

The dispersal of native and exotic seeds by São Tomé forest birds

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The island of São Tomé, in the Gulf of Guinea, is a biodiversity hotspot with a remarkable number of endemic species. While introduced species are generally perceived as a major threat to the conservation of native biota, their exact impacts on key ecosystem functions remain poorly understood. Animal-mediated seed dispersal, is one such functions, which is critical for vegetation dynamics. During three months we quantified the seeds found in the droppings of mist-netted birds in the Obô Natural Park to explore how avian seed dispersal might affect the future of São Tomé forests. We captured 15 bird species, all of which endemic, but only five were dispersing intact seeds, with the São Tomé speirops, *Speirops lugubris* being responsible for nearly 90 % of the recorded interactions. Over 6000 seeds of nearly 50 plant species were retrieved from the droppings. The most frequent seeds belonged to the native *Psydrax subcordata* and to the introduced roseleaf bramble, *Rubus rosifolius*. Our preliminary results suggest that in São Tomé, birds play a double role, likely facilitating the dispersal of introduced species and also the recolonization of degraded areas by native flora. These results pose a curious and difficult dilemma, since birds are simultaneously contributing to forest regeneration and invasion. This study provides a first assessment of the role of species interactions in maintaining ecosystem diversity and function in São Tomé.