

New records of bird species for Puerto Rico and one for the West Indies

Notes on nine species unrecorded in the past

Herbert A. Raffaele

FROM DECEMBER 1970 TO JULY 1977 I resided in Puerto Rico, the easternmost island of the Greater Antilles. During this period I noted numerous changes in the status of the island's avifauna, however, the records included here only deal with birds never before recorded from Puerto Rico, or for which skins or photographic documentation did not previously exist. Below I present only records in which I have particular confidence.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*). On Dec. 9, 1973 Cameron B. Kepler and Noel F. R. Snyder observed a large gull flying near shore at Sardinera on Mona Island which lies 72 km west of Puerto Rico, midway between that island and Hispaniola. The bird flew back and forth along the shoreline 4-5 times in good light and was identified with certainty as an immature Great Black-backed Gull. I observed an adult of the same species on Oct. 10, 1974 on the tidal mudflats by Constitution Bridge in San Juan Bay. It was in the company of Laughing Gulls (*L. atricilla*), Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*) and a variety of terns and shorebirds. On this date the color of the feet could not be seen well, a key character in distinguishing this species from the Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*) which has been recorded once in Puerto Rico (Bond, J. (1956) *Twelfth supplement to the check-list of birds of the West Indies*, Acad. Nat. Sci., Phila., 1967). However, the gull was observed in the same locality on three later dates through Jan. 10, 1975 during which time its flesh-colored feet were clearly noted and I photographed the bird. One of the photographs is in the collection of the Migratory Bird and Habitat Research Laboratory of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (accession no. 47-1T). The identity of the photographed bird was corroborated by

Chandler S. Robbins and Jay M. Sheppard.

These represent the first records of *L. marinus* from Puerto Rico and add that island to Cuba, St. Bartholomew and Barbados as the West Indian islands from which this gull has been reported. The October sighting also is the earliest fall date by two months for the occurrence of *L. marinus* in the Antilles.

Forster's Tern, (*Sterna forsteri*). Buckley and Buckley (*Condor* 72:483-486, 1970) reported up to six Forster's Terns in San Juan harbor Jan. 21-28, 1969 and at least four in Mayaguez harbor on Jan. 26. These are the only previous reports of this tern from Puerto Rico, the easternmost limit of the species' range in the West Indies. During rather intensive observations at San Juan harbor from 1971 through 1974 I recorded *S. forsteri* on only two occasions. Both observations were of single birds in winter plumage, one from Palo Seco peninsula at the west end of the bay on Mar. 6, 1971, and the second on Apr. 1, 1971 from the mudflats at Constitution Bridge. These sightings were very probably of the same bird. Bond J. (1974) *Birds of the West Indies*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, reports Forster's Tern as occurring in the West Indies from November through February. The March and April sightings, therefore, represent the latest spring records of the species for the West Indies. *S. forsteri* may be a very irregular visitant to the Antilles, which would account for its occurrence in numbers in 1969 and scarcity in succeeding years.

A photograph of *S. forsteri* taken on Mar. 6, 1971 has been given to the collection of the Migratory Bird and Habitat Research Laboratory (accession no. 69-1T). Chandler S. Robbins and J. M. Sheppard confirmed the identity of the photographed bird. This represents the

first certain documentation of the occurrence of *S. forsteri* in Puerto Rico.

Caspian Tern, (*Hydroprogne caspia*) The only published record of this species from Puerto Rico is that of Buckley and Buckley (1970) who reported a single bird in San Juan harbor from Jan. 21-26, 1969. I have observed this tern on the mudflats by Constitution Bridge in San Juan Bay as follows: one Jan. 1 - Mar. 11, 1971; one Nov. 17, 1972; two Oct. 20, 1973; one in July, August and October 1974 and two on Nov. 3, 1974. The species, therefore, has occurred regularly in Puerto Rico for at least 4 consecutive years, including the summer months of 1974. Its status on the island appears to be that of a very rare, but regular visitant.

I have taken photographs of *H. caspia* and one is on deposit in the collection of the Migratory Bird and Habitat Research Laboratory (accession no. 64-1T). Identification of the bird was corroborated by C. S. Robbins and J. M. Sheppard. This is the first photographic documentation of the species' occurrence in Puerto Rico.

Common Potoo (*Nyctibius griseus*). At 2300 on Dec. 5, 1974 Thomas Wiewandt observed a Common Potoo on Mona Island. The red eye shine of the bird appeared in the beam of Wiewandt's headlamp and he was able to approach to a distance of 3 m and observe the potoo for about 30 sec before it flew silently away. The bird was observed perched approximately 1 m above the ground in its typical vertical posture atop a bare, vertical, tree stump. The sighting was made on Mona's plateau above Sardinera near the radio antenna.

In the West Indies *N. griseus* was previously known only from Jamaica, Gonave Island and Hispaniola (Bond 1974). This sighting represents the first record

of the species east of Hispaniola and the first record within Puerto Rican territory.

Purple Martin (*Progne subis*). *Progne subis* is being treated here as a species distinct from the Caribbean Martin (*P. dominicensis*) following Meyer de Schauensee, R. (1970) *A guide to the birds of South America*, Livingston Publ. Co., Wynnewood, Pennsylvania.

At the Boqueron Refuge in southwest Puerto Rico on May 11, 1974 I was hiking across a fairly dry, open stretch of mangrove swamp when I came upon a small group of four or five Caribbean Martins intermittently perching on dead mangrove trunks. Among these birds was a single male *P. subis* in perfect plumage with its underparts entirely glossy purple, lacking even a trace of white. The bird was observed for a period of at least 5 min at close range with 10 x 40 binoculars. *Progne subis* has previously been recorded from the Bahamas, Cuba, Hispaniola and Grand Cayman (Bond 1974). This represents the first record from Puerto Rico and the easternmost observation of the species in the West Indies.

American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*). On Dec. 10, 1971 while hiking through a thick, xeric forest on the north coast of Mona Island, Jacob Whitmore, one of my companions and the lead hiker, stopped the group to inform us that a bird with red underparts was in the bushes ahead. I moved forward slowly, but the bird flushed and flew across a small opening in front of me into thick brush where it could not be pursued and from which it could not be attracted. During the instant the bird was in the open I could see only its upperparts, but these clearly had the dark back and white tips of the outer tail feathers characteristic of the American Robin, a species with which I am totally familiar. The only bird on Mona of somewhat similar appearance above is the fairly common Pearly-eyed Thrasher (*Margarops fuscatus*) which is larger than a robin, browner above, and with

substantially more white in its proportionately longer tail. There is no doubt that the bird observed was not of this species, and I am confident in the identification of this new record for Puerto Rico. Previously, *T. migratorius* was known to occur in winter in the northern Bahamas, Cuba and Jamaica, but was unknown from Hispaniola and Puerto Rico (Bond 1974). This observation from Mona Island suggests that stray birds do reach the eastern portion of the Greater Antilles.

White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*). Shortly after dawn on Dec. 31, 1970, I observed a vireo with distinct white wingbars high in a swamp immortelle (*Erithrina glauca*) tree in Parque Las Américas, San Juan. The bird flew down to forage in low trees and I was able to observe its yellow eye ring and lores. The throat was grayish-white and the flanks were yellowish. The vireo called twice, both times giving a chattering "tit-tit-tit-tit-, etc", repeated 10-15 times.

The bird was apparently a White-eyed Vireo and is the first observation of the species in Puerto Rico and the easternmost record of this vireo in the West Indies. The above sighting has been noted by Bond, J. (1971) *Sixteenth supplement to the checklist of birds of the West Indies*, Acad. Nat. Sci., Philadelphia. A subsequent observation of *V. griseus* in Puerto Rico was recorded by Terborgh and Faaborg (*Auk* 90:759-779, 1973) who mist-netted and released a bird on Mona Island during the first week of February, 1972.

Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*). At the Agriculture Experimental Station in Rio Piedras on Sept. 26, 1972, Noel and Helen Snyder, Kay Frank, Mitchell Fram and I observed a strange finch with a yellowish chest and black chin stripe feeding in short grass among a flock of Red Bishops (*Euplectes orix*). Before meeting again on Sept. 28, the Snyders and I independently determined that the bird had been a fall-plumaged Dickcissel. On the latter date the Snyders and I

again visited the Agriculture Experimental Station and N. Synder was able to take photographs from as close as 20 m with a 500 mm lens. Two of these photos are now in the collection of the Migratory Bird and Habitat Research Laboratory (accession nos. 604-1Ta and 604-1Tb), the identification having been corroborated by C. Robbins.

In the West Indies *S. americana* had previously been known only from the Bahamas, Cuba, Jamaica, Swan Island, Old Providence, St. Andrew's and Albuquerque Cay. This record represents the first sighting and authenticated record of a Dickcissel in Puerto Rico and the easternmost observation of the species in the Antilles.

White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*). While observing birds shortly after dawn on Jan. 15, 1971 in a wet field of high grass scattered with trees in Parque Las Américas, San Juan, I heard what sounded like the song of a White-throated Sparrow, a vocalization very familiar to me. The "Old Sam Peabody" call was repeated four times, but I was unable to locate the caller. Fifteen minutes later the bird called again and I located it on a clump of common bamboo (*Bambusa vulgaris*). While the bird perched in the open I had the opportunity to observe it with a 25 X scope at close range and in good light. The bird proved to be a perfectly-plumaged adult White-throated Sparrow of the white-striped morph. The white throat, crown stripes and the yellow spot over the bill were seen clearly. The bird continued calling and at times ended its "peabody" call with an almost Cardinal-like whistle. The following month, on Feb. 16, just after dawn, I again heard the White-throated Sparrow call from nearly the same locality as previously. When I returned with a camera the bird could not be located.

These observations of *Z. albicollis* represented the first records of the species for Puerto Rico and for the West Indies.

—Department of Ecology and Evolution, SUNY, Stony Brook, N.Y. 11794

