

## ADDITIONS TO THE BIRDS OF THE TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS

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**Abstract.**—We report the results of an intensive wetland survey on the avifauna of the Turks and Caicos islands, which updates the list of 183 species reported by Buden (1987). About 60% of the bird fauna listed therein was observed during two visits and 55% of these sightings resulted in new records within the Turks and Caicos islands and 11% for the Turks and Caicos as a whole.

Wetland habitat is one of the fastest disappearing habitat types in the world today and it is only relatively recently that the importance of this habitat is being realized. In the coastal mangrove zone of the tropics, wetlands may possess unique flora and fauna of scientific, cultural and recreational value. For these reasons international conservation bodies have been particularly concerned over the decline of wetland habitat and efforts are being directed at conserving this resource.

A survey was undertaken to compile a preliminary inventory of important wetlands in the Turks and Caicos islands that would qualify under the Ramsar Convention on identified and described wetlands. A basic description of wetland types was required with individual descriptions of sites thought to be important in the preliminary survey, as well as, avifauna species considered important for designating wetlands.

Buden (1987) reported on 183 species of birds of the southern Bahamas (Crooked and Acklin's islands, Mayaguana, Little and Great Inagua) and the Turks and Caicos islands whose status was considered acceptable, although several other species were listed as needing further corroboration. Buden's treatment of the avifauna of the Turks and Caicos fills a major void in our understanding of the southern Bahamas region and the banks whose fauna occupies these islands (Norton 1988).

Indeed, these banks are close to, and are influenced by, the Greater Antillean bird fauna of Cuba, Hispaniola and Puerto Rico. Buden's frequent visits to the Turks and Caicos islands ended in the late 1970s. Since that time experienced observers have contributed records of birds to *American Birds* West Indies regional summaries and to local publications not receiving wider acceptance. These observations serve to confirm and produce a fuller understanding of avian occurrences over the seemingly

homogeneous, yet subtly different, landscape at the southern terminus of the Bahamas.

#### METHODS

We used a small, fixed-wing aircraft for initial survey of wetland areas. Field truthing of wetlands was conducted on foot and by small boat with the aid of 1:2500 scale DOS maps. See Buden (1987) for map of area. The itinerary of the visits during 1987 was as follows: 17-20 July, Grand Turk; 21 July, East Caicos; 22 July, South and Middle Caicos; 23, 25 July, Middle Caicos; 24, 26 July, East Caicos; 27 July, Sawgrass, Malley, and Flamingo Ponds, North Caicos; 28, 29 July, Grand Turk; 25 September, Grand Turk, Providenciales; 26 September, aerial survey, West Caicos, Provo, cays, North, Middle Caicos; 27 September, Provo; 28 September, West Caicos; 29 September, Provo; 30 September, Pine Cay, North Caicos; 1-3 October, North Caicos; 4 October, Middle Caicos; 5-6 October, Grand Turk.

Birds were identified with the aid of 8x and 10x power binoculars. Daily lists were compiled of plants and bird species. The status of avifauna were determined with the aid of Brudenell-Bruce (1975), Buden (1981, 1987), Sanderson (1982), Aldridge (1984), Halewyn and Norton (1984), and Bond (1985).

Ray and Sprunt (1971) have described several of the habitats and birdlife found in the Turks and Caicos islands. The current survey emphasized wetlands, although the following wetland and upland habitats (see Correll and Correll 1982) were investigated: submerged sand bank, small island, coastal rock community, beach, dune, intertidal sand and mud flats, lagoon, mangrove swamp, salt pond, salina, sinkhole, marshland, coppice, and pine-land. We investigated representative communities on nearly all islands and recorded bird species as we encountered them.

The nomenclature follows the 6th edition of the American Ornithologists' Union Checklist (1983).

#### RESULTS

The following is a list of species recorded as absent from the Turks and Caicos islands by Buden (1987).

Least Grebe (*Tachypaptus dominicus dominicus*).—Observed: West Caicos, Providenciales (including juveniles - 27 September), North Caicos. Reports for West Caicos and Provo represent the only records of the islands.

Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps antillarum*).—Observed: Providenciales, Pine Cay, North Caicos (including juveniles - 27 July). Reports represent only records from these locations and confirms breeding in Caicos Islands.

White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus catesbyi*).—Observed: Middle Caicos, East Caicos, Grand Turk. First report from E. Caicos. Apparently nests along the east facing cliffs of East Caicos. Three pairs noted at Grand Turk.

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*).—Observed: North Caicos, Middle Caicos. First record from Middle Caicos.

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*).—Observed: North Caicos (30 September), Middle Caicos (23 July). New records for

Turks and Caicos islands. Sanderson's (1982) report for Grand Turk (no date) was not recognized by Buden (1987).

Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber ruber*).—Observed: West Caicos, North Caicos, Middle Caicos. At Pumpkin Bluff Pond, North Caicos, a large area of 6-7,000 mounds was determined from counting the average number of mounds in a square meter and subsequent measure of the area on the DOS chart. The low number of flamingos presently observed in the Caicos Islands is probably a remnant group formerly nesting in the area. Reports from local residents of North Caicos suggest that Flamingo Pond was a feeding area and the airport, with its increased traffic in recent years, caused abandonment by the colony. Several ponds of North and Middle Caicos show evidence of feeding but not in the numbers suggested by the Pumpkin Bluff Pond nesting mounds.

West Indian Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna arborea*).—Observed: North Caicos (27 July, 30 September). Two ponds, Sawgrass Pond and at Bellfield Landing, are the only sites where this rare West Indian species was noted during the survey. Buden (1987) considered two earlier reports as tentative. These two sightings were of small to medium sized flocks (11 and 15, respectively) suggesting family groups and implies breeding. Photographs were taken and loose feathers collected. The adults of the group seen in July were apparently moulting as they did not attempt to fly when approached, but moved off into the mangroves leaving flight feathers on the surface of the water. Although it is possible that the two occurrences were of the same group, it is likely that two or more family groups inhabit the remote ponds of North Caicos.

Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*).—Observed: West Caicos (28 September). First record for the Turks and Caicos islands.

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*).—Observed: West Caicos (28 September), Providenciales. First report from West Caicos.

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*).—Observed: Providenciales (27 September), North Caicos (27 July). Summer records of Ruddy Duck suggest breeding and two males were in breeding plumage and displaying to five hen-plumaged ducks at Sawgrass Pond. This report represents the first records for the Turks and Caicos islands. Sanderson's (1982) report from Pine Cay in winter (no date) was not recognized by Buden (1987).

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius sparveroides*).—Observed: West Caicos, Providenciales, North Caicos, Middle Caicos, East Caicos, Grand Turk. First reports from West and East Caicos.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*).—Observed: West Caicos (28 September), Middle Caicos. First report from these islands and earliest fall date for the archipelago.

Clapper Rail (*Rallus longirostris*).—Observed: North Caicos, Grand Turk. First reports from these islands. Adult and chick seen on Grand

Turk (19 July) for first record of breeding.

Sora (*Porzana carolina*).—Observed: West Caicos, Providenciales. First report for West Caicos. Specimen found on 27 September on Provo provides earliest fall date for the Caicos Islands.

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*).—Observed: Providenciales, North Caicos. First reports from these islands.

American [Caribbean] Coot (*Fulica americana caribaea*).—Observed: North Caicos (27 July). Apparently the first record of the *caribaea* morph in the Turks and Caicos. Breeding suspected at Sawgrass Pond.

Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*).—Observed: West, North, Middle, and East Caicos, Grand Turk. Breeding resident, first report for North Caicos.

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*).—Observed: West Caicos. Common migrant, first record for West Caicos.

Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*).—Observed: West Caicos. First report for West Caicos, second 'unconfirmed report' for the Turks and Caicos islands (Buden 1987).

American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus prattii*).—Observed: Grand Turk. Uncommon local breeder. First report for Grand Turk.

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*).—Observed: West Caicos, Providenciales, North Caicos, Middle Caicos, East Caicos, Grand Turk. First reports for Providenciales and East Caicos.

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*).—Observed: West Caicos, Providenciales, North Caicos, East Caicos. Uncommon migrant, first report for West Caicos.

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*).—Observed: West Caicos, North Caicos, Middle Caicos, East Caicos, Grand Turk. Common winter migrant. First report from West Caicos.

Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*).—Observed: West Caicos. First report for Turks and Caicos islands. Reported by Sanderson (1982) from Grand Turk (no date), but not recognized by Buden (1987).

Willet (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*).—Observed: Providenciales, Middle Caicos, East Caicos, Grand Turk. Common summer resident, first report for Grand Turk.

Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*).—Observed: Middle Caicos. Rare migrant in area. First report from Turks and Caicos islands.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*).—Observed: North Caicos, Grand Turk. First report from North Caicos.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*).—Observed: West Caicos, Grand Turk. First report from West Caicos.

Western Sandpiper (*Calidris mauri*).—Observed: North Caicos. Uncommon migrant, first report from the Caicos Islands.

Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*).—Observed: West Caicos, Providenciales. Uncommon migrant, first reports from the Caicos Islands.

Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*).—Observed: West Caicos, North Caicos. Common migrant, first reports from the Caicos Islands.

Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*).—Observed: West Caicos, Providenciales, North Caicos, Middle Caicos. First reports from West and North Caicos.

Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*).—Observed: North Caicos (27 September). East Caicos (21 July), Grand Turk. Common summer resident, first report for East Caicos.

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*).—Observed: West Caicos, Middle Caicos, East Caicos (21 July), Grand Turk. Common summer resident, first report for East Caicos.

Gull-billed Tern (*Sterna nilotica aranea*).—Observed: Middle Caicos (23 July) and East Caicos (21 July). Summer resident, first record from East Caicos.

Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis acuflavida*).—Observed: West Caicos (28 September) and Grand Turk (21 July). Among the large number of *acuflavida* observed at West Caicos, was a single bird with bill markings of an intrograde Cayenne Tern (*S. s. eurygnatha*), a subspecies of the southern Caribbean that has expanded its range through the Puerto Rico Bank (Norton 1984, Schaffner et al. 1986). This is the first report of a Cayenne x Sandwich Tern from the Turks and Caicos islands and the southern Bahamas.

Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii dougallii*).—Observed: Middle Caicos, East Caicos (21 July), Grand Turk. Breeds in area, e.g. adults feeding chicks at cays off Middle Caicos in July, first record from East Caicos.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*).—Observed: West Caicos (28 September). Transient, first record from West Caicos.

Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaethetus recognita*).—Observed: Middle Caicos (24 July). First reports from Middle Caicos where they apparently nest on small cays off Bambarra.

Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata fuscata*).—Specimen: found (3 October) in Grand Turk salt pan drainage system. An abundant summer resident, but this is the first record from Grand Turk.

Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus stolidus*).—Observed: Grand Turk (2 on 19 July). Common summer resident, first report for Grand Turk.

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*).—Observed: Pine Cay (30 September), Middle Caicos (18, 23, 25 July) and abundant on East Caicos (19, 24 July) for the first records on that island.

Zenaida Dove (*Zenaida aurita*).—Observed: Middle Caicos (23, 25 July) and at East Caicos (24 July) for the first record on that island.

Antillean Nighthawk (*Chordeiles gundlachii*).—Observed: very common on Middle Caicos (23 and 25 July), yet previously unrecorded. Fledgling photographed on 25 July.

Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*).—Observed: West Caicos, Middle Caicos. First reports from these islands.

Greater Antillean Pewee (*Contopus caribaeus*).—Observed: two Greater Antillean Pewees were observed at Providenciales (29 September) only a few days after Hurricane Floyd passed over Hispaniola, where this Greater Antillean species is common. This is the first report of the species in the Turks and Caicos islands and the southern Bahamas.

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*).—Observed: East Caicos (24 July) for the first record and another on North Caicos (1 October).

Cliff Swallow (*Hirundo pyrrhonota*).—Observed: West Caicos (28 September) and Providenciales (4 birds on 27 September) for the first records from the Turks and Caicos islands. Sanderson's (1982) report (no date) from Grand Turk, not recognized by Buden (1987).

Cuban Crow (*Corvus nasicus*).—Observed: North Caicos (27 July), Middle Caicos (18, 23 July) and East Caicos (24 July) for the first report from that island. Heavily persecuted by local farmers; police often recruited to exterminate crows.

Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*).—Observed: a Red-eyed Vireo was seen at close range at North Caicos (1 October) for the first report from that island and seen in the hand at Providenciales as well as a specimen. Five were banded (Aldridge 1986) at Providenciales in 1984-85.

Nashville Warbler (*Vermivora ruficapilla*).—Observed: this warbler was observed at Providenciales (29 September: BA, RLN) and at North Caicos, near Bellfield Landing, (30 September: RLN) for the first record from the latter island. Aldridge (1986) banded one in the spring of 1982 at Provo.

Northern Parula (*Parula americana*).—Observed: one at West Caicos (28 September) for the first record from that island.

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*).—Observed: Providenciales (29 September) and Pine Cay (30 September) for the first record from that island.

Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*).—Observed: West Caicos (28 September) and at Pine Cay (30 September) for the first records from these islands, and North Caicos (1 October).

Blackpoll Warbler (*Dendroica striata*).—Observed: West and North Caicos (28 September and 2 October, respectively), for the first records from the Caicos Islands.

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*).—Observed: North Caicos (30 September and 1 October) for the first reports.

Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*).—Observed: one at North Caicos (26 July) at a fresh water pond near Kew for the first record from the Turks and Caicos islands.

Mourning Warbler (*Oporornis philadelphia*).—Observed: seen at

Bellfield Landing pond, North Caicos (30 September), providing new record for the Turks and Caicos islands. Sanderson's (1982) report from Providenciales as rare passage migrant or winter visitor (no date) was not recognized by Buden (1987).

Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*).—Observed: Blue Grosbeaks were common migrants in the Turks and Caicos islands (late September and early October) where six were seen at Providenciales (28 September: BA, RLN) and eight were seen at Middle Caicos (3 October) for a new record.

Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*).—Observed: 14 at West Caicos (28 September), 9 at Providenciales (26 September), and 8 at North Caicos (1 October) for the first records from the Caicos Islands.

### SUMMARY

We investigated 11 representative habitats-communities found on nearly all islands and recorded 109 bird species (ca. 60% of Buden's [1987] list) during late July, late September and early October 1987. Reported herein are accounts of 60 species (ca. 55%) which expand the knowledge of the distribution of common and rare migrant and resident avifauna of the Turks and Caicos islands, the southern terminus of the Bahamas archipelago. Of these accounts 48 describe new records within the two island-groups; 10 (11%) (Black-crowned Night-Heron, West Indian Whistling-Duck, Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck, 'Caribbean' form of American Coot, Solitary Sandpiper, Upland Sandpiper, Cliff Swallow, Louisiana Waterthrush and Mourning Warbler) represent new records for the Territory; and two (Greater Antillean Pewee and the 'Cayenne' form of Sandwich Tern) are records of the Bahamas.

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