

# Central America



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This winter was characterized not so much by rare and unexpected species but by unusually high numbers of regularly occurring species. The unprecedented invasion of Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers throughout the Region was perhaps the biggest news, but record numbers of waterfowl and other waterbirds were also noteworthy. Of course, there was also the usual complement of rarities: Manx Shearwater in Panama, Glaucous-winged Gull in El Salvador, several Olive Tanagers in Honduras, and Black-headed Grosbeak in Belize were all country firsts. The gull and grosbeak were also firsts for Central America, and the shearwater was only the third reported in the Region.

Abbreviation: U.C.R. (Universidad de Costa Rica).

### SHEARWATERS THROUGH RAILS

A Manx Shearwater, new for Panama, was found in a weakened condition in

the sea just offshore at Isla Margarita near Colón 5 Jan (ph. KA, RQ, OA). The bird died three days later, despite efforts to revive it. The American White Pelican continues to prosper as a relatively recent winter visitor to Central America. A flock of 270 migrating over Bocana Santa Clara, La Paz 15 Jan (NH, RI, MSa) was the largest number yet recorded in El Salvador, and 3 and one, respectively, at Tortuguero, Limón 30 Nov (GT) and 9 Feb (GD) were noteworthy for Costa Rica, where it is still rare. An impressive count of 998 Brown Pelicans passing eastward over the beach at Los Cóbanos, *Sonsonate* during a three-hour period 3 Jan (NH, RI, RR) lends credence to the notion that significant numbers of this species migrate through El Salvador in late fall and early winter. A Bare-throated Tiger-Heron seen inland along the Río Torola in Cacoopera 15–16 Feb (NH) was one of the few inland occurrences of this species in El Salvador and the first record for *Morazán*. An impressive 59 Jabirus in sight at one time at Crooked Tree Wildlife Refuge, Belize 28 Feb (BZ and V.E.N.T.) is testament to the success of countrywide educational programs and increased protection for the species in Belize, along with the ongoing expansion and enhancement of its foraging habitat. In addition to the spectacular numbers of waders that gather at Crooked Tree every year in the dry season, this RAMSAR site is also renowned for its impressive waterfowl numbers. Many thousands of Blue-winged Teal and American Coots congregate there every winter, but 2500 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in sight at one

time, along with 70 Ring-necked Ducks, 28 Feb–1 Mar (BZ and V.E.N.T.) was impressive. Seventy Ring-neckeds is a large number for this late in the season. Across the divide in El Salvador, NH and WR recorded 3500 Lesser Scaup on L. Güija, Metapán, *Santa Ana* 27 Feb, by far the largest flock yet recorded in that country.

A female Hook-billed Kite at San Francisco Dos Cerros, Municipio El Paisnal 17 Jan (NH) was the first recorded in *San Salvador*. The Swainson's Hawk is rare in winter anywhere n. of South America, so an ad. and about 10 imms. 1 Feb (WA, GA, NP) at a grass fire where the Panamanian Hwy crosses the Chiriquí R. near David were unusual. Zone-tailed Hawk is now reported regularly in Belize in winter, but 2 together over Blue Hole N.P., Cayo 29 Dec (LJ et al.) may be the first sighting of more than one individual. In Belize, the Red-tailed Hawk is confined to the Mountain Pine Ridge for breeding, with very few records elsewhere, but an increasing number of reports recently from w. and n. Orange Walk, including up to 4 imms. together with ads. at Booth R. Nov–Jan (JU), suggest a small disjunct breeding population, probably of recent origin, 85 km n. of the pine ridge. Two Red-throated Caracaras in Braulio Carrillo N.P. near heavily birded Quebrada Gonzalez 28 Jan (CS) were at a new locality in Costa Rica. A Rufous-necked Wood-Rail at San Francisco Dos Cerros, *San Salvador* 8 Dec (NH) may have been the first ever recorded in winter in El Salvador, and another on the s. outskirts of Punta Gorda 11 Dec (LJ) was the southernmost yet in Belize.

### PLOVERS THROUGH MONKLET

In addition to their continued presence at recently reported sites along the cen. Pacific coast of Costa Rica, Southern Lapwings were reported this winter considerably farther to the north and south. To the n., one was in Palo Verde N.P. feeding along the edges of drying Palo Verde Lagoon 25–27 Feb (MSo), and to the s., one was on the Río Coto Colorado in the Golfo Dulce area 21 Mar (ph. JO). A Marbled Godwit was on Caye Caulker, Belize 20 Jan–16 Feb (J&DB), where it has been seen previously, and a Parasitic Jaeger was in Belize City 17 Jan (JU). Well documented was the first record of Glaucous-winged Gull for El Salvador and Central America, a first-winter bird closely studied at the mouth of Río Jiboa, *La Paz* on 5 & 7 Jan (ph. TJ, AN). Three Elegant Terns at the mouth of Río Jiboa on the latter date (ph. TJ) were the first

**SA** Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers staged an unprecedented invasion of Central America this winter, perhaps as a result of the severe early-winter cold weather that gripped much of the U.S., forcing more birds farther south than usual. A contributing factor that may have set the stage for this invasion, even before the onset of winter, could have been the bumper crop of Myrtle Warblers produced in this past breeding season. For example, last summer Allen Chartier's banding station in southern Ontario banded nearly three times its previous record number of Myrtle Warblers (per the NEOORN listserv discussion group). Still another, earlier factor could have been a higher-than-normal winter survival rate in 2001-2002, setting the stage for last summer's unprecedented breeding success. The result: in Belize, more than **1000** Myrtle Warblers were observed feeding in the open pasture at Chaa Cr., Cayo in Dec (OF), and "an extraordinarily large number" overwintered on Caye Caulker (J&DB), where only a handful may be present in a typical winter. In Costa Rica, JRZ reported that they were as common as American Redstarts and Black-and-white Warblers this winter, with one flock of about 20 reported from Tortuguero. In Panama, they were nearly as common, with 11 at the Ft. Sherman airstrip, Colon 5 Jan (KK, RM) and 2 at the Cocoli Ponds on 22 Dec (RM, RB). Additionally, the species was "common" on Coiba I. 17-19 Jan (GA, RM, KK), and smaller numbers were reported elsewhere across the country.

ever seen in Jan in El Salvador and probably represented exceptionally late fall migrants. This species is occasionally reported in California as late as early Jan, so the late date is not unprecedented. A Forster's Tern was at Rocky Pt., Corozal in mid-Dec (JL). This species is now being reported fairly regularly along the n. coast of Belize in winter. A moribund Brown Noddy floundering in the surf at Tortuguero 19 Feb (JRZ, \*U.C.R.) later died despite rehabilitation efforts. This species is rare off the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica.

Unusual anywhere on the Belize mainland, a White-crowned Pigeon seen in Shipstern Nature Reserve, Corozal in mid-Dec (JL) was noteworthy. The 2 remaining Yellow-naped Parrots of the 3 that were discovered on Calabash Caye, Turneffe Is., shortly after Hurricane Mitch in late 1998 were recently observed "showing signs of courtship" (*vide* PB). Could it be that these two survivors just might represent the nucleus of a future Yellow-naped Parrot population off the coast of Belize? A Mangrove Cuckoo was seen repeatedly on the outskirts of Dangriga, Stann Creek 27 Feb-2 Mar (BF). The status of this infrequently-reported species in Belize remains unclear. In El Salvador, the first *San Salvador* records of Pacific Screech-Owl and Spectacled Owl were established on 17 Jan, when NH heard one of each (and also saw the former) in San Francisco Dos Cerros, Municipio El Paisnal. On 25 Dec, a male Rufous-crested Coquette appeared in Cerro Azul, Panama (KK, RM) and stayed into Feb, when it was joined by a 2nd male. A male Blue-tailed Hummingbird at Perquín 28 Dec (JPD) was only the 5th for El Salvador and the first for *Morazán*. An Amazon Kingfisher on the Río Torola, Cacaopera, *Morazán* 15-16

Feb (ph. NH) provided solid evidence that this now-rare kingfisher in El Salvador still persists. In Costa Rica, the seldom-seen Lanceolated Monklet put on a show for a group of birders (RC, FV et al.) when 2 birds appeared trailside at the Tuis River 6 Jan, one flying to the ground to retrieve a katydid and allowing itself to be photographed before flying off.

#### FLYCATCHERS THROUGH GROSBEAKS

An Olive-sided Flycatcher was near Punta Gorda 23 Dec (LJ). This species is uncommon in winter in the lowlands of Belize. A total of 9 Eastern Wood-Pewees recorded on the 18 Dec Punta Gorda C.B.C. (LJ, MM) was impressive for this late in the season. The latest documented record for this fall transient is 26 Dec. A Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher at Caye Caulker 16 Feb (J&DB) was the first ever recorded on this caye and also provided the earliest spring migrant record for Belize by more than three weeks (there is, however, at least one winter record). A Yellow-billed Cotinga near Punuga on the Gulf of Montijo, *Veraguas* 22 Feb (JW) was the easternmost record for Panama. It is otherwise found only near David and on the Burica Pen., *Chiriquí*. Two Steller's Jays at the Hotel Highland Pital, Chalatenango 16 Feb (AM) were at the same place where 3-4 were seen last Oct. It is still to be determined if these are representatives of a locally breeding population or wanderers from the highlands of nearby Honduras. Always fascinating is the appearance of a "resident" species on an isolated caye, so the first appearance of a Clay-colored Robin on Caye Caulker 16 Feb (J&DB) was a pleasant surprise. This species is occasionally seen on nearby Ambergris Caye (a long, narrow peninsula, not a true caye) where it may

be present only in winter. Cedar Waxwings were reported with greater frequency and in larger numbers than usual in Central America this winter. Examples were a flock of 200 near *San Salvador* 21 Feb (AM) and a flock of 40-50 visiting mistletoe-laden trees at Ensenada Lodge, Abangares de Puntarenas, Costa Rica 14 Feb (JS). Magnolia Warblers also were reported in Costa Rica much more frequently this winter than is typical. The species is considered to be a very uncommon winter visitor this far south.

In Honduras, the Olive Tanager was reported for the first time. A group of 8 was seen and documented well in primary forest in the foothills just outside Las Marias, Mosquitia 25 Dec (†TJ), and at least 2 others were seen the following day about 5 km away at Cerro Baltimore (TJ). This species is found nearby in Nicaragua and was expected to turn up in Honduras eventually. Elegant Euphonias continue to be reported periodically at Chan Chich, *Orange Walk* after a pair was discovered there in Jan 2002. The latest report is of a male reported at the lodge in Feb by a local guide (*vide* BZ). After more than a year without an addition to the Belize list, a male Black-headed Grosbeak was closely observed along the Tapir Trail at Pook's Hill, Cayo on 23 Jan by HB, a tourist from Arizona who is thoroughly familiar with the species. Another male was reported from a site 25 km away on 26 Dec 2001 (*N.A.B.* 55: 240), but it was seen by someone unfamiliar with the species and was not sufficiently documented for a first country record.

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