

THE BRAZILIAN MERGANSER (*MERGUS OCTOSETACEUS*), THE MOST THREATENED DUCK IN SOUTH AMERICA

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SUMMARY

The Brazilian merganser (*Mergus octosetaceus*) is a poorly known merganser from the central-southeastern parts of South America. With the extinct Auckland Islands merganser (*Mergus australis*), from New Zealand, it is the only representative of the genus of this unique group of ducks in the Southern Hemisphere.

The species lives in freshwater and rapid rivers of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay (PARTRIDGE, 1956; SICK, 1985; YAMASHITA and VALLE, 1990; COLLAR *et al.*, 1992). In Brazil, it lives in the states of Minas Gerais (southern part of the state, currently at the Serra da Canastra National Park), Goiás (Emas National Park), Mato Grosso do Sul (Sucuriú river), Tocantins (Chapada dos Veadeiros National Park) and Paraná (Iguaçu National Park). The Santa Catarina and São Paulo (Parapanema and Itararé rivers) records have no recent confirmation.

The merganser inhabits the Argentinian Iguazu National Park and the Uruguai river in Misiones Province, besides also being cited for the major left bank tributaries of the Paraná river in Misiones (PARTRIDGE, 1956; COLLAR *et al.*, 1992). Its occurrence also historically encompasses the southeastern part of Paraguay, within the Paraná river basin, with a recent record in the Carapá river (COLLAR *et al.*, 1992).

Besides the remarkable publication about the species in Misiones, Argentina (PARTRIDGE, 1956), and sparse observations regarding breeding and other aspects of its biology carried out in the Serra da Canastra National Park (BARTMANN in COLLAR *et al.*, 1992), generally the records of this species are either quick observations or skins deposited in Museums. It is known that the Brazilian merganser lives on dobson fly (*Corydalis* sp.) larvae, snails and various fish species up to 19 cm long. The breeding season occurs during the southern winter (July-September) and the only nest known was localized in a tree hollow at the edge of the river. Four and five young were observed in two cases (PARTRIDGE, 1956; COLLAR *et al.*, 1992). The forest type bordering the river apparently has no influence on the merganser's dis-

tribution (as it inhabits rivers with subtropical forest, cerrado (savana) and gallery forest). The most important habitat characteristic is the type of river, which needs to have rapid, clean waters with small waterfalls. Most of the rivers where it was found in Brazil are highland streams more than 500 m above sea level. In the central Brazil part of its range, it inhabits rivers draining acid and poor soils, characterized by oligotrophic waters.

Thanks to its scarcity, the merganser's conservation status has always been considered endangered in Brazil, and the species is mentioned in the various lists produced since the 1960s. The Brazilian legislation also lists it as endangered and the merganser's presence in various national parks makes its future more positive, although some of the created areas are not yet fully managed by the federal government. In Argentina, it also occurs in two different protected areas, although there is no habitat protection in Paraguay. There is no direct human impact known, but the habitat loss is of special concern. The indirect impact comes from deforestation of river edges and/or basin deforestation with increasing downstream turbidity, introduction of alien fish species, pollution and large dam constructions.

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LE HARLE HUPPARD (*MERGUS OCTOSETACEUS*), LE CANARD LE PLUS MENACÉ D'AMÉRIQUE DU SUD

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MOTS-CLÉS : Harle huppard, *Mergus octosetaceus*, statut, conservation.

DER DUNKELSÄGER (*MERGUS OCTOSETACEUS*), DER GEFÄHRDETSTE ENTENVOGEL IN SÜDAFRIKA

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SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER : Dunkelsäger, *Mergus octosetaceus*, Status, Erhaltung.