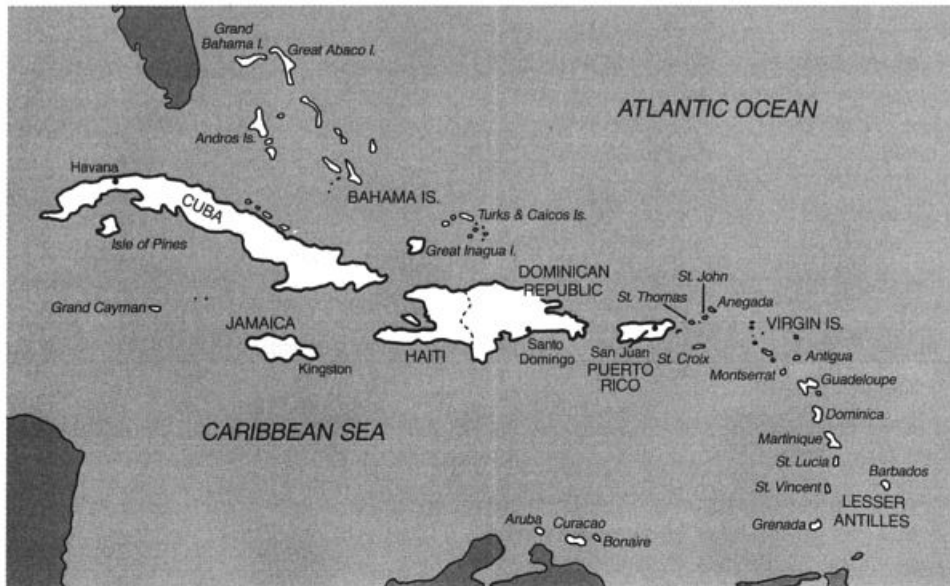


# west indies region



## ROBERT L. NORTON

Amid the reports received this season were some surprises, troublesome observations, and species that require greater study. Not surprising was the breeding of Neotropical Cormorants at New Providence, Bahamas. Tony White, Aileen Bainton, Bruce Hallet, and Paul Dean have been on the "hunt" for some time to document the local distribution of this and other species. Finding nesting species internally on islands, however tedious, is not easier than finding nesting records on off-shore cays. But be sure this team will be on the trail of Brown Pelican, and possibly White Ibis, if it nests in the Bahamas. White et al. found Red-footed Booby nesting near San Salvador in 1995. Bracey has returned to reporting birds from the northern Bahamas, so these islands will be well represented in the future. Andrew Dobson continues to provide reports from the very competent cadre of Bermuda birders who get remarkable results.

Gulls were not reported this season, nor were migrant warblers in any illuminating fashion. Either they are commonplace or non-existent. There appears to be an increase in the reporting of Shiny Cowbirds in the Bahamas. This does not bode well for

vulnerable endemics such as Bahama Yellowthroat, or local subspecies such as Black-cowled Oriole. Lastly, the careful identification of the problematic *Catharus* species in the Region may be aided by reviewing MacLaren (*Birding* 27:358-366, 1995). As always, photographs are preferred when documenting rarities of confusing species.

**Abbreviations:** BA (Bahamas); BE (Bermuda).

## SHEARWATERS THROUGH SANDPIPERS

A dead Audubon's Shearwater was found at Abaco, BA, May 1 (BB, WB). At Powell's Cay, Abaco, three White-tailed Tropicbirds were noted May 21 (WB). White and Dean have discovered Neotropical Cormorants nesting at Harrold Pond, New Providence, in the c. Bahamas. An ad. Brown Pelican was seen at Munjack Cay, Abaco, also May 21 (WB), but this species hasn't been confirmed nesting in the vicinity. A Least Bittern was noted at Diamond Farm, New Providence, Mar. 3 (AW, PD), where five Glossy Ibis were also noted.

While Fulvous and Black-bellied whistling-ducks seem to be expanding dramatically at tropical and semi-tropical lati-

tudes among the Greater Antilles, West Indian Whistling-Ducks are either under-reported or struggling as a result of habitat loss and/or hunting. On islands in the Lesser Antilles, for example, where hunters from the French Antilles boat to remote and unpatrolled lagoons, whistlers are taken in large numbers. When whistling-ducks are reported from small islands in the Bahamas, such as four seen at Charles I., Eleuthera, Mar. 1-3 (DL, *fide* AW), it is somewhat encouraging, and perhaps some localized expansion.

A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was found May 16 at Civil Air Terminal, BE, providing only the 4th island record with none recorded before 1973 (Wingate 1973). White-cheeked Pintails numbered five at Treasure Cay golf course, Abaco, from April through May, and six Blue-winged Teal lingered there until late April (WB). On Mar. 4, the 3rd island record of **Tufted Duck** was recorded at Mid-Ocean Golf Course, BE, following the first two in 1993 (*fide* AD). A Red-breasted Merganser was noted in early March at Man-O-War Cay, Abaco (NH, DA), for one of the few reports from the Bahamas and perhaps the first from Abaco.

A Swallow-tailed Kite was seen Apr. 23 at Port Royal Golf Course, BE, a rather late and remarkable oceanic sighting. Two Bahamian race Am. Kestrels (*F. s. spaveroides*) were noted at Marsh Harbour, Abaco, throughout the period (WB). A Limpkin was noted at the Treasure Cay dump, Abaco, May 31 (WB). An Am. Oystercatcher noted Apr. 27 from Treasure Cay (WB) could be a potential breeder, but Brudenell-Bruce (1975) considers northern occurrences as vagrants. Seven Short-billed Dowitchers were lingering at Treasure Cay Apr. 27, and a very uncommon spring Stilt Sandpiper in breeding plumage May 7 at the Treasure Cay dump was pushing its departure.

## DOVES THROUGH SPARROWS

The secretive Key West Quail-Dove is best heard and seen in late April and May at Abaco early in the morning, according to Bracey, where as many as six responded to

imitations of their call. Caribbean Doves are heard regularly at Lyford Cay, New Providence (AW), into early March. At the National Park at Abaco, 20 Cuban Parrots were noted in pairs May 26 (WB). Two Yellow-billed Cuckoos were noted at the Treasure Cay dump, Abaco (WB), May 3 as passage migrants. Good numbers of West Indian Woodpeckers were recorded by Bracey at Abaco, especially in the National Park May 27, where 20 were noted including young birds accompanied by parents. La

**SA** A **Gray-cheeked Thrush** was noted at Abaco May 26 (WB) for a very rare, late-spring occurrence. This record extends the spring passage by almost 2 weeks. Gray-cheekeds should be carefully documented, as well as Bicknell's Thrush. Wetmore and Swales (1931) reported that the majority of *Hylochichla* (now *Catharus*) specimens were Bicknell's Thrush, not Gray-cheeked. The etymology is circuitous, but material indicates the smaller of the two (*bicknelli*) passes through the Bahamas and Hispaniola more frequently than the larger (*minimus*). The migration and stopover routes of Bicknell's Thrush have been described (Bond 1956; Chapman 1966 and earlier; and Ouellet 1993) as e. United States through the Bahamas to Haiti (Hispaniola) and the Greater Antilles, where they are reported to overwinter. Two specimens netted at Mayaguana proved to be Gray-cheeked (Buden 1987), while a specimen taken at Cay Sal in the w. Bahamas (Bond 1956) was attributed to Bicknell's. The latter, formerly recognized as a Gray-cheeked subspecies, may be expected in the n.e. Caribbean. Buden (1987) suggests this thrush may occasionally winter in the s. Bahamas and Turks and Caicos. Given a new understanding of this group's systematics and subsequent migration, it seems plausible to speculate that many sight records of Gray-cheeked may in fact be Bicknell's, without specimens to establish Gray-cheeked as predominant. Photographs are desirable when definitive identification is made in the Bahamas and Greater Antilles.

It seems the more we know about isolated populations of birds both continental and insular, the less we know. The more we split subspecies, the more endangered these delicate creatures suddenly become. The politics of endangerment, indeed, becomes local.

Sagra's Flycatchers numbered 10 at the National Park May 26. Cuban Pewees were also seen there. A **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** was seen Mar. 3 (PM) at Hatchett Bay, Eleuthera, for a rare occurrence in the c. Bahamas and perhaps the first spring record for the Region. Two Tree Swallows were noted May 26 at Marsh Harbour, Abaco (WB).

A Water Pipit first seen in November remained at Diamond Farm, New Providence, to at least Mar. 3 (PD, AW), a very unusual extended occurrence. Two Bahama Yellowthroats were seen at the National Park, Abaco, May 27 (WB), but no Bahamian race Yellow-throated Warblers were seen by Bracey on Abaco after late April. Olive-capped Warbler, an endemic to the Region, numbered eight in the National Park May 27 (WB). A late Vesper Sparrow was seen Apr. 1 at Ferry Pt. Park, BE.

#### ADDENDUM

Received too late to be included in the winter report are some additions to the Bahamas occurrences. An ad. Snow Goose was seen at Lyford Cay, New Providence, Dec. 12 (AB, AW); an immature was at Wilson's Pond, New Providence, Dec. 20 (PD); and one visited at Sugarland Farm, Abaco (PM), Feb. 20. A "Caribbean" type Am. Coot was seen at Adelaide, New Providence, Feb. 23 (AW). A Piping Plover was noted at Brown's Pt., New Providence (AW). A White Ibis was noted at Diamond Farm, New Providence, Feb. 23 and Rainbow Farm Feb. 27 (AB, AW). Forster's Tern's were noted at Harrold and Wilson's Ponds, New Providence (PD). Two Savannah Sparrows were noted along Golden Isles Rd, New Providence, Feb. 27 (AB, AW). An imm. or female **Yellow-headed Blackbird** remained at Rainbow farm, New Providence, from mid-December to mid-February (PD). Shiny Cowbirds are spreading through the c. Bahamas and appear to be resident at Rainbow Farms, where as many as six were noted by Bainton, Dean, and White.

**Contributors, subregional editors in bold-face:** Eric Amos, Aileen Bainton, Betsy and Woody Bracey, Paul Dean, **Andrew Dobson**, Dick Long, Jeremy Madeiros, Pericles Maillis, David Wingate, and **Anthony White**.

**Robert L. Norton**, 8960 N.E. Waldo Road, Gainesville, FL



# Profile

## George Hall

VICTORIA IRWIN

*The Regional Editors provide the heart and soul of Field Notes magazine. Their work each season, sifting through hundreds of bird sightings and records, is distilled into the reports that make up the bulk of this publication. The regions they cover vary—some are geographically huge, some small, some with a plethora of birders, some with only a handful. But the snapshot of bird life that these editors give us provides an important picture of population trends, rarities, migration patterns, effects of weather or habitat changes, as well as the simple delight of knowing what was where and when.*

*The job of Regional Editor is clearly a labor of love. Our editors come from a variety of backgrounds—while some work in the field as wildlife biologists, ornithologists, or birding guides, our family includes university professors, a retired law enforcement official, doctors, small business owners, and students. Their time and effort is donated and most often sandwiched in between work, family time, and other obligations.*

*The Field Notes editors thought that profiles of our Regional Editors would give readers a sense of who these volunteers are, what motivates them, and why these front-line volunteers see the Regional Reports as an important resource and archive for birders. Our first profile is of George Hall of West Virginia, editor of the Appalachian Region.*

**G**eorge Hall will capture a spot as one of the longest contributing Regional Editors for *Field Notes* when he hits 40 years with the fall season report this year. His career here has spanned great changes in both birders and birding, which has given a particular flavor to the expertise he brings to *Field Notes*.

"We didn't go places, we stayed home," Hall says of the birders of his generation. The mobility of today's birding community has been perhaps one of the biggest changes he has seen in more than a half a century of birding. With the advent of jet planes and lower fares, even young birders can span the continent—or the globe—in search of birds.

But it is exactly his rootedness that has made Hall a gem in the eyes of many col-