

West Indies Region

ROBERT L. NORTON

This season produced some high numbers of migrants in the northern part of the Region—particularly evident at Bermuda, a phenomenal migrant trap for Nearctic, Neotropical, and Palearctic species. However, no island in this Neotropical realm seems to be more strategically located for attracting Palearctic vagrants, as well as passage migrants, than Barbados. Already, this island may be the responsible portal for the invasion or fusion of two, perhaps three ardeids, in the New World (Cattle Egret, Little Egret, perhaps Western Reef-Heron). Sub-regional contributors Massiah and Frost, relentless in their pursuit of documenting rarities, have documented increased nestings of the “Littles,” and are anxious to see if their prediction of a Little Egret explosion in North America will occur in 1997. And you will find their quest for the pratincole, yet another Regional record, paid off. Surveys of the Bahamas by members of the Bahamas National Trust, with the assistance of Ailene Bainton, Tony White, Bruce Hallet, Dave Lee, and many others are also paying big dividends.

The weather in the northern quadrants (Bermuda to Bahamas) was windy and cool. The effects of last year's numerous storms were felt from the Virgin Islands to the Bahamas, particularly by tree-nesting seabirds. While these populations may

rebound from natural catastrophes large or small in scale, habitat loss from human endeavors may prove to have lasting effects on land birds (see woodpeckers, nuthatches, and orioles).

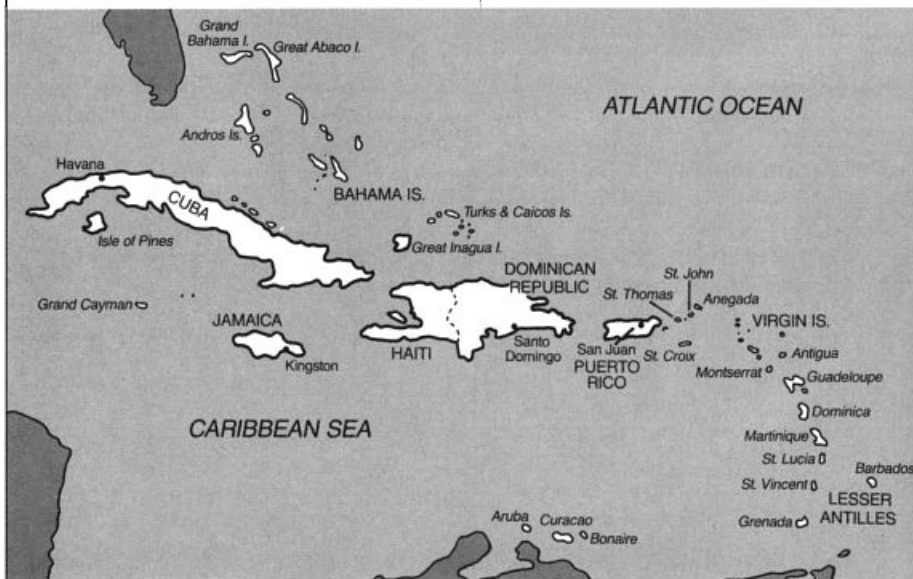
Abbreviations: Ba (Bahamas); Bd (Barbados); Be (Bermuda); BVI (British Virgin Islands); GB (Grand Bahama); NP (New Providence, Bahamas); El. (Eleuthera, Bahamas); SS (San Salvador, Bahamas).

Loons to Gulls

A moribund Com. Loon discovered at Dolly's Bay, St. David's, Be Dec. 22 was the first recorded there in 20 years (*fide* AD). A Manx Shearwater seen Jan. 30 off Bermuda was apparently early (AD). Sailing from Green Cay to Royal Island, Ba Feb. 24, Bainton counted about 35 Audubon's Shearwaters resting on the surface before they lifted away. In the Virgin Islands, this shearwater is already on eggs by Feb. 14 at some of the smaller islets (RLN). Red-footed Boobies (three) are hanging on at White Cay, SS, despite storm damage to previous nesting sites (*fide* BH *et al.*). An adult was on a nest Jan. 21, but the contents could not be determined. A Neotropical Cormorant was noted Dec. 12 at N. Great Abaco (DLe, MW-M). A Magnificent Frigatebird was an unusual find at the South Shore, Be Nov. 28 (SD). Rowan Roy of the British Virgin Islands sent a photograph of the hurricane decimated Great Tobago, BVI, frigatebird colony, 2nd largest on the Puerto Rican marine bank. The BVI National Park's efforts to remove goats from the island are critical to the recovery of vegetation and providing essential nesting habitat for this important colony.

SA Little Egrets continue to breed at Graeme Hall Swamp (EM, MF). More than a dozen nests were located in 1996; but the resident population seems to be fluctuating as a result of emigration to other islands and other latitudes, perhaps south as well as north. Massiah and Frost predict that numbers will explode in 1997, with North America being a major beneficiary after “lag phase and exponential growth here.” A follow-up report on another denizen of the renowned Graeme Hall Swamp includes more precise details of the Little Bittern observed Dec. 10 & 16, 1995. Two observers have personal experience with this species in Asia Minor (EM) and Africa (BB), and they have no doubt as to its identity. In fact, during 3 weeks of sightings lasting until Dec. 31, they believe they observed the African race *pavesii* also reported from the Cape Verde Islands (EM). This represents the first record from the West Indies, if not the New World.

A single imm. White Ibis remained through the winter at Jubilee Rd., Be, according to Dobson, after a quinter showed last fall. A road-kill West Indian Whistling-Duck found near Sugar Loaf, SS Jan. 19 appeared to be near good habitat (AB, BH, ToW); but eight whistling-ducks counted Feb. 21 at San Andros airport (CW, AR) was very encouraging. At least two Eur. Wigeon were found at Bermuda. One was at Spittal Pond Dec. 15, and two others wintered at Lovers L. from Jan. 26 through February (AD). A ♀ Hooded Merganser seen Dec. 14 at Chancery Lane, Bd, furnished a new island record (EM, MF). A Peregrine was seen at SS Jan. 20 (AB *et al.*). A Collared Pratincole was eventually identified and photographed in early January (EM, MF) at North Point, Bd. It eluded being shot by local hunters because it looked too much like a small hawk (*fide* EM)! Details included the condition of its worn non-breeding plumage, reddish underwing, and white trailing edge of the secondaries. Massiah and Frost place this individual in the European race. A Snowy Plover was noted at Sandy Pt. Beach, SS Jan. 22 (AB); and Feb. 24, Bainton counted 15 Piping Plovers at Spanish Wells, El. Two Piping Plovers were noted at Morgan's Point, Be, in December and at Spanish Pt., El., Jan. 24 (AD). Of three Bar-tailed Godwits reported from Bermuda (AD), one remained at least until Dec. 24 at the





Present at North Point, Barbados, at least from November 1996 to January 1997 was this pratincole, evidently Collared or Common Pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*) of the European race. Previous New World records of this family, *Glareolidae*, have come from the outer islands of Alaska. Photograph/Martin Frost.

Civil Air Terminal. Five Least Sandpipers wintered at St. George's Dairy, Be, for an unusual winter record (AD). Singleton Iceland and Glaucous gulls were seen throughout the winter at Bermuda (AD); and ER may have recorded Bermuda's first Thayer's Gull at Ferry Reach Dec. 7. There were no supporting details. A first-winter Great Black-backed Gull appeared at West End, Grand Bahama, Feb. 13 (CH, BH). A first-winter Bonaparte's Gull was noted at San Salvador Jan. 21–22 (AB, BH, ToW). A Caspian Tern was noted at Rideing Point, GB Feb. 18 (DLe).

Doves to Orioles

A White-winged Dove was seen at Marsh Harbour, Abaco, Dec. 13 (DLe, MWM). In the Bahamas National Trust Parrot Reserve, Great Abaco, a flock of 90 birds was seen between Dec. 12–19 (MW-M). Two Chuck-will's-widows were heard calling at Lyford Cay, NP Feb. 16 (ToW *et al.*). Last year, Dobson reported a wintering Ruby-throated Hummingbird at Bermuda as quite remarkable, but another was found this year at Lorhan's Devonshire home regularly in the fall and again after Dec. 25. Less than five West Indian Red-bellied Woodpeckers were encountered from Dec. 12 to 19 (DLe), but Hairy Woodpeckers appeared to be more common. An E. Kingbird was observed Dec. 15–16 (DLe) in the Parrot Reserve, Abaco, for one of the few, if any, winter reports from the Bahamas and the Region. Lee (*El Pitirre*, 1996) has been intermittently recording *Empidonax* sp. in the n. Bahamas, suggesting they over-winter. Two birds were seen at Abaco; one at the Parrot Reserve Dec. 14 & 16, and another at Hole-in-the-Wall Dec. 15. On Jan. 25, seven Horned Larks were found at the airport, the largest number recorded from Bermuda since 1990 (AD).

Two N. Rough-winged Swallows were seen at San Salvador Jan. 19 (AB, BH, ToW). A Fish Crow was photographed at Jack Tar Hotel complex, West End, Grand Bahama, Feb. 13 (BH, CH) and again Feb. 15–16 (ToW *et al.*) representing the first Bahamian and West Indian records. Four Brown-headed Nuthatches were counted Feb. 11 (PH, MD), 12 (CH, BH) & 15 (BH *et al.*) at the Sherwood-Radcliff track, Rand Nature Center, Grand Bahama. This resident species has a fluctuating population in the Bahamas. Another remarkable winter record from Bermuda was a Brown Creeper seen Jan. 16 (J&LM) through February, the first wintering creeper since 1969–1970 (*vide* AD). A Hermit Thrush was seen at Grand Bahama Feb. 13 (BH). Dean estimated about 20–30 Cedar Waxwings at Nassua, NP, through the end of February.

The 3rd consecutive winter record of Yellow-throated Vireo, seen Jan. 14 at St. Mark's Road, Be, and one at Paget Feb. 19, was considered rare (AD). Twenty-seven warblers were recorded at Bermuda this winter, including Louisiana Waterthrush at Compton's Pond in early January; 11 Orange-crowned, four Swainson's, and Wilson's Warblers (only the 5th record). Sixteen migrant warbler species were noted in the Bahamas (New Providence and San Salvador) from Jan. 17–24, including an Orange-crowned Jan. 17 (BH) at Nassau, a Worm-eating at Nassau Jan. 19 (PD), and another Worm-eating at SS Jan. 20 (AB, BH, ToW). Seventeen migrant species were counted at Grand Bahama from Feb. 11 to 15 (BH *et al.*), including single Tennessee and Nashville warblers Feb. 12. A survey of Abaco (DLe, MW-M) for over-wintering Kirtland's Warbler produced 2 confirmed sightings Dec. 15 & 17, and possibly 2 others. None appeared to banded (*vide* DLe). A Summer Tanager was noted Feb. 13 at Grand Bahama (BH *et al.*). One of the more remarkable warblers found in the Bahamas, a Yellow-breasted Chat at the s. end of Little Abaco Dec. 13 (MW-M), was eclipsed by six found at Bermuda (AD). A Blue Grosbeak found Dec. 2 at St. David's, Be, represented an unusual winter find. Dobson suspects it was actually a late fall migrant. Two Clay-colored Sparrows were noted at Fortune Hill, SS Jan. 22; two Grasshopper Sparrows were counted Feb. 14 at Grand Bahama (BH *et al.*); and a Lincoln's Sparrow was seen by Haney and Hallet Feb. 12 at Grand Bahama. A White-crowned Sparrow seen Feb. 5 at Riddell's Bay golf club, Be, provided an unusual winter record (AD). A wintering flock of ≤ 30 Snow Buntings was

seen at the airport or at Cooper's Island, Be (AD). A Bobolink was also noted Fortune Hill Jan. 22 (BH).

And now a word for a bird not seen. Lee did not find Black-cowled Oriole at the abandoned settlement near Hole-in-the-Wall, Abaco, where P. William Smith had recorded them some time ago. Neither Walsh-McGehee in 1990 nor Lee in 1995 found any there. Could their absence be linked to human settlements?

Addendum

In the report from Barbados, Massiah and Frost included late, unusual records and sightings previously unreported here. Six Greater Shearwaters were seen 40 mi w. of Barbados June 16, 1996 (EM), on a pelagic trip out of Barbados. A ♂ Eur. race Green-winged Teal was found at Cole's Pasture, Bd Feb. 11, 1996 (EM, MF). A Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was found at St. Lucy Parrish, Bd Sept. 1 after the August 1996 passage of hurricane *Fran*. Two juv. White-winged Black Terns were discovered in mid-October 1996, and lingered for 3 weeks. Also arriving at the same time as the terns, apparently, was a pratincole sp. first described by a hunter and later (November) seen and heard by Massiah (*see above*). A Greenshank was noted at Cole's Pasture Nov. 17, 1996, for perhaps the island's 3rd record (EM, MF). Early Oct. 12 about 30 Blackpoll Warblers dropped in on Harrison's Lighthouse on the n.w. coast of Barbados providing a high count for the island (EM, MF).

Contributors (subregional editors in bold): Marianne Albury, Eric Amos, Aileen Bainton, Barry Blake, Paul Dean, Mike DeKapata, Steven DeSilva, Wayne Dennis, Bruno Dittmar, **Andrew Dobson**, David Feiges, **Martin Frost**, Liede Hagopian, Bruce Hallet, Chris Haney, Peter Holmes, Phil Huber, Yvonne and Bernie Katchor, Dave Lee, Dave Lincoln, Bruce Lorhan, Jeremy and Leila Madeiros, **Edward Massiah**, Rick and Kathy Oliver, Arline Raab, Paul Reed, **Rowan Roy**, Penny Soares, David Wallace, Martha Walsh-McGehee, Carolyn Wardle, Paul Watson, Tony, Trina and Nelson White, Earl Wilson, David Wingate.

—Robert L. Norton 3518 W 37th Ave., Gainesville, FL 32605. email: robert.norton@santafe.cc.fl.us