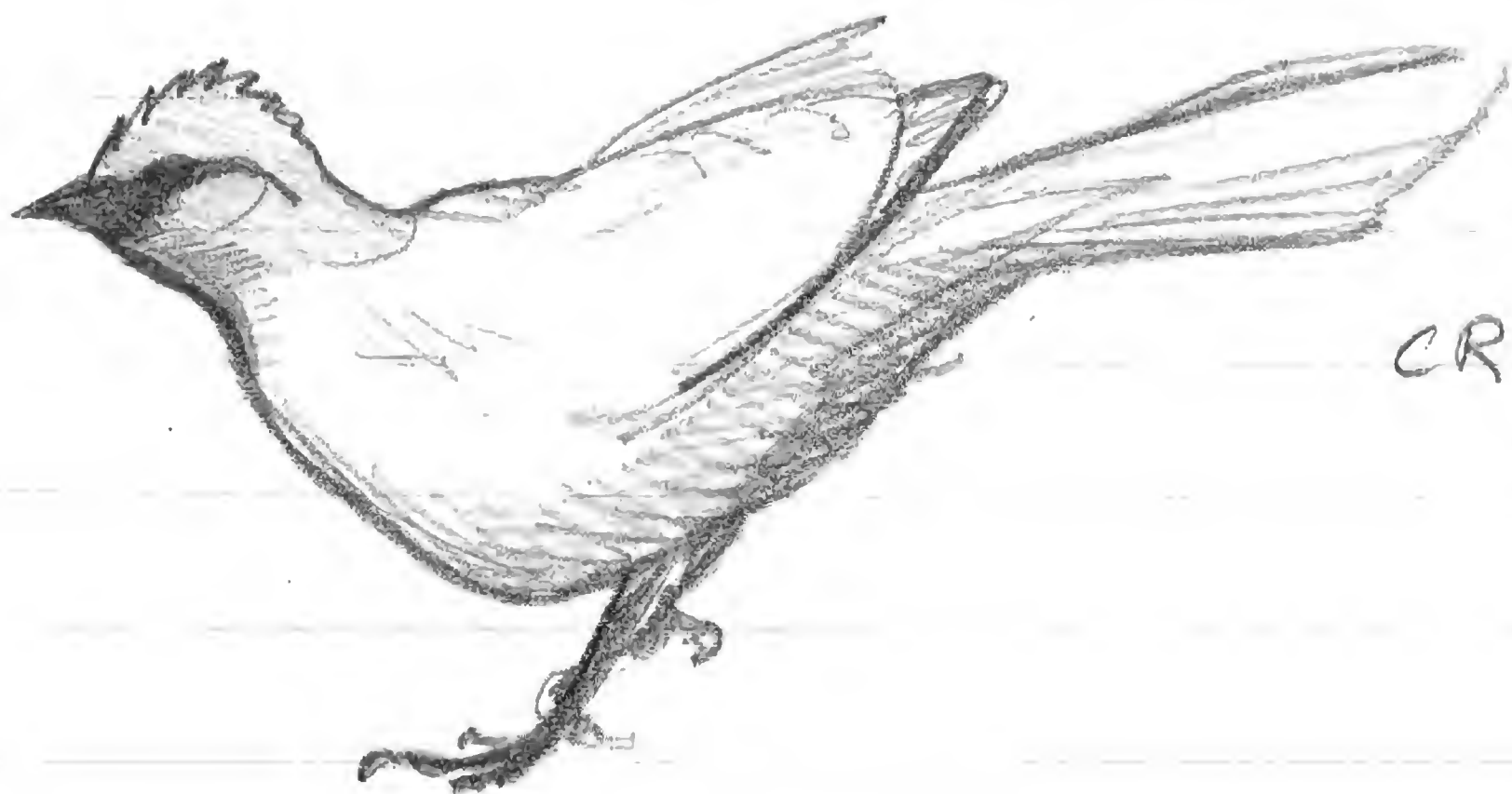
Peyapetes, March 27, 1960, II

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bird we watched yesterday afternoon utter as it suddenly flew away from us.)

I think that this species must be more or less the "equivalent" of the Chestnut-Capped Atlapetes lower down the mountain. Very silent, skulking, staying on or near the ground, and apparently not following the mixed flocks.

The "nervous" bird we watched this morning did a lot of TF-ing and WF-ing. The WF's of this species are certainly much more extreme than those of all or most other bush-finches. The bird this morning also had pronounced CR. So the CR of this species is also an indication of alarm and/or general hostility.



CR + WF + TF
+ (fanning)

The bird we watched yesterday did lots of "flight intention movement bowing" (see yesterday's notes on Pelliochrois).

Peyapetes, I

March 29, 1960
Cerro Punta

I watched a pair of Big-foots feeding on the forest floor for quite a long while. More or less undisturbed by me. Their method of feeding is quite distinctive. They are hoppers

Pegopates, Mar. 29, 1960, II

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but they get their food by scratching. They scratch, therefore, by leaping, using both feet together! The result is that they bob back and forth like mechanical toys, as if they were on some sort of rockers!

Almost all the time the birds fed this morning they were quite silent (to my ears at least). They didn't even utter faint "Tut" CN's.

The one call they did utter occurred very early in the morning, around 7:00 a.m., when I first began to watch them. When I first came upon them, they were feeding together on the forest floor. One bird flew away into a thicket almost immediately. The other one stayed behind for a few minutes. Just sat & pecked. Eventually it flew off to the same thicket that its mate had entered. Immediately I heard a soft twittering warble, rather neutral in tone (in the sense of being difficult to locate precisely), coming from this thicket. This "song" was quite reminiscent of the "greeting" song of the Yellow-thighed Finch, but still distinctly different. I am sure that it must have been a "greeting" song uttered by one of the Big-foots (I am sure that there were no other birds in the same thicket — and especially, since that there were no Yellow-thighs there.) This song differed from the usual song of the Yellow-thighs in being more "regular", containing a lesser variety of notes. It is very difficult to transcribe adequately, but the following might be a very rough, diagrammatic, schema:

"Tika-tika-tika-tika-keea-keea-keea-keea"

Some definite difference between the first and second halves of the phrase.

This was not repeated.

Pezopetes, I.

October 4, 1960
Cerro Punta

Came across a pair of these birds (possibly a third, in the dust area), in the usual area, just below the upper pasture.

One bird out in open in brush along side of road. Obviously nervous and excited, presumably by my presence. Lots of WF's and TF's. Lots of int. mov. of flight bowing. Then flew across road, landed in open in another brush. Performed same movements there. All this time it had slight CR. Also all this time uttered a loud clear whistled single notes: "se - weeee" or (less frequently) "se - e - weeee"


Quite reminiscent of Atlapetes annalis in Ecuador. During part of this time, after it had crossed the road, these long whistled notes (which I shall call "LW") were apparently alternated with brief softer notes. Each LW was accompanied by opening and closing of the bill. But I also noted that the bird was opening & closing its bill more rapidly between LW's. Some of this rapid opening and closing was apparently silent, but I did hear a few very soft "Tsect" notes uttered, apparently just as the bill opened a couple of times. So I presume all this rapid opening & closing was accompanied by very soft "Tsect"s. These "Tsect"s seemed to be a little higher than the ECN's of the Yellow-throat. The bird continued to utter LW's and "Tsect"s, with slight CR, many TF's and WF's, and bowing movements for quite some while. I could not see any rigid correlation between particular movements and particular notes. I rather imagine this bird was reacting both to my presence and to its mate's absence.

After a while the mate flew across the road and joined this bird. Lots & Lots of "quitting". All apparently vocal. The first response was a series of

Pezopetes, Oct 4, 1960, III.

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birds, followed by a twittering phrase, followed by a flourish. Perhaps the following may give some idea of a typical performance:


"Isawah-Isawah Tut-Tut Isa-a-wa-ah Isa-a-wah Srewee"

In this case, the first doublet consisted of quite typical SN's, like the SN's in "que stings". The second doublet appeared to consist of abbreviated MW's. The subsequent twittering part seemed to consist of more or less modified SN's. This was the most variable part of the "songs". Sometimes much longer than shown in the diagram. The terminal flourish may be related to the LW's.

Sometimes parts of this song were repeated, in an apparently formless jumble.

Earlier this morning, I heard a similar but slightly different song being uttered in a bush. I could tell it was being uttered by a bush-finch, but I couldn't distinguish the species at the time. Now I am sure it was a Pezopetes. This song might be represented as follows:


"Tut-tut duh-duh" followed by twitter, flourish, and soft rattle. This song was repeated frequently, with only minor variations (mostly involving the preliminary doublets, any one of which might be repeated in any order).

The only time I got a good view of a bird singing some of these variable "songs" was during the later incident, right after the first MW-SN "greeting". At this time, the singing bird was just sitting in a more or less unutilized sitting posture, with slight CR (as far as I could tell, it had slight CR all the time this morning, both when vocal and when silent).

Pezopetes, Oct. 4, 1960, IV.

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I presume that all or most of all or most of these variable "songs" were produced by some pairing and/or sexual motivation.

All these vocal patterns, the "songs" and the "greetings" would seem to confirm the relationship between Pezopetes and Atlapetes.

Pezopetes, I

October 8, 1960

Cerro Punta

When I arrived just below the upper pasture at 6:30 a.m. this morning, I heard a Pezopetes uttering a whole series of LW's, or something very similar, from a ledge. The notes were uttered quite rapidly, one right after the other. All or most of the notes were quite like the LW's I heard on Oct. 4th, but it was obvious today that most of the notes descended in pitch at the end. Comme ça: "seeeeeeeeee" or "seeeeeeee - eeee - eeee"

(It is possible that the LW's I heard on Oct. 4th also descended in pitch at the end. I may have made a mistake in transcribing them.) Most of the LW's I heard today were obviously either bi-syllabic or tri-syllabic, but I couldn't tell if there was any really significant difference between the two types — they seemed to be jumbled together in perfectly random fashion. Every once in a while, however, the bird would utter a completely monosyllabic, and relatively short "seeeeeeee" note in the middle of the other notes. Such monosyllabic notes are presumably the lowest intensity form of LW.

The bird stopped singing about 5 minutes after I arrived. So I presume that this series of LW's was really a form of "down song" like that of other Cuckoo-fundlers.

Unfortunately, I was never able to see the bird while it was uttering these LW's, but it was certainly almost or completely stationary throughout

Later on I saw one bird follow another into a bush. Then one uttered a distinctive vocalization which was probably a form of "greeting". A series of soft "Zee" Notes (about 5 or 6), followed immediately by a very soft formless warble. It is possible that both the "Zee" Notes and the warble were variants of what I called "SN's" before. More probably, the "Zee" Notes were a variant of what I called "MW" on Oct. 4th. But they were rather buzzy and not noticeably metallic. (I didn't see these birds during the "greeting" either.)

It is obvious, I think, that these birds are breeding now, or just about to begin breeding. This seems to be the only species, or one of only two species, which are breeding at the present time. (It is possible that the Yellow-throated Bush-finch are also breeding now. It might explain why I have seen so little of them this trip.)

Pezopetes, I

October 7, 1960

Cerro Punta

When I first arrived below the upper pasture (6:30 a.m.) there was no dawn song by any Pezopetes. But I did hear some warblers by one or more birds fairly soon. All composed of LW's, all in pitch. More care, I was able to determine that this song was uttered by a solitary bird, apparently stationary.

I got some very nice views of 4 different birds at various times during the morning, and saw their flicking movements very clearly. They do perform extreme WF's. Also very exaggerated TF's. Usually with a very conspicuous vertical component. Always with a very conspicuous lateral component. Almost always U-D, but very occasionally D-U (TF's with a very strong lateral component are frequently difficult to classify in terms of U and D).

Peyopetes, Oct 7, 1960, II,

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One of the birds I saw later in the morning seemed disturbed by my presence, and had a definite CR (alarm). So I think that the CR is an indication of alarm in this species also.

I heard quite a lot of "greetings" during the course of the morning. I can now amplify my previous descriptions of the typical series of notes during this vocalization. Complete "greetings" are as follows: They always begin by a series of metallic notes, the notes I called "MW" in my description of Oct. 4. This is usually followed by a series of "Buzzy Notes", which I shall call "BN". They are rather variable. Some might be transcribed as "zawab zawab zawab zawab", while others might be transcribed as "zee zee zee" (The latter are obviously the "zee" notes which rather puzzled me yesterday - see p. 8). These BN's are usually followed by a soft, low, warble, very much like the Wbl of the Yellow-throats. I shall call it "Wbl" too.

I think that in my description of the "greetings" on Oct 4, 1960, p. 5, I probably confused BN's and Wbl's under the term "SN". (I did, however, distinguish between them - to some extent - in the descriptions of the peculiar vocalizations on Oct. 4, 1960, p. 6.) The BN's and Wbl's may intergrade, and more or less intermediate notes are sometimes uttered, but the two patterns are usually quite distinct.

The complete "greetings" are usually uttered when the birds of a pair come together after an appreciable (in time and/or space) separation. I still do not know if one or both birds usually utter the "greeting" in such circumstances. (I did see at one time this morning that one bird uttered the MW's while the other uttered the BN - Wbl patterns - but this is probably not very likely to be the general rule.)

When mated birds re-join one another after a very short and/or very slight separation, they usually utter only a very abbreviated "greeting". A brief match of Wbl and nothing else. This would suggest that the Wbl is a

lower intensity pattern than all or most of the other "greeting" patterns. (One might suppose, on general grounds, that the series MW-BN-Wbl is one of decreasing intensity.)

Much to my surprise there were 2 pairs of Pygmites here. I first became aware of this while I was watching one pair hopping about excitedly, in some very open brush, uttering all the "greeting" notes very loudly and very rapidly. I then realized that there was another pair behaving in exactly the same way, also in the open, right across the road, about 15 feet away from the first pair! The "greeting" notes uttered by the 2 pairs at this time were by far the loudest and most intense-sounding I have heard. This would indicate that the "greeting" notes of this species, like the Wbl and associated notes of Yellow-throats, are really mutually hostile!!

None of the birds engaged in this dispute uttered any LW's. So the LW's cannot be hostile. They must be pairing and/or sexual patterns.

I think that all 4 birds were uttering some or all of the "greeting" notes during this dispute, but I cannot be sure of this. I also think that they tended to utter the "greeting" notes in the usual MW-BN-Wbl sequence; but again I cannot be sure about this. In any case, it was obvious that some of the birds were uttering so many "greeting" notes so rapidly that they frequently became rather jumbled. One or more of the birds also uttered quite a lot of peculiar intermediate-sounding notes. "Tsee-wee" or "I see-wee-ee"

There may well have been intermediate between typical MW's and typical BN's.

One of the birds appeared to become aware of my presence quite suddenly in the middle of the dispute. It immediately uttered 4 or 5 sharp "Tuck" notes. These were quite probably ACN's. Then, for a minute or so afterwards, this bird occasionally inserted one or two "Tuck" notes, apparently at ran-

Pezopetes, Oct. 9, 1960, IV

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down, in its "greeting" phrases.

(Everything I have heard of the vocal patterns of this species during the last 2 days makes the elaborate vocalizations described on Oct 4th, 1960, p. 6, seem more remarkable. These elaborate vocalizations certainly should not be called "songs". They may conceivably have been uttered during some sort of hostile encounter like the one I saw today. If not, they were certainly remarkably elaborate for "greetings" between mates.)

This whole dispute today looked very much like a territorial boundary dispute.

None of the birds engaged in this dispute performed any special ritualized movements or assumed any special ritualized postures. Lots of TF's and WF's of course. One bird had a slight CR while it uttered a series of MW's, but other series of MW's were certainly not accompanied by CR.

The posture of the bird uttering MW's with CR was comme ça.



Bill opening & closing with each note.

No special throat-fluffing.

I have certainly been surprised, on this trip, by how common the Pezopetes are. Not only are they very noisy early in the morning, but they also come out into the open much more frequently than they did last March. I have even seen them foraging unconcernedly on the ground in the middle of a brood (more than 10) open nest!

They are not infrequently associated with the large mixed flock here, as they live in the same area, but this association seems to be quite "casual".

Pezopetes, I

October 10, 1960
Cerro Punta

There was absolutely nothing in the way of "Lawn song" by any of the Pezopetes when I arrived at the upper pasture area at 6:30 this morning. I did not hear a single burst of LW's until 7:50 a.m. It rained furiously last night and yesterday afternoon, and also the night and afternoon before. Perhaps the birds have "regained" somewhat.

Most of the LW's during the burst I heard might be transcribed by something like "Ja-sweeee-oooo". An occasional longer note

like "sweee-eeee" was interspersed from time to time, but these were relatively rare.

Pezopetes, I

April 15, 1961
Cerro Punta

I have been watching bush finches in an area approximately halfway between Cerro Punta and the upper pasture. Chestnut capped Atlapetes are common in this area. To my surprise, I found, yesterday and today, that there is also at least one pair of Large-footed Finches in the area.

I watched one Large-footed Finch apparently feeding all by itself this morning. Usually feeding by "matching cups" like the other Large-footed Finches I have seen. But it also hopped in and through bushes, at least 3 or 4 feet off the ground, and apparently fed in the bushes.

Yesterday afternoon, I came upon a pair of Large-footed Finches in

Pezopetes, Apr. 13, 1961, I

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~~|||||~~ then suddenly. They both flew away into a tangle of vines. As they landed in the tangle, one or both uttered harsh metallic notes. Sort of "Klink klink klink klink klink" Rapid. Presumably a form of "greeting." Probably what I called MW before.

