

xeno-canto

Identification of some Brazilian elaenias by voice

Por Jeremy Minns

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In this article I deal with eight species of elaenia that are common in Brazil but are not restricted to this country. I have examined the recordings of these species on xeno-canto, the Macaulay Library and WikiAves. The sound types I describe do not constitute the full repertoire of each species but include only those most commonly heard and which serve for identification. I have ordered the species by ease of identification rather than by taxonomy.

The elaenias are considered amongst the most challenging groups of birds to identify. 'Notoriously difficult, the elaenias represent perhaps the most confusing tyrannid group...It will simply *not* be possible to identify some elaenias in the field.' (Ridgely and Tudor, volume II, 1994). In these circumstances vocalizations assume greater than normal importance. But if identification in the field of some species is uncertain and we have few cases of birds that have been recorded and then collected, how can we be sure that a particular sound type belongs to one of these problematical species? The answer can be obtained from a combination of two factors: the distinctiveness of the morning songs of the elaenias and the range of each species. My reasoning is as follows:

The ranges of the eight elaenias which are the subject of this article are those in Ridgely and Tudor (1994). Ridgely based his work on the examination of museum specimens with the addition of some reliable visual records (Ridgely and Tudor, volume I). In the last few years extensive collections of sound recordings have been built up and it is now possible to plot the geographic distribution of certain distinctive songs. It is reasonable to suppose that a specific song is not emitted by two different species. Therefore, if the range of a species established from museum specimens coincides with the distribution of a certain song type, we can be confident that this is the species' song. The final step is to establish which calls are associated with each song and in this way the species' repertoire can be built up.

Yellow-bellied Elaenia (*E. flavogaster*)

This is the easiest of these elaenias to identify visually and its limited vocal repertoire is well known, being consistent throughout its wide range which extends from Central America to Argentina. The species' four principal vocalizations are:

Sound Type 1 dawn song. Almost always given at or before dawn but occasionally later in the morning. This song, unique to the species, is made up of short 2-note phrases and longer 4-note phrases. The 4-note phrase is in fact the 2-note phrase with the addition of two notes, one long the other short. The phrases are given at 1-3 second intervals at a measured pace. The song may consist entirely of short phrases, long phrases or – more usually – a mixture of both. Typical examples are [XC288218](#), [XC346338](#) and [XC70827](#).

XC288218	XC346338	XC70827
play	play	play
pause	pause	pause
stop	stop	stop
0:00	0:00	0:00
1:44	0:40	1:08
Yellow-bellied Elaenia (<i>Elaenia flavogaster</i>) · song		
Jerome Fischer	Juha Honkala	Daniel Lane

ST2 call. A single, overslurred, burry note, 0.5-1.0 sec long. This call is highly characteristic. I know no other species with a similar call. Examples are [XC287871](#), [XC169866](#) and [XC103595](#). This call is often a component in the ST3 day song and ST4 duet.

XC287871	XC169866	XC103595
play	play	play
pause	pause	pause
stop	stop	stop
0:00	0:00	0:00
0:05	0:22	0:19
Yellow-bellied Elaenia (<i>Elaenia flavogaster</i>) · call		
Jerome Fischer	Roney Assis Souza	Jeremy Minns

ST3 day song. A series of single burry notes and short, double 'squelchy' notes, given by a single bird. Examples are [XC82909](#) and [XC440674](#).

XC82909	XC440674
play	play
pause	pause
stop	stop
0:00	0:00
0:13	0:08
Yellow-bellied Elaenia (<i>Elaenia flavogaster</i>) · Song	
Sidnei S. dos Santos	Jeremy Minns

ST4 duet. This is the vocalization most commonly heard. It is a long jumble of notes that is difficult to describe but easy to recognise. Sometimes there seem to be two birds giving the ST3 song, simultaneously but out of sync. At other times one bird gives the ST3 song, interspersed by single notes given by a second bird. Occasionally a third or fourth bird may be involved. Examples are [XC353092](#), [XC243470](#) and [XC440675](#).

XC353092	XC243470	XC440675
play	play	play
pause	pause	pause
stop	stop	stop
0:00	0:00	0:00
0:07	0:09	0:09
Yellow-bellied Elaenia (<i>Elaenia flavogaster</i>) · song		
Jeff Norris	Eric DeFonso	Jeremy Minns

Brazilian Elaenia (*Elaenia obscura sordida*)

In this article I cover only the subspecies *sordida* of Highland Elaenia (*E. obscura*), which is the taxon that occurs in Brazil. It is treated as a species by the HBW, with the English name Brazilian Elaenia, but has not yet been split by the IOC, whose taxonomy XC follows. The nominate subspecies does not occur in Brazil.

Brazilian Elaenia is distinguishable in the field visually from the other elaenias of this article and it is also distinctive vocally. Its principle vocalizations are:

ST1 dawn song. Usually given in the early morning but sometimes a little later. This song, distinct from that of any other species, is a series of short (about 0.5 s long) phrases, each consisting of a clear, whistled note followed by two burry notes. There are clear notes between the burry notes and after the second one, which are visible in the sonogram but are not distinguishable to the ear. The phrases are given at regular intervals of 2-3 secs. Typical examples are [XC337456](#) and [XC81541](#).

[XC337456](#) 

play

pause

stop

0:00

1:33



[XC81541](#) 

play

pause

stop

0:00

0:27



Highland Elaenia (*Elaenia obscura sordida*) · song

Jerome Fischer

Highland Elaenia (*Elaenia obscura sordida*) · ST1 song

Jeremy Minns

ST2 call. A shorter (0.2 s), truncated version of ST1, consisting of a clear, whistled note followed by a single burry note. [XC332300](#) and [XC351024](#) are typical. It is given at longish, irregular intervals.

[XC332300](#) 

play

pause

stop

0:00

0:15



[XC351024](#) 

play

pause

stop

0:00

0:16



Highland Elaenia (*Elaenia obscura sordida*) · ST2 call

Jeremy Minns

Highland Elaenia (*Elaenia obscura sordida*) · ST2 call

Jeremy Minns

ST3 trill. A short (0.3-0.5 s) trill. [XC49362](#) and [XC332193](#) are examples.

[XC49362](#) 

play


pause

stop

0:00

0:02



[XC332193](#) 

play

pause

stop

0:00

0:08



Highland Elaenia (*Elaenia obscura*) · song

Rosendo Fraga

Highland Elaenia (*Elaenia obscura sordida*) · ST3 trill

Jeremy Minns

ST4 whine. A drawn out, nasal note, that may be single ([XC23372](#)) or in a series ([ML39147](#), [ML179790](#) in the first 13 secs and later).

[XC23372](#) 

play

pause

stop

0:00

0:27



Highland Elaenia (*Elaenia obscura*) · call

Fernando Jacobs

Plain-crested Elaenia (*E. cristata*)

This species does not have a stereotyped dawn song, unlike most other elaenias, but throughout the day it utters a 'song' which consists of different song elements, given at a measured pace and at approximately equal intervals. In [XC272543](#), for example, five different song elements appear.

[XC272543](#) 

play

pause

stop

0:00

1:19



Plain-crested Elaenia (*Elaenia cristata*) · song

Peter Boesman

The song elements most frequently heard are:

ST1 3-note phrase. A short trill is followed by an emphatic burry note and then by a shorter burry note. Each note is at a slightly higher pitch than the preceding note. The rhythm is characteristic. See [XC81533](#) (first, fourth, sixth, eighth and tenth phrase. To hear the examples of this sound type, click below on the catalogue number of the recording and then on the times in 'Remarks from the Recordist'), [XC329825](#) (second, third and fourth phrase etc., recorded at 15:12 in the afternoon) and [XC81199](#) (second, fifth and sixth phrase etc.).

[XC81533](#) 

play

pause



[XC329825](#) 

play

pause



[XC81199](#) 







play

pause



stop 0:00 0:21	stop 0:00 1:43	stop 0:00 0:25
Plain-crested Elaenia (<i>Elaenia cristata cristata</i>) · Dawn song	Plain-crested Elaenia (<i>Elaenia cristata</i>) · song	Plain-crested Elaenia (<i>Elaenia cristata cristata</i>) · Dawn song
<i>Jeremy Minns</i>	<i>Jeremy Minns</i>	<i>Jeremy Minns</i>

ST2 quick trill. Five or six notes, descending in pitch and accelerating in pace, with each note shorter than the last, until the last longer note. This can be seen clearly in the sonogram. See [XC3963](#), [XC81531](#) (first, fourth, seventh and ninth phrase) and [XC272544](#) (second, fifth and sixth phrase etc.).

XC3963 	 XC81531 	 XC272544 	
play	play	play	
pause	pause	pause	
stop 0:00 0:27	stop 0:00 0:56	stop 0:00 0:42	
Plain-crested Elaenia (<i>Elaenia cristata cristata</i>) · call?	Plain-crested Elaenia (<i>Elaenia cristata cristata</i>) · call, song	Plain-crested Elaenia (<i>Elaenia cristata</i>) · song	
<i>Nick Athanas</i>	<i>Jeremy Minns</i>	<i>Peter Boesman</i>	

ST3 slow trill. Slower than ST2, level pitched and ending with a longer, descending note or notes. See [XC81530](#) and [XC33415](#).

XC81530 	 XC33415 	
play	play	
pause	pause	
stop 0:00 0:10	stop 0:00 0:03	
Plain-crested Elaenia (<i>Elaenia cristata cristata</i>) · Call	Plain-crested Elaenia (<i>Elaenia cristata</i>) · call	
<i>Jeremy Minns</i>	<i>Marcos Melo</i>	

ST4 descending call. One to five slow notes, descending in pitch. See [XC81534](#), [XC146803](#) and [XC202508](#).

XC81534 	 XC146803 	 XC202508 	
play	play	play	
pause	pause	pause	
stop 0:00 0:29	stop 0:00 1:16	stop 0:00 0:05	
Plain-crested Elaenia (<i>Elaenia cristata cristata</i>) · Call	Plain-crested Elaenia (<i>Elaenia cristata cristata</i>) · call	Plain-crested Elaenia (<i>Elaenia cristata</i>) · song	
<i>Jeremy Minns</i>	<i>Andrew Spencer</i>	<i>Hans Matheve</i>	

ST5 quick level trill. There are few recordings of this call. See [XC272538](#) and [ML68484](#), where it appears with ST1.

XC272538 	
play	
pause	
stop 0:00 0:44	
Plain-crested Elaenia (<i>Elaenia cristata</i>) · dawn song	
<i>Peter Boesman</i>	

Plain-crested Elaenia is identifiable in the field and can be distinguished from other sympatric elaenias with confidence. There is no reason to believe that the large body of recordings of the above sound types have been wrongly attributed to this species.

Lesser Elaenia (*E. chiriquensis*)

Restricted to savanna / cerrado habitat, its range overlaps partially with those of Large, Plain-crested, Small-billed and Chilean Elaenia. When seen well it is separable in the field from all these species. Two of its vocalization types are diagnostic, but the ST3 whistle is not.

ST1 dawn song. Usually given at dawn but sometimes later in the morning or even in the late evening. Unique to the species. There are two components to the distinctive song of Lesser Elaenia: a short phrase and a long phrase. The short phrase is a quick double note, the long phrase is the short phrase followed by two or three quick lower pitched notes and a final higher pitched note. In [ML69888](#) the long phrase is preceded by several short phrases. In [XC18520](#) and [XC246362](#) the song consists only of the long phrase.

XC18520 	 XC246362 	
play	play	
pause	pause	
stop 0:00 0:19	stop 0:00 0:09	
Lesser Elaenia (<i>Elaenia chiriquensis</i>) · song	Lesser Elaenia (<i>Elaenia chiriquensis albivertex</i>) · dawn song	
<i>Robson Silva e Silva</i>	<i>Niels Krabbe</i>	

ST2 chibum call. The sound of this 2-note call gives the species its name in Portuguese. See [XC81526](#).

XC81526 	
play	
pause	

stop
0:00
0:19

Lesser Elaenia (Elaenia chiriquensis albivertex) - Song
Jeremy Minns

ST3 whistle. This is a short, overslurred whistle, showing in the sonogram as an inverted 'V' or 'U'. It is the first elaenia vocalization that we have met that does not provide a clear ID. Both Large Elaenia (*E. spectabilis*) and Chilean Elaenia (*E. chilensis*) have a single note whistled call. I shall deal with the differences between these whistles below. Meanwhile, examples of whistles that are almost certainly by Lesser Elaenia are [XC345324](#), [WA1842549](#), [WA1804965](#), [WA1566228](#) and [WA72161](#). In these recordings the whistle and the chibum call appear in the same cut. In [ML69890](#) the whistle is heard with a twilight song. [WAxxxxx recordings can be found on www.wikiaves.com.br/xxxxx]

[XC345324](#) 



play

pause

stop
0:00
0:48


Lesser Elaenia (Elaenia chiriquensis albivertex (ssp assumed from location)) - song
Jeremy Minns

ST4 buzzy call. This is a rarely recorded single note call. Examples are [WA1548629](#) and [WA2809507](#). On [WA2809555](#) there is a good photo of the bird in the latter recording.

Large Elaenia (*Elaenia spectabilis*)

This species is distinguishable in the field from other elaenias by its large size. The most frequently heard vocalizations are:

ST1 dawn song. Unique to the species. Usually given in the early morning, rarely later in the day. A 3-syllable phrase repeated at regular 2-3 sec intervals. See [XC70516](#), [XC49364](#).

[XC70516](#) 



[XC49364](#) 



play

play

pause


pause

stop
0:00
1:07

stop
0:00
0:17

Large Elaenia (Elaenia spectabilis) - Song **Large Elaenia (Elaenia spectabilis) - song**
Bernabe Lopez-Lanus *Rosendo Fraga*

ST2 'wheeo' call. This is a descending, slightly underslurred 'wheeo' note, often preceded by a quiet explosive note that appears in the sonogram as a vertical line. See [XC176957](#) and [XC207894](#). It is variable, even in the same region, being sometimes longer, sometimes shorter. In northeastern Brazil this call is a little different, being slightly over- rather than underslurred. See [XC7081](#), [XC6158](#) (at 7.5 secs) and [WA2834939](#). This form of the call is reminiscent of Small-billed Elaenia's ST3 call, but there should seldom be doubt as to the ID as Small-billed Elaenia is rare in northeastern Brazil and the two species are visually separable.

[XC176957](#) 



[XC207894](#) 



[XC7081](#) 



play

play

play

pause

pause

pause

stop
0:00
0:09

stop
0:00
0:12

stop
0:00
0:24

Large Elaenia (Elaenia spectabilis) - song **Large Elaenia (Elaenia spectabilis) - call** **Large Elaenia (Elaenia spectabilis) - call**
Cleberton D. Bianchini *Robson Silva e Silva* *Glauco Alves Pereira*

[XC6158](#) 




play

pause

stop
0:00
0:21

Large Elaenia (Elaenia spectabilis) - song
Ciro Albano

ST3 whistle. This is a short, overslurred whistle, showing in the sonogram as an inverted 'V' or 'U'. See [XC163532](#) (at 8.5 secs), [XC148699](#), [XC71180](#) (from 11 secs) and [ML516954](#) at 23, 36 and 44 secs). As this call can be confused with the whistle of Lesser and Chilean Elaenia, I have chosen examples where the ST1 song or ST2 or ST4 call is present as well.

[XC163532](#) 



[XC148699](#) 



[XC71180](#) 



play

play

play

pause

pause

pause

stop
0:00
0:22

stop
0:00
0:34

stop
0:00
2:49

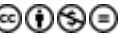
Large Elaenia (Elaenia spectabilis) - song **Large Elaenia (Elaenia spectabilis) - call** **Large Elaenia (Elaenia spectabilis) - song**
Pedro Rinaldi *rudy gelis* *Paul Donahue*

ST4 rattle. [ML516954](#), [XC81552](#) (last 10 secs), [XC52842](#) (at 15.5 secs).

[XC81552](#) 



[XC52842](#) 



play

play

pause

pause

stop

stop

0:00
0:36
Large Elaenia (*Elaenia spectabilis*) · call
Jeremy Minns







0:00
0:19
Large Elaenia (*Elaenia spectabilis*) · song
Carlos Ferrari

ST5 descending sequence. [ML190740](#) (at 38 secs), [WA1841464](#) (18-25 secs).

Small-billed Elaenia (*Elaenia parvirostris*)

The vocalizations that are useful for the identification of Small-billed Elaenia are:

ST1 dawn song. Usually given in the very early morning but sometimes later in the day. This is another elaenia with a stereotyped song, unique to the species, consisting of a series of 4-note phrases, transcribed by Belton (1985) as "weedable-we", given at regular intervals. See [XC344289](#), [XC81545](#) and [XC49382](#) (in which there are also variations on the standard 4-note phrase). Sometimes high frequency single notes may be interposed between the phrases of the song, as in [XC344289](#) at 10s, 16s and 20s.

XC344289 		XC81545 		XC49382 	
play		play		play	
pause		pause		pause	
stop		stop		stop	
0:00		0:00		0:00	
0:47		0:09		0:31	
Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · song <i>Rodrigo Dela Rosa</i>		Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · Dawn song <i>Jeremy Minns</i>		Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · song <i>Rosendo Fraga</i>	

ST2 pik call. [XC49388](#) (first two calls) and [XC50922](#). This call is very similar to the ST3 call of Olivaceous Elaenia but the two can be distinguished if heard well. The call of Small-billed is higher-pitched and sharper than that of Olivaceous Elaenia, which is lower pitched and less abrupt.

XC49388 		XC50922 	
play		play	
pause		pause	
stop		stop	
0:00		0:00	
0:14		0:13	
Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · song <i>Rosendo Fraga</i>		Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · song <i>Bernabe Lopez-Lanus</i>	

ST3 descending call. This category covers a wide range of calls that form a continuum. The call may be short, as in [XC290056](#) (first three calls), or longer, as in [XC46423](#) and [XC49384](#). It may resemble the ST2 call of Large Elaenia.

XC290056 		XC46423 		XC49384 	
play		play		play	
pause		pause		pause	
stop		stop		stop	
0:00		0:00		0:00	
0:18		0:22		0:15	
Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · song <i>Pedro Rinaldi</i>		Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · Feuu call <i>Bernabe Lopez-Lanus</i>		Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · song <i>Rosendo Fraga</i>	

The descending call may be so modulated that it becomes a 2-note call, as in [XC205368](#) and [XC50917](#).

XC205368 		XC50917 	
play		play	
pause		pause	
stop		stop	
0:00		0:00	
0:13		0:19	
Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · song <i>Gabriel Rosa</i>		Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · song <i>Bernabe Lopez-Lanus</i>	

Olivaceous Elaenia (*Elaenia mesoleuca*)

ST1 song. The song, unique to the species, is a 4-note phrase, with a pause between the first and second notes: 'wit.... wit wichoo'. [XC284498](#) and [XC81540](#) exemplify this well. This phrase may be given at regular or irregular intervals, at any time during the day. If analysed, it is seen to be composed of four different elements. The two note 'wichoo' is always present; the 'wit' calls vary and may be any of three single note sound types. For identification purposes it is the rhythm and the 'wichoo' sound type that are important rather than the precise sound of the 'wit' call.

XC284498 		XC81540 	
play		play	
pause		pause	
stop		stop	
0:00		0:00	
0:53		0:21	
Olivaceous Elaenia (<i>Elaenia mesoleuca</i>) · call <i>Jerome Fischer</i>		Olivaceous Elaenia (<i>Elaenia mesoleuca</i>) · Song <i>Jeremy Minns</i>	





ST2 buzzy call. This is one of the three types of 'wit' note that are components of the song but it may appear on its own, as for example in [XC299733](#).

XC299733 	
--	---

play
pause
stop
0:00
0:04





Olivaceous Elaenia (*Elaenia mesoleuca*) - song
Pedro Rinaldi

ST3 pik call. This is a short, single note that appears as an inverted 'V' or 'hairpin' in the sonogram. Examples are **XC81538** (see forum discussion of this recording), **XC81543** (the second and fourth calls) and **ML19568** (in the third cut, alternating with ST4). It is very like the ST2 call of Small-billed Elaenia (see above).

XC81538 		XC81543 	
play		play	
pause		pause	
stop		stop	
0:00		0:00	
0:10		0:45	

Olivaceous Elaenia (*Elaenia mesoleuca*) - Call **Olivaceous Elaenia (*Elaenia mesoleuca*)** - Two different calls and sound of interaction
Jeremy Minns *Jeremy Minns*

ST4 call. This call is highly variable. It may be a slightly longer version of the 'pik' call, less sharp and more burry. In the sonogram it appears as an inverted 'V' with a 'tail' after the second leg. Examples are **XC164699** and the first call in **XC81543**.

XC164699 		XC81543 	
play		play	
pause		pause	
stop		stop	
0:00		0:00	
0:27		0:45	

Olivaceous Elaenia (*Elaenia mesoleuca*) - call **Olivaceous Elaenia (*Elaenia mesoleuca*)** - Two different calls and sound of interaction
Christian Regis da Silva *Jeremy Minns*

In other cases the inverted 'V' has practically disappeared and the 'tail' is more defined, giving a diagnostic descending burry sound. This is a commonly heard call and there are many recordings on XC, ML and WA. For example **XC325913**, **XC118643** and **ML19568** (in the first cut).

XC325913 		XC118643 	
play		play	
pause		pause	
stop		stop	
0:00		0:00	
0:31		0:40	





Olivaceous Elaenia (*Elaenia mesoleuca*) - call **Olivaceous Elaenia (*Elaenia mesoleuca*)** - call
Jeremy Minns *GABRIEL LEITE*

Chilean Elaenia (*Elaenia chilensis*)

This species breeds in Argentina and Chile and migrates north during the austral winter, reaching northeastern and northern Brazil (*Somenzari et al.*). This pattern is supported by the recordings on XC, ML and WA. From August to February there are 57 recordings from Argentina and Chile and 11 from Brazil and Bolivia. From March to July there are 62 recordings from Brazil and Bolivia and none from Argentina and Chile.

There are four common sound types present in these 130 recordings, of which the only one recorded in Brazil is the simple whistle (ST2).

ST1 song. A series of double notes, given at short, regular intervals, e.g. **XC46419**, **XC1652**.

XC46419 		XC1652 	
play		play	
pause		pause	
stop		stop	
0:00		0:00	
0:21		0:49	

Chilean Elaenia (*Elaenia chilensis*) - Dawn song **Chilean Elaenia (*Elaenia chilensis*)** - call
Bernabe Lopez-Lanus *Sperd Mayer*

ST2 simple whistle. A short, clear, overslurred whistle. The sonogram ranges from an inverted 'V' with a sharp apex (**XC225270**) to a smooth inverted arc.

XC225270 	
play	
pause	
stop	
0:00	
0:07	

Chilean Elaenia (*Elaenia chilensis*) - song
Lance A. M. Benner

ST3 modulated whistle. A modulated, burry, drawn out form of ST2. See **XC309056**, **XC4587** and **ML129371**. It is similar to the ST4 call of Small-billed Elaenia.

XC309056 		XC4587 	
play		play	

pause
 stop
 0:00
 0:54
Chilean Elaenia (*Elaenia chilensis* Chilensis) · begging call
Cristian Pinto

pause
 stop
 0:00
 0:10
Chilean Elaenia (*Elaenia chilensis*) · Call
Aidan Maccormick

ST4 double whistle. Two ST2 or ST3 whistles, or one of each, e.g. **XC53272**.

XC53272  

play
 pause
 stop
 0:00
 0:12
Chilean Elaenia (*Elaenia chilensis*) · song
Felix Vidoz















ST5 dawn song. A series of downslurred two- and three-note whistles, given at regular intervals, e.g. **XC449910**.

XC449910  

play
 pause
 stop
 0:00
 0:27
Chilean Elaenia (*Elaenia chilensis*) · song
Peter Boesman

How can we be sure that the songs of Small-billed Elaenia (*Elaenia parvirostris*), Olivaceous Elaenia (*E. mesoleuca*) and Chilean Elaenia (*E. chilensis*) are correctly attributed?

These three species cannot be reliably separated in the field. The songs generally attributed to each species are very distinct and cannot be confused but how can we be certain that these distinctive songs have been correctly assigned? The answer is to compare the geographical distribution of each song type with the range of each species. The range of Olivaceous Elaenia as shown in Ridgely and Tudor (1994) is restricted to southeast Brazil, eastern Paraguay and northeast Argentina and most of the recordings of the song of this species on XC, ML and WA were made in this area. The exceptions (**XC299733**, **XC93406**, **XC93328**, **XC16330**, **ML187245** and **ML187247**) were made in Uruguay, a short distance outside the above area. The breeding range of Small-billed Elaenia, however, extends to Bolivia, all of Paraguay and northern Argentina (south to Buenos Aires and San Luis). There are many recordings of the song of Small-billed Elaenia from locations well outside the range of Olivaceous Elaenia, for instance **ML129775** (Jujuy, Argentina), **XC212721** (Salta, Argentina), **XC50224** (Saladillo, Buenos Aires), **XC3761** (Catamarca, Argentina), **ML86540** (San Luis, Argentina). Both Small-billed and Olivaceous Elaenia move north in the austral winter, but the recordings of the song of Small-billed Elaenia in La Paz, Bolivia (**ML120803**) and Guyana (**ML134440**) are outside the non-breeding range of Olivaceous Elaenia. We can therefore be certain that the ST1 songs of Small-billed and Olivaceous Elaenia do in fact belong to those species.

XC299733  	XC93406  	XC93328  
play	play	play
pause	pause	pause
stop 0:00 0:04	stop 0:00 1:09	stop 0:00 0:01
Olivaceous Elaenia (<i>Elaenia mesoleuca</i>) · song <i>Pedro Rinaldi</i>	Olivaceous Elaenia (<i>Elaenia mesoleuca</i>) · Song <i>José Luis Menéndez</i>	Olivaceous Elaenia (<i>Elaenia mesoleuca</i>) · Song <i>Adrián Azpiroz</i>
XC16330  	XC212721  	XC50224  
play	play	play
pause	pause	pause
stop 0:00 0:54	stop 0:00 2:04	stop 0:00 0:33
Olivaceous Elaenia (<i>Elaenia mesoleuca</i>) · song <i>Alvaro Riccetto</i>	Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · dawn song <i>Niels Krabbe</i>	Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · song <i>Miguel Angel Roda</i>
XC3761  		
play		
pause		
stop 0:00 0:27		
Small-billed Elaenia (<i>Elaenia parvirostris</i>) · call, song <i>Rosendo Fraga</i>		









Chilean Elaenia breeds in the southern Andes and migrates north in the austral winter. There are not many recordings of its song on XC and ML from locations outside the ranges of both Small-billed and Olivaceous Elaenia but there are sufficient (**XC17873**, **XC53271**, **XC16005**) for there to be no doubt that its song is correctly attributed.

XC17873  	XC53271  	XC16005  
play	play	play
pause	pause	pause
stop 0:00 1:00	stop 0:00 0:13	stop 0:00 1:57

Chilean Elaenia (*Elaenia chilensis*) - Song **Chilean Elaenia (*Elaenia chilensis*) - song** **Chilean Elaenia (*Elaenia chilensis*) - dawn song**
Doug Knapp Felix Vidoz Niels Krabbe

Identifying elaenia whistles

As we have seen, Large, Lesser and Chilean Elaenia all have a single whistle in their repertoire. These whistles sound very similar, with Large Elaenia's tending to be a little longer and lower pitched - compare **XC108630** and **XC44199** with **XC59344** and **XC29344**.

XC108630 	 XC44199 	 XC59344 	
play	play	play	
pause	pause	pause	
stop	stop	stop	
0:00	0:00	0:00	
0:40	0:24	0:26	
Large Elaenia (<i>Elaenia spectabilis</i>) - call, song <i>Joao Menezes</i>	Large Elaenia (<i>Elaenia spectabilis</i>) - call <i>Adrian Eisen Rupp</i>	Lesser Elaenia (<i>Elaenia chiriquensis</i>) - ? <i>Renaudier Alexandre</i>	
XC29344 			
play			
pause			
stop			
0:00			
0:30			
Chilean Elaenia (<i>Elaenia chilensis</i>) - call <i>Niels Krabbe</i>			

I have attempted to quantify the differences, measuring one call from each of a number of recordings. For Large and Lesser Elaenia I have chosen only recordings on xeno-canto, WikiAves and the Macaulay Library which contain the song or a diagnostic call as well as the whistle, so as to be confident that the ID is correct. That option is not available for Chilean Elaenia as all the recordings of the whistle in these three collections contain no other sound type. The results are as follows:

[elaenia whistles table](#)

These numbers confirm the subjective impression that Large Elaenia's whistle is a little longer and lower pitched. However, if these measurements are plotted on a graph there is considerable overlap between the values for the three species:

[elaenia whistles graph](#)

If the whistle is longer than 0.3 sec and its peak frequency is below about 2500 Hz, the species is probably, but not certainly, Large Elaenia. Therefore, if you are unable to identify an elaenia visually, you need to hear its song or a diagnostic call, rather than a whistle, to make a positive identification by voice.

Conclusion

A highly respected contributor to the Brazilian ornitobr group once wrote that he had no confidence in the vocal repertoires conventionally attributed to the elaenias because of the difficulty in identifying them in the field. He maintained that the only way to establish reliable repertoires of these species was by a systematic process of recording vocalizations in the field combined with the collection of voucher specimens. Belton tackled this problem in a different way, capturing and banding individuals of Small-billed Elaenia and observing and recording them in the field. In this way he was able to prove that the ST1 and ST2 sound types did indeed both belong to Small-billed Elaenia and not to two different species (Belton, 1985). The wealth of recordings now available means that these extreme steps are no longer necessary and most vocalizations can be attributed to the correct species with a high degree of certainty.

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