

# Central America



## H. Lee Jones

P O. Box 158  
Punta Gorda, Belize  
U S. address:  
12188 Central Avenue, #605  
Chino, California 91710  
(buteo@attglobal.net)

**A** team of investigators from University of Kansas Natural History Museum and University of El Salvador School of Biology, led by Oliver Komar, embarked on the first ornithological expedition to isolated San Vicente Volcano from 18 June to 4 July. The volcano is a massive 2000-m peak that rises out of the central coastal plain of El Salvador. The researchers found a fairly extensive cloud forest with a surprising number of cloud forest specialist species and other highland species. These isolated populations are separated from neighboring populations by 45-75 km. Cloud forest species recorded included White-faced Quail-Dove, Green-throated Mountain-gem, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Mountain Elaenia, Yellowish Flycatcher, Rufous-browed Wren, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Black Robin, White-throated Robin, and Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch. Populations of other highland species recorded on the volcano's slopes included Singing Quail, Rufous Sabrewing, Magnificent Hummingbird, Emerald Toucanet, Paltry Tyrannulet, Long-tailed Manakin, Bushy-crested Jay, Brown-backed Solitaire, Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Crescent-chested Warbler, Flame-colored and White-winged Tanagers, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Yellow-faced Grassquit, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, White-

naped (Yellow-throated) Brush-Finch, Prevost's and White-eared Ground-Sparrows, and Bar-winged Oriole. The conservation implications of these findings are significant, as many of these species have very limited populations in El Salvador, and some are endemic to the highlands of Central America. Some of these populations may represent undescribed subspecies.

To the north, Corozal District, the last frontier of Belizean ornithological exploration, is finally receiving its due. Jacques Laesser, who is employed by International Tropical Conservation Foundation, is being funded in part to inventory the birds of the vast, largely unspoiled forests of eastern Corozal. Already, he has made a significant contribution to our knowledge of bird distribution in this northern outpost. Another significant contribution to Belizean ornithology was Luz Hunter's discovery this summer of a previously unknown tern nesting colony on a small caye southeast of Dangriga.

**Abbreviation:** K.U.N.H.M. (University of Kansas Natural History Museum).

## HERONS THROUGH FALCONS

Least Bitterns have been reported periodically from the vicinity of Flores, Lago Petén Itzá, but MM has confirmed that they are present year-round. One found 1 Sep 2001 and present continuously since then supports existing evidence that the species is a permanent resident in the area. Agami Herons continue to make news in Belize. The nesting colony discovered last year near the mouth of the Moho R., Toledo continues to flourish. On 28 Jul, WRM

and LZ counted 82 active nests, most with two eggs, a few with one. Two ad. King Vultures at La Montañona, Chalatenango, El Salvador (OK), may have been the same pair seen there the previous Jul. At least 6 Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, an extremely rare species in Panama, were in Las Macañas Marsh, Herrera 28 Jul (DM). They were first seen in this area two years ago. The first southbound Swallow-tailed Kites, a group of 3, were recorded in Freshwater Creek Forest Reserve, Corozal District, Belize 24 Jun (JL et al.). A pair of White-breasted (Sharp-shinned) Hawks at La Montañona 11-16 Jul (ph. OK) represents the first breeding-season record for Chalatenango. At the same place where a juv. was photographed last year, 2 ad. Zone-tailed Hawks were observed 13 Jul (OK) at Cerro La Montañona, Chalatenango. A Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle in Shipstern Nature Reserve 30 Jul (JL) was the first ever recorded in Corozal District, and an Ornate Hawk-Eagle seen on a nest near Chacan Chac Mol 26 Jul (JBo, VP, YC) also was a first for Corozal. A Peregrine Falcon hunting grackles over a field on the outskirts of Quetzaltenango 4 Jun and it or another seen perched on a crag at Volcano Candelaria 1.5 km from Quetzaltenango 31 Jul (both JB) were unseasonal and likely indicative of breeding nearby. The species is not known to nest in Guatemala.

## QUAIL THROUGH TERNS

A nest of Buffy-crowned Wood-Partridge on San Vicente Volcano (OK et al.) represents the first El Salvador nest record. Details of the nest, previously undescribed for science, will appear elsewhere. Several Ruddy Crakes heard calling from a boggy pond at La Montañona 11-16 Jul (OK) represent the first records for Chalatenango. Thanks in part to J&DB, who monitor the birds on Caye Caulker almost daily, an accurate record of the fall arrival of shorebirds in Belize is emerging. They found the first southbound Semipalmated Plovers, Willets, Whimbrels, and Ruddy Turnstones on 3 Jul, and the first Short-billed Dowitchers on 8 Jul. A trip to Chomes, Costa Rica by EA and RD 5 Jul produced unexpectedly early fall arrival dates for Surf-bird (5) and Red Knot (2). Or were these birds overwintering? Ten Sanderlings at the Río Tarcoles estuary, Costa Rica 26 Jun (JP), and 6 Wilson's Phalaropes first seen at Chomes 20 Jun (AK), were likely to be overwintering birds.

Tern nesting colonies are rapidly becoming a thing of the past in Belize as the cayes are being systematically developed for high-impact human uses. Even the tiniest cayes are regularly used as fishing camps. So, the discovery in

Jul of a significant tern colony on Tobacco Caye (fortunately part of a marine reserve) is encouraging news. The colony was discovered by LH on 16 Jul and investigated by PB, EB, LH, and TR on 26 Jul, with the following results: Sandwich Tern, 50+ with large chicks and fledglings; Roseate Tern, 200+ with chicks; Least Tern, 20+ with large chicks; Bridled Tern, 12 ads.; Brown Noddy, 10 ads. The latter two were behaving as if they had nests, but breeding was not confirmed. The noddies are especially significant, since it was feared that this species might no longer nest in Belize. LH reported seeing a few Sooty Terns with chicks (all dark) on her first visit, but this was not confirmed on the next visit. There is only one known remaining colony of Sooty Terns in Belize.

### DOVES THROUGH FLYCATCHERS

White-winged Doves continue their rapid expansion southward in Belize. JU reported an "explosion" in the population around Orange Walk Town this Jun, which is near the s. limit of its Belize breeding range. Whereas in the past he had estimated only about 10 pairs in summer, this year the birds were present in flocks, some with as many as 40 individuals. This species was unrecorded in Belize prior to 1967. The Yellow-naped Parrot is becoming increasingly scarce in Guatemala, as elsewhere, so 2 found at El Palmar Viejo 25 Jul (JB) are worth reporting. The presence of dozens of Lesser Nighthawks all summer in Corozal District (JL) strongly suggests the presence of a breeding population in n. Belize. There are a few scattered breeding records for this species in Belize, but no established breeding population has been documented. A White-tailed Emerald at Kiri Lodge near Tapanti 19 Jun (AW) may be the first reported on the Caribbean slope of Costa Rica. A Belted Kingfisher on Caye Caulker 15 Jul (J&DB) was an early fall migrant.

The first Strong-billed Woodcreepers reported in Chalatenango since 1927 were found at La Montaña 14-16 Jul (OK), where at least 8 could be heard calling frequently throughout the forested area. Two Streak-headed Woodcreepers at La Montaña 15 Jul (OK, LR) were the first ever recorded in Chalatenango. An ad. female (\*K.U.N.H.M.) had a receding brood patch and active ovaries. A Barred Antshrike on Ambergris Caye, Belize 4 Jun (LJ, GH) was apparently the first ever reported on this "caye" (actually a long, narrow peninsula). An Ochraceous Pewee was observed on the Las Nubes Trail in La Amistad International Park, Chiriquí, Panama on 4 Jul (DM, DeM). This species, a Costa Rican near-

endemic, is rarely seen across the border in Panama. The first southbound Western Wood-pewee in Costa Rica was observed 30 Jul (JRZ), and the first southbound Brown-crested Flycatcher was on Caye Caulker 8 Jul (J&DB). All but a few individuals of this species vacate Belize after the nesting season.

### VIREOS THROUGH FINCHES

A Brown-capped Vireo was observed 19 Jul (JB) at Santa María de Jesus, Quetzaltenango, where they are relatively rare. The species was not discovered in this part of Guatemala until Jun 1999 (AB). Black Catbirds are common on Ambergris Caye and nearby Caye Caulker, but *white* Black Catbirds are not. About 10-15 years ago, partially leucistic birds with varying amounts of white in their plumage began turning up in the Ambergris population. This summer, an all-white bird and a nearly all white sibling were fledged at Caribbean Villas in late May (SL) and seen regularly thereafter (LJ et al.). Also this summer, the first Black Catbirds with white in their plumage were seen on nearby Caye Caulker (J&DB). Thus far, no leucistic catbirds have turned up in the mainland population.

A Black-and-white Warbler near Santa María de Jesus, Guatemala 25 Jul (JB) was early. A Rose-throated Tanager at Beaver Dam Creek, Cayo in Jul (EB) was slightly s. of the previously known s. limit of its range in Belize. Nesting of *Savannah Sparrow* in Guatemala was confirmed when JB found a nest and observed at least 5 birds 4 km n. of San Francisco El Alto, Totonicapán on 10 Jun. These birds were seen again 18 & 23 Jul. A male Blue Grosbeak at La Montaña 17 Jul (OK, LR) was the first ever recorded in Chalatenango. The Bar-winged Oriole was first reported in Chalatenango last summer and was found again at La Montaña this summer (OK, LR). Last year, only males were reported. This year, females were also found; however, one collected 12 Jul (\*K.U.N.H.M.) was not in breeding condition. An active Yellow-backed Oriole nest with young at La Montaña 16 Jul (ph. OK) confirmed previous suspicions that this species breeds in El Salvador. The first southbound Orchard Oriole in Costa Rica was found 25 Jul (JRZ); however, a male Baltimore Oriole on Ambergris Caye 4 Jun (LJ, GH) was totally out of season. A *Red Crossbill* seen at La Montaña 16 Jul (OK) represents the 2nd sight record for Chalatenango and El Salvador. A pair of mating Pine Siskins was observed on the grounds of San Carlos Univ., Quetzaltenango 22 Jul (JB), where the species is at the s. limit of its range.

### CORRIGENDA

Two Chestnut-headed Oropendolas mentioned in the Winter Season report were considered to be unexpected on the Pacific slope of Guatemala where the species is unrecorded. However, the Mario Dario Biotopo del Quetzal Reserve where they were seen is on the Atlantic slope, where the species is frequently seen.

**Cited observers** (country coordinators in boldface): Eduardo Amengual, **George Angehr** (Panama), Philip Balderamos, Andrea Berry, **Jason Berry** (Guatemala), Jim and Dorothy Beveridge, Julien Bottinelli (JBo), Erneldo Bustamante, Yohan Charbonnier, Robert Dean, **Lee Jones** (Belize), Gerry Haigh, Luz Hunter, Allan Kimberley, **Oliver Komar** (El Salvador), Jacques Laesser, Susan Lala, Darien Montañez, Delicia Montañez (DeM), Marvin Morales, Vincent Palomares, Jim Peterson, Tony Rath, Lorena Rosales, Wilfred Requena-Mutrie, Andy Walker, Len Zeoli, **James R. Zook** (Costa Rica).



# SONG BIRD COFFEE



**SHADE-GROWN COFFEE**

**SAVES TREES FOR MIGRATING BIRDS**

**BUY YOUR NEXT BAG OF  
SONG BIRD COFFEE  
FROM ABA SALES**

## 800.634.7736

WWW.AMERICANBIRDING.ORG/ABASALES



**American Birding**  
ASSOCIATION

YOUR PURCHASE SUPPORTS  
THE ABA'S BIRDERS' EXCHANGE PROGRAM