

Central America



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With this spring season, we welcome Honduras and its country coordinator, David Anderson, to the list of Central American countries that we are confident will be providing regular contributions to this column in the future. Honduras comes on board with three country firsts (pending review): Large-billed Tern, Blue-chested Hummingbird, and Northern Mockingbird. Costa Rica also added Large-billed Tern to its avifaunal list, as well as Swallow-tailed Gull, Greater Ani, and Tropical Mockingbird. The latter has been seen twice in the past four years in an area close to the Nicaraguan border where wild-origin birds are more likely to occur.

Attempts to correlate periodic changes in seasonal bird movements with short-term climatic fluctuations are problematic at best in Central America, perhaps because of the close proximity of both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans narrowly separated by the Central American isthmus, which at places reaches nearly 4000 m in elevation. Two weather-related phenomena, however, that can be directly correlated with other-than-

normal seasonal bird movements in the Region are, on the one hand, cold fronts and the varying availability of food resources in North Temperate regions that drive some species farther south in some winters than others, and, on the other hand, hurricanes and tropical storms that carry some species well beyond their normal distributional limits.

This past winter and spring saw two species "invade" Central America in larger than normal numbers: Cedar Waxwing and Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler. Factors that caused 2 Large-billed Terns (and perhaps others that went undetected) to wander far north of their typical haunts in South America are best left to the imagination at this point.

Abbreviations: Continental Divide Trail (Continental Divide Trail at Fortuna along the border of Chiriquí and Bocas del Toro provinces, Panama); Crooked Tree (Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, Belize District, Belize); Tikal (Tikal National Park, Petén District, Guatemala); Wilson Botanical Gardens (Wilson Botanical Gardens, San Vito de Jaba, eastern Puntarenas, Costa Rica).

PELICANS THROUGH FALCONS

An unprecedented 684 American White Pelicans were at Cerrón Grande reservoir, Chalatenango, El Salvador 2 May (NH, WR, RR). Crooked Tree appears to be supporting ever-larger numbers of waterbirds with each passing year, as demonstrated by the 200 American White Pelicans, 300 Glossy Ibis, and 40+ Jabirus present there 1–2 Apr (MSM et al.). A Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture at El Jicarito Lagoon, *Choluteca* 19 Apr

was the first reported from the Pacific side of Honduras. A flock of 25+ Mississippi Kites circling over the pond at the entrance to Tikal 28 Mar (MSM et al.) was not only an impressive number but may have been the first ever reported from *Petén*. Very little is known about this species' migration through n. C.A., and every record adds another piece to the puzzle. On 30 Mar, TJ documented the first nesting record of White-breasted Hawk in El Salvador when he found 2 ads. completing a nest near Perquín, *Morazán*. By 25 May, 2 nearly-fledged chicks were observed in the nest. In Honduras, AN and TJ observed 2 Harris's Hawks mating at El Jicarito Lagoon 19 Apr. This species was not recorded in Honduras until 1998 (Anderson et al. 1998).

Three reports of Ornate Hawk-Eagle were received: in Belize, a presumed pair was near Irish Creek, *Orange Walk* 19 Mar (MS), and one was at Tapir Mt. Refuge, *Cayo* 20 Apr (FT); in Panama, 2 were seen along the Continental Divide Trail 24 May (GB, VW). In Costa Rica, the rare Red-throated Caracara was reported from Quebrada González, Braulio Carillo N.P. 23 Mar (PM), where one was seen earlier this year, and from Tortuguero 18 Apr (LMo et al.), where it had not been reported previously. A *Crested Caracara*, only recently documented in Belize, was at Crooked Tree 2 Apr (MSM et al.). This record expands the period of reported occurrences in Belize into Apr and supports the supposition that this species is expanding its range in response to deforestation, most likely southeastward from the Yucatán Pen.

RAILS THROUGH TERNS

On Caye Caulker, Belize, an incredible 18 Rufous-necked Wood-Rails were in sight at one time on 5 May in the yard of J&DB, up 4 from their previous high count. All but one had left by the end of the period. A Sunbittern seen on the banks of the upper reaches of Río Petexbatun near the Aquateca ruins, *Petén* 11 Mar (JO, *vide* SM) was at the extreme nw. end of its known range. Likewise, an imm. Wattleed Jacana molting into ad. plumage, seen in association with Northern Jacanas in San Joaquin Marsh and nearby Wilson Botanical Gardens from mid-Mar until 1 Apr (ph. GR), was at the n. limit of its range in extreme e. Costa Rica.

Southern Lapwing, a recent arrival in Costa Rica, continues to be seen in new areas. Two sw. of Golfito, several km up the Río Coto Colorado 21 Mar (JO'D), were the first reported from that site, and one at 650 m elevation in Peñas Blancas, San Isidro de El General 2 Mar (JRZ) was the 3rd reported from the General Valley and the 2nd from the site. An Upland Sandpiper seen in the roadway on the way up to Hid-

den Valley Inn in the Mt. Pine Ridge, *Cayo* 30 Mar (MSM et al.) was a surprise, as this species is not often seen in Belize. The Marbled Godwit that spent the winter on Caye Caulker was last seen 8 Apr (J&DB).

An unusually large concentration of about 15 jaegers near Isla Colón, *Bocas del Toro* 10 Mar (GA, RMI, VW) were mostly Pomarine, but at least 2 were Parasitic. Both species are uncommon migrants in Panama. Sixty Laughing Gulls at Crooked Tree 1 Apr (MSM et al.) was a large concentration for this inland locality. New for Costa Rica was an ad. Swallow-tailed Gull in alternate plumage seen shortly after dusk off the Osa Pen. (exact location not determined) on 14 Mar (EC, RZ, SW et al.). It was seen in the ship's searchlight as close as 15–20 m, close enough to see the white spots at the base of its bill. At least 40 Common Terns at Crooked Tree 1 Apr (MSM et al.) was not only the largest concentration yet recorded in Belize but the first time the species has been seen inland. This species' seasonal status in Belize remains far from clear. Separate sightings of Large-billed Tern, both along the Caribbean coast, provided the first country records for Costa Rica and Honduras. One was observed along a 4-km stretch of Río Tortuguero Lagoon, Costa Rica 10–15 Mar (LMu, CG, DL, ph.), and what was most likely a different individual was several hundred km away at Palacios, *Gracias a Dios*, Honduras 28 Apr (†RoG).

DOVES THROUGH HUMMINGBIRDS

Two seldom-reported quail-dove species were seen this spring in Panama: 2 Violaceous on 19 Mar at Fort Sherman, Colón (EA, RD) and a Russet-crowned on 22 Mar on Cerro Jefe (JR, ML et al.). A group of about 10 Great Green Macaws at Río Piños, *Darién* 13 May (GA) was in an area of Panama where they are rare. A Yellow-billed Cuckoo at Caye Caulker, Belize 24 Mar (J&DB) was an exceptionally early migrant.

Costa Rica certainly had more than its share of firsts this spring. In addition to Swallow-tailed Gull and Large-billed Tern, a Greater Ani was present along the Río Tortuguero Lagoon from Feb at least until 19 May (DL et al., ph.). The nearly ubiquitous Groove-billed Ani, on the other hand, had never been reported from *Darién* until 13 May, when one was seen at the Tropic Star Lodge, Piñas Bay (GA). A Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl, rare in Panama, was seen along the Volcán-Boquete Trail, *Chiriquí* 26 Mar (EA, RD).

A group of about 4 Greater Swallow-tailed Swifts observed periodically at Perquín, *Morazán* 23 Apr–25 May (TJ) were the first recorded in spring in El Sal-

vador, although the lack of records is more likely a result of inadequate coverage. A Bronzy Hermit seen at *Chiriquí Grande*, *Bocas del Toro* 23 May (GB, VW) was near the edge of its range on the Caribbean side of Panama. Generally rare in Panama, Green-breasted Mangos were reported at three localities in *Bocas del Toro*: a male and female at Big Cr. on Isla Colón 8 Mar (GA, RMI), a male in Bocas del Toro town, also on Isla Colón, 11 Mar (RMI), and one at *Chiriquí Grande* 23 May (GB, VW). This species has not been reported previously on the Caribbean side as far e. as *Chiriquí Grande*.

Also in Panama, the relatively rare Rufous-crested Coquette was reported from two localities: a male at El Valle, *Coclé* 22 Mar (EA, RD), and 2 imm. males at Cerro Azul, *Panama* 12 Apr (RMI, KK, NQ). Another rare hummingbird species seen in Panama this spring was a female White-crested Coquette at El Choro, *Chiriquí* 4 Mar (GA, RMI, RMO, JAC). Rounding out the reports of rare and uncommon hummingbirds in Panama this spring were a Black-bellied Hummingbird seen along the Continental Divide Trail 24 May (GB, VW) and 5 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (a rare migrant) reported during the period 22 Mar–12 Apr (m. ob.). In Honduras, a female Blue-chested Hummingbird reported 18 Apr (RG) on the Río Platano in the Río Platano Biosphere Reserve near Cerro Pomokir, *Gracias a Dios*, would be the first record for the country. It has been anticipated for several decades, as it occurs in the same habitat in neighboring Nicaragua.

PUFFBIRDS THROUGH MOCKINGBIRDS

A Lanceolated Monklet was seen and tape-recorded along the Continental Divide Trail 25 Feb (ph. PC); there are still fewer than 10 records for Panama. Two pairs of Rufous-winged Woodpeckers were reported in Panama: one at El Choro, *Chiriquí* 2 Mar (GA, WA et al.) and another along the Continental Divide Trail 24 May (GB, VW), where it is rare and had not been previously reported. A rare Crimson-bellied Woodpecker was at Río Piñas, *Darién* 12 May (GA) and an equally rare Black-banded Woodcreeper was near Fortuna, just on the Caribbean side of the divide, 4 May (JT, AA, LP). An Immaculate Antbird, a Rufous-breasted Anthrush, and a White-fronted Tyrannulet were all recorded along the Continental Divide Trail 24 May (GB, VW). All are rare to uncommon in Panama.

An Ochraceous Pewee was seen and tape-recorded above Guadalupe near Cerro Punta, *Chiriquí* 17 Mar (JR, ML et al., ph.). Two White-throated Flycatchers, rare in Panama, were at Volcán airstrip, and 2

more were at Hotel Dos Ríos, *Chiriquí* on 24 and 25 May, respectively. Seven Gray Kingbirds on Ambergris Caye 3–5 Apr (MSM et al.) was an unprecedented number for Belize. A rare Sapayoa was at Río Piñas, *Darién* 11 May (GA), and a male Cinereous Becard, only the 3rd reported from the canal area since 1912, was near Madden L., *Panamá* 17 Mar (EA, RD).

A Warbling Vireo at Tikal 29 Mar (MSM et al.) was one of the few recorded from the lowlands of Guatemala. There were two reports of single Black-whiskered Vireos this spring: Ambergris Caye 5 Apr (MSM et al.)—only the 3rd for Belize and the 2nd for Ambergris Caye (the other occurring last spring)—and near La Suiza de Turrialba, Rancho Naturalista 20 Apr (FM), the latest in the year and the farthest inland for this seldom-seen species in Costa Rica. A pair of Steller's Jays at 1650 m just w. of Montecristo N.P., *Santa Ana* 9 Mar (AM, EC) were the first recorded in that department, and a Gray Catbird at Colima, *Cuscatlán* 12 Apr (TJ) was the first for that department and only about the 5th for El Salvador.

Remarkable was a Northern Mockingbird at El Jicarito Lagoon, *Choluteca*, Honduras 19 Apr (†TJ, AN). This may represent the first documented record for Central America and may lend credence to an old unpublished report from Belize: a mockingbird seen on South Water Caye 1 Mar 1987 by a seasoned birder familiar with both Northern and Tropical Mockingbirds. Although identified at the time as a Northern, the only notation "Prominent white wing flashes. New to Belize!" has been considered insufficient for acceptance of a record of such unprecedented nature.

The Tropical Mockingbird is expanding its range rapidly southward through Pacific Nicaragua, so it is likely that one seen along the road to Palo Verde N.P. 6.5 km s. of Bagaces, Costa Rica 30 Mar (KE et al.) was of wild origin. Lending support to this assumption, another one was reported from the park entrance in 2000. Birds seen periodically in the major towns and cities, on the other hand, are considered more likely to be of captive origin.

WAXWINGS THROUGH OLD WORLD SPARROWS

Cedar Waxwings and Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers continued to be reported in greater-than-usual numbers through spring. Flocks of up to 200 waxwings were reported from various sites in El Salvador (AM, TJ), and a flock of 30 at Perquín, *Morazán* 24 Apr (TJ) is believed to represent a first departmental record. In Costa Rica, where Cedar Waxwing is always noteworthy, one was at 1700 m in San Gerardo de Dota, Cerro de la Muerte 16 Mar (RB),

and another was at 1100 m in the Wilson Botanical Gardens 24 Mar (RC). On Ambergris Caye, Belize, 25 Myrtle Warblers were seen 4 Apr (MSM et al.), and in El Salvador, where the Myrtle Warbler is not found every year, one was at Santa Tecla, *La Libertad* 14 Mar (TJ).

A Golden-cheeked Warbler, identified as an ad. female, was at La Paz Waterfall Gardens 4 Apr (RG, A&MP). This was apparently only the 2nd recorded in Costa Rica, the first being just last Sep. There are few records of Palm Warbler from Panama, so 2 at Fort San Lorenzo, Colón 18 Mar (EA, RD) were unexpected. A male Mourning Warbler at Jaguar Cr., Cayo 7 Apr (MMc) was the earliest spring occurrence yet for Belize. A Yellow-breasted Chat mist-netted near San Vito de Jaba 9 Mar (CS) was noteworthy, as this species is a rare migrant and winter visitor in Costa Rica. A Crimson-collared Tanager, uncommon and local in Panama, was at Chiriquí Grande, *Bocas del Toro* 23 May (GB, VW), and several apparently pure Flame-rumped Tanagers along the road from Chiriquí Grande to Almirante and along Oleoducto Road from Fortuna Road 25 Feb (PC) established the westernmost reports of this species.

A White-collared Seedeater near Chiriquí Grande 23 May (GB, VW) was the farthest e. on the Caribbean slope that this species has been reported. In Belize, the Lincoln's Sparrow reported this winter at Hidden Valley Lodge in the Mt. Pine Ridge, Cayo was still present on 1 Apr (MSM et al.).

An Eastern Meadowlark at Los Cábanos, *Sonsonate* in May (RP) represented the first departmental record. A Black-cowled Oriole near Chiriquí Grande 23 May (GB, VW) was noteworthy, as few are reported this far e. in Panama. In Sierra de Metapán, *Santa Ana*, a Chestnut-headed Oropendola nesting tree with 18 nests, 17 females, and several males (LC) represents a first departmental record and only the 2nd locality for this species in El Salvador. Nest-building began around 15 Apr. Unexpected was a lone male House Sparrow on Half Moon Caye, Belize, in mid-Apr (FT). Half Moon Caye is 75 km offshore and nearly 100 km from the nearest population in Dangriga—but much closer to shipping lanes where stowaways are likely.

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Cited observers (country coordinators in boldface): William Adsett, Ariel Aguirre, Eduardo Amengual, **David Anderson** (Honduras), **George Angehr** (Panama), Ray Belding, Guido Berguido, Jim and Dorothy Beveridge, Raphael Campos, Eric Castro, Enrique Choussy, Paul Coopmans, Luis Cristiani, Jan Axel Cubilla, Robert Dean, Coen Dexter, Kevin Easley, Bert Frenz, Robert Gallardo, Richard Garrigues, Charles Gomez, William Granados, Néstor Herrera, Karl Kaufmann, Tom Jenner, **Lee Jones** (Belize), **Oliver Komar** (El Salvador), Daryl Loth, Mitch Lysinger, Freddy Madrigal, Mark McReynolds, Stauffer Miller, Rosabel Miró, Alvaro Moises, Rosa Montañez, Lisa Mora, Luis Mungrio, Adam Narish, Jerry O'Donahoe, Joe Orr, Luis Paz, Ricardo Pérez, Ann and Matt Pettigrew, Nando Quiroz, Roberto Rivera, Wilfredo Rodríguez, Gary Rosenberg, John Rowlett, Mike San Miguel, Cagan Sekercioglu, José Tejada, Francis Toldi, Steven Weston, Venicio Wilson, Rudy Zamora, **James R. Zook** (Costa Rica). ☉

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