

NOTES ON NORTH AMERICAN MIGRANTS IN COLOMBIA

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DURING a year's leave of absence from Michigan State University I spent about ten months (September 13, 1955, to July 20, 1956) in Popayán, in the intermontane hill country of southern Colombia, at latitude 2° 26' N. During this interval I was in the field almost daily, at least for short periods, and had a good opportunity to make incidental observations on familiar North American birds passing through or wintering in that area. Though the distribution and status of North American birds in Colombia is fairly well known from abundant collecting, my continuous records over nearly a year's time in one locality provide useful supplementary data for some species.

Popayán is located in the Departamento del Cauca, in the Cauca river valley, in the relatively high (1760 meters, or 5720 feet) plateau country between the Western and Central Andes. It is largely agricultural land, quite heavily pastured and thus severely denuded of its original vegetation, but a generous sprinkling of coffee and banana plantations, as well as fence rows and some uncut gullies, provide cover for quite a variety of birds. Because of the cutting of the original timber, however, true forest birds, and most mammals, have largely disappeared, or can be found only in the higher mountains immediately east or west of Popayán. In spite of proximity to the equator, the climate is prevailing cool, because of altitude, with a characteristically heavy cloud cover and high rainfall.

A comparison of the birds in the A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds (1957) with those in R.M. de Schauensee's *Birds of Colombia* (Caldasia, 5, nos. 22-26, 1948-1952) discloses that 84 North American species migrate fairly regularly to Colombia, 15 of which are transients en route to more southern wintering grounds, the other 69 genuine winter residents. A number of other North American migrants have been recorded from Colombia, but present knowledge of their status hardly justifies inclusion as regular migrants.

In my somewhat restricted operations in or near Popayán I had definite records on 30 of the 84 species that migrate regularly between the two continents. Comments on these occurrences are appended below. Except for Buenaventura on the Pacific coast, all the localities cited are inland in the Departamento del Cauca, and the September to December dates are for 1955, the January to July dates for 1956. Since my observations did not begin until mid-September, the earliest dates listed are not necessarily arrival dates.

ANNOTATED LIST OF SPECIES

Anas discors. Blue-winged Teal. Several North American ducks occur, either casually or regularly, in Colombia, but the most widespread and abundant of these is the Blue-winged Teal. Favorable duck marshes are largely lacking around Popayán; my only observation on this species here was of five birds flushed from a canal on November 8, but a few local hunters were more successful in finding larger numbers. On February 4, during a three-day trip into the Patia Valley, some 100 or more kilometers south of Popayán, a party of us visited a secluded lake near Galindez that was teeming with assorted waterbirds. Among the numerous local grebes (*Poliiocephalus dominicus*) with their downy young, and the many lily-trotting jaçanas (*Jacana jacana*), was a flock of 100 or more teal. A check of the latter with glasses revealed no identifiable examples of the less common Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*).

Buteo platypterus. Broad-winged Hawk. Though this species is found wintering throughout much of Colombia, and except for *B. swainsoni* is the only northern buteo to do so, my only unquestioned observation was of a lone bird perched at fairly close range at El Cofre, in the picturesque hill country outside Popayán, on February 19. (A group of nine small buteos passing over a hilltop in Popayán on October 22 was probably this species, as the somewhat similar resident *B. magnirostris* was never seen in flocks.)

Actitis macularia. Spotted Sandpiper. I found the Spotted Sandpiper fairly common (maximum count of nine on November 2) along the Río Cauca on my infrequent hikes to the river, but scattered individuals also wintered along smaller streams, including one that flowed through Mosquera Park in Popayán. My first observation here was on September 22, the last on April 21, a date later than some of the first arrival records in the northern states. Spotted Sandpipers were also seen at Patia on January 15, at Santander on January 27, and at Galindez on February 3, 4, and 5.

Tringa solitaria. Solitary Sandpiper. I never found this species associated with the Spotted Sandpipers along the rivers and streams, but in the more favorable marshland near Santander one was flushed from a roadside puddle on January 26. Two more were seen near there the next day. My only Popayán record was on May 9, a lone individual—perhaps a belated transient—with three yellowlegs in a pasture rainpool.

Totanus melanoleucus. Greater Yellowlegs. January 26, one in a roadside puddle at Santander; May 9, three at a rainpool in a pasture in Popayán.

Totanus flavipes. Lesser Yellowlegs. January 26, one in a roadside puddle at Santander.

Tryngites subruficollis. Buff-breasted Sandpiper. On October 5 a small group of sandpipers was noted in flight, then watched descending and feeding in a potato field near Popayán. One of these was collected by Roberto Ayerbe, and proved to a female Buff-breasted Sandpiper with a small ovary. Natives said these birds were common, but it is not certain, of course, that their observations always pertained to this species. Moreover, it is apparently a transient in Colombia, since, except for a December record at Popayán, all records (M. de Schauensee, *op. cit.* p. 447) are for fall (September 12 to November 12) or spring (April 4).

Coccyzus americanus. Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Although known to be a winter resident in Colombia, all my records for this species are in the fall or spring. I had seven records between October 8 and November 22 at Popayán, then no more until April 21. I also had five May records—May 8, 9, 12, 17(2), and 24—the latter sur-

prisingly late. M. de Schauensee (*op. cit.* p. 491) reports a sight record from Bogotá for June 3. A native cuckoo (*Coccyzus melacoryphus*) resembles the Yellow-billed, but is readily identified by its buffy-yellowish under parts.

Chordeiles minor. Common Nighthawk. These birds appeared in large numbers in late September (my first certain record was on September 28) and were common for about a month (last record November 3). By contrast my only spring record at Popayán was of a lone bird on April 19. During the day the nighthawks roosted in exposed situations in trees or on the tile roofs of buildings where they were highly prized targets for small boys with slingshots. Several mutilated or wounded specimens were brought to me, but though some were saved as skins, the race or races involved in the nighthawk flights were not determined (five confusing transient races of *Chordeiles minor* have been taken in Colombia and there are several additional closely allied forms).

Tyrannus tyrannus. Eastern Kingbird. This species also seems to be strictly a transient in Popayán. My records include five fall dates: September 29 (2), October 5, (4 or 5), October 8 (4), October 19 (1), November 2 (1). Spring records were as follows: April 13 (5 or 6 together), April 14 (7 in same place), April 15 (2), April 17 (1), April 19 (10 in city park, 9 of them once perched close together in a bamboo tree), April 28 (1), May 9 (1). These spring records seem to indicate a fairly heavy migration through Popayán in mid-April, with belated individuals lingering into May.

Myiarchus crinitus. Great Crested Flycatcher. Though this species is known to winter in Colombia, I had only three fall or early winter observations at Popayán, and none in the spring. The dates were October 8 (1), October 20 (1), and December 2 (1). Several resident *Myiarchus* species occur in Popayán but can be fairly readily distinguished from *crinitus* in the field. (It is more difficult to separate the resident species from each other than from *crinitus*.)

Empidonax virescens. Acadian Flycatcher. This species is also a winter resident in Colombia, but I made no attempt to distinguish it in the field as nondescript flycatchers of this type are so common in the tropics. A specimen collected in Patia on February 5 proved to be this species.

Contopus sp. Four migratory races of *C. virens* (and/or *sordidulus*) and two native species of *Contopus* make it useless to try to identify these birds in the field. Of interest, perhaps, is that one was observed singing its "Pee-a-wee" song repeatedly (about 12 times) on November 10. At other times the birds were silent or uttered only single calls.

Hirundo rustica. Barn Swallow. On several occasions in the fall a few Barn Swallows were noted, usually associated with the more abundant native Blue-and-white Swallows (*Atticora cyanoleuca*). The first were on September 18, the last on October 25. No more were seen thereafter at Popayán, but large numbers wintered about 90 kilometers north (at a lower elevation) in the Cauca valley, as disclosed on trips to Cali on January 19, January 26-27, February 11, and March 7-8. On January 27 three different groups of 138, 80, and 13 respectively were counted on roadside wires. They were in ragged plumage, some with short or uneven tails. One was observed preening, and body feathers sifted down to the ground as it preened. The birds were relatively inactive, mostly merely resting on the wires, though some engaged in foraging sorties out over the fields. On the evening of March 7, in this same place, hundreds if not thousands of swallows were milling around in the air at dusk, but whether they were all, or even predominantly, Barn Swallows was not determined. More Barn Swallows (a flock of about 50) were seen near here on the following day (March 8), still in ragged plumage.

Petrochelidon pyrrhonota. Cliff Swallow. This species is known only as a transient in Colombia. Except for several watched cruising about our boat on September 9 as we neared the port of Buenaventura on the Pacific coast, my first record was of a lone bird mingled with native swallows on September 24 in Popayán. Six more were seen on September 25, and on October 11 about the same number were watched foraging over a steep gully in a pasture. The last noted were on October 22, when four were seen perched on wires, or making short sorties over a meadow for insects.

Hylocichla ustulata. Swainson's Thrush. This winter resident was encountered on nearly every field trip that took me into their favorite habitats in shady ravines or wooded hillsides, but they were sometimes seen in other places, as along the usually shelterless roads, and, on December 14, hopping about the grass and flowers in Caldas Plaza, in the center of a bustling city of 44,000 people. Altogether I had 41 recorded dates between October 16 and April 21, and probably did not record every observation. On November 10 several were watched foraging along an exposed gravelly roadside bank, at times suddenly springing upward or fluttering forward in pursuit of moving prey. Later that morning six were seen close together, feeding on a pendulous flower cluster of an unidentified tree. On April 13 several were seen "flycatching" in the rain, perhaps from association with Eastern Kingbirds which I had seen in the same tree earlier on the same day. More often, however, the thrushes were feeding on fruit.

None of these birds was heard singing at Popayán until spring, but at El Bordo (100 kilometers south by winding road) at least two were in full song on the morning of January 15. At San Joaquin, just west of Popayán, singing was quite persistent on March 1. Then on March 27 at Popayán one (or more?) broke into song about twelve times. Presumably the late March birds were moving northward, as I had only four April records.

Vireo flavifrons. Yellow-throated Vireo. This is the only transient or wintering vireo that I dared identify in the field (six resident or transient races of *olivaceus* and five resident races of *gilvus* have been recorded in Colombia). But no trouble was encountered with this monotypic species. My only positive dates, however, were on November 10, November 21, December 2, and January 13.

Mniotilta varia. Black-and-white Warbler. Common all fall and winter, from September 22 to March 21. I had 42 dates listed, with one to seven individuals for each date. The lack of April records seems a little surprising in view of the lateness of some of the other warbler records.

Black-and-white Warblers engage in some fall singing. Typical songs were heard on October 1 and November 16. On October 14 one was watched crawling unconcernedly about the branches of a nearly leafless tree in which a hawk (*Buteo magnirostris*) perched. The hawk seemed to be watching the warbler but made no move to capture it and in a few moments the warbler flew away.

Vermivora chrysoptera. Golden-winged Warbler. Apparently uncommon. I had only five records: December 2 (im. ♂ ?), December 26 (same place, same bird?), February 28 (2), March 13 (ad. ♂).

Vermivora peregrina. Tennessee Warbler. My unquestioned records are October 26 (2), November 17, January 12 (several), January 13 (3), January 24 (1), March 13 (3). I had several less satisfactory dates, including a probable late record on April 20, but without a clear view of the crown this warbler can be confused with a local vireo (*dissors*) of the *Vireo leucophrys* group, which may be conspecific with our Warbling Vireo (*V. gilvus*). (*Dissors*, unlike our northern *gilvus*, has a brownish crown).

Dendroica petechia. Yellow Warbler. Common winter resident seen regularly

from September 16 to April 21. The last date is later than many early arrival dates in the northern states. On January 14, in El Bordo, one was seen "flycatching" with native tanagers and flycatchers with which it was associated on the exposed branches of a large tree in a park. It appeared to be imitating the more accomplished "flycatchers". In none of these observations was the exact race determined, though all were probably members of the North American *aestiva* group. There are five North American migrant and three resident Colombian forms of *D. petechia*, but the resident forms are apparently coastal and not recorded about Popayán.

Dendroica fusca. Blackburnian Warbler. Common winter resident, perhaps the most abundant of the wintering warblers. Seen regularly, often in considerable numbers, from October 5 to April 21, with one belated record on May 4.

Dendroica striata. Blackpoll Warbler. I had ten dates, between October 14 and January 20, listed for this species and none for *D. castanea*, which in general apparently winters further north, but some of my Blackpoll records were jotted down with question marks. Unfortunately, no spring males in full plumage were seen to help out in this uncertainty.

Seiurus noveboracensis. Northern Waterthrush. Common winter resident, seen regularly from September 22 to April 26, though less frequently in mid-winter. One apparently wintered along a small stream on the outskirts of Popayán, where it was last seen on April 26. Another frequented a wet, thicket-studded horse pasture, hardly a typical waterthrush habitat, near a University building and remained until April 16.

Oporornis philadelphia. Mourning Warbler. I had about 20 dates, mostly of males with full hood and black crescent, from October 31 to April 21, but had several earlier and one later (April 30) dates of questioned females or of birds not in full male plumage. One, or sometimes two, and once three individuals were seen during the winter in the rather scanty ground cover in Mosquera Park in Popayán, but other observations were in wooded ravines or on brush-covered hillsides. On April 20 one sang clearly three or four times from a dense thicket, but I could not locate the singer for further verification.

Wilsonia canadensis. Canada Warbler. Common winter resident, seen in ravines and on wooded hillsides with suitable undergrowth from October 5 to at least March 18. Curiously perhaps, I had no April records, the month when many other warblers were quite conspicuous. It sang its typical spring and summer song quite frequently in late March, but I did not record the first or last dates of song. It was not heard singing in fall or winter.

Setophaga ruticilla. American Redstart. Common winter resident, seen regularly from September 19 to April 10 (about 40 records). A few were in adult male plumage, others were immatures or females. On September 9, one of the latter came aboard ship the evening we docked in Buenaventura, was caught, examined and released. Redstarts were usually flitting about quite actively when seen, sometimes silent, sometimes calling, or occasionally giving brief snatches of song.

Dolichonyx oryzivorus. Bobolink. Strictly a transient in Colombia. My only records were on October 22, when three were seen perched momentarily on the swaying tips of low bushes fringing a stream in a meadow, and on November 2, when four were seen perched on fence wires along a country road. All were in a rather peculiar buffy plumage, perhaps that of winter males. The October 22 birds uttered their familiar "spink" notes when they took flight.

Piranga rubra. Summer Tanager. Birds of this type were seen quite frequently but irregularly from September 17 to May 22 (more often in spring and fall), but

this species is difficult to distinguish in the field from the Hepatic Tanager (*Piranga flava*) which is resident in Colombia. Possibly my two May records (May 14 and 22) were of the resident form.

Pheucticus ludovicianus. Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Apparently uncommon, I had only two unmistakable records from Popayán, one of an immature or molting male (pink of breast barely showing) on October 31 and another in similar plumage on November 3. At El Bordo a male in full plumage was seen on January 15.

SUMMARY

Of the 84 species of North American migrants that are winter residents, or transients, in Colombia, I found 23 wintering in or near Popayán in the Departamento del Cauca, between September and May, 1955-1956. Seven others were recorded as transients only. Of particular interest was the prevalence of wintering warblers (10 species), some of which were noted almost daily. Included also are a few interesting late departure dates for species that breed in the northern states or Canada.

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