

First record of Brown-chested Martin for North America

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ON THE MORNING OF JUNE 12, 1983, the authors observed an unfamiliar hirundine on the south island of Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge, 11 kilometers south of Chatham, Barnstable County, Massachusetts. The swallow aerial fed and occasionally rested among a flock of approximately 50 Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), residents of the abandoned Monomoy Lighthouse building nearby. The size of the strange swallow was near that of a Purple Martin (*Progne subis*). Its uniformly brown upperparts, prominent grayish-brown breast band, conspicuous series of oblong spots down the mid-breast, and white throat, convinced the authors to make efforts to obtain a careful description and to photograph the bird (see Tingley 1983). After observing the swallow for nearly one hour, we left the island and promptly consulted field guides by Ridgely (1976), and Meyer de Schauensee and Phelps (1978), which suggested that the bird was a Brown-chested Martin [*Phaeoprogne (Progne) tapera*], a widespread South American species that ranges from Colombia and the Guianas, south to northern Argentina, southern Brazil, and Uruguay (A.O.U. 1983). Based on the prominent breast spotting and white throat, we suspected that the bird might belong to the race *P. t. fusca*, a migratory population from southern South America (Ridgely 1976). On a return visit to Monomoy Island that afternoon, the bird was located in the area of its initial discovery, and the specimen was obtained (U.S. Nat'l Mus. Nat. Hist. No. 699678; the skin prepared by James Baird; undetermined sex; wing chord 125 millimeters; skull unossified; weight 37.56 grams).

Subsequent comparison of the specimen to a museum series of *P. tapera* at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, confirmed initial suspicion that the specimen belonged to the southern race, *P. t. fusca*. Chapman (1929) described in detail the relationships of *Phaeoprogne*, and included in his discussion that the coloration of ". . . the southern *P. t. fusca* [resembles] a Bank Swallow with a median line of spots extending from the center of the breast-band to the belly." Chapman further points out that, "In many specimens of *fusca*, the throat is whiter and more clearly defined than in *tapera*."

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The Monomoy specimen agreed in all of these plumage characters with Chapman's description. The unossified skull and no apparent evidence of molt on the Monomoy Island specimen suggested that the bird was a first-year individual. This is supported by the fact that *P. tapera* appears to exhibit deferred postjuvenile molt until arriving on its wintering grounds (Chapman 1929), and as described for many North American hirundines (Dwight 1975).

Chapman (1929) and Zimmer (1938) have described the northward migration

of southern races of certain polytypic South American swallow species. Also, the occurrence of Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Muscivora tyrannus*) and Variegated Flycatcher (*Empidonomous varius*), species having populations with similar migration patterns, has been documented in the northeastern United States (Monroe and Barron 1980, Abbott and Finch 1978). Eisenmann (1952) first reported *P. t. fusca* as far north as Panama in 1949, and Ridgely (1976) described the species as an "Uncommon to abundant austral winter visitant from southern South America (mid-April-late September, most numerous May-August)." More recently, Stiles and Smith (1980) reported sight records of this species in September 1976 in Costa Rica. This represents the northernmost record in Middle America (A.O.U. 1983). The appearance of *P. tapera* in Massachusetts extends the northern occurrence of the species to North America by approximately 4900 kilometers.

Explaining the occurrence of extralimital vagrants such as *P. tapera* in New England can only be conjectural. However, weather patterns in late April 1983 suggest a possible explanation for the northward transport of this species to Monomoy Island. Nikula (1983) documented a major fallout of early North American migrants from South America in the wake of a low pressure system that passed New England April 23-25, 1983. This system, and a similar frontal passage May 24-26, accounted for exceptional numbers of tropical-wintering migrants throughout the New England states and eastern Maritime Canada. Although the appearance of *P. tapera* did not occur until mid-June,

it is possible that its earlier arrival went undetected. Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), several species of thrushes and warblers, Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*), Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*), and a scattering of other species, all arrived prematurely in April, some in impressive numbers. It seems reasonable to postulate that the Brown-chested Martin may have arrived coincidentally with these species, whose migratory origins at that season would be similar.

The potential for northward, migrational overshooting of vagrants has been discussed by McLaren (1981) with particular reference to Canadian islands in Nova Scotia. Considering the established migration pattern of *P. t. fusca*, the species' occurrence in New England is not implausible. Similar northward spring vagrancy has been documented in Nova Scotia for the Cuban race of the Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva cavicola*) (McLaren 1981). The record of *P. tapera* in Massachusetts should alert birders to the possibility of additional records of this and other austral migrants [e.g., Streaked Flycatcher (*Myiodynastes maculatus solitarius*) and Blue-and-White Swallow (*Pygochelidon cyanoleuca patagonica*)] in the continental United States.

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Brown-chested Martin in flight. Photo/Wayne R. Petersen.



Note the prominent breast spotting and white throat which was the first indication that the bird belonged to the race P. t. fusca. Photo/Wayne R. Petersen.

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