

oles were at H.Ti. 7 Sep (BM), and an imm. male plus 8 others were at H.Ti. 4 Oct (BM). A Yellow-backed Oriole was observed feeding a juv. Bronzed Cowbird in a zapotilla tree at Majahual 30 Aug (BM). Two Tricolored Munias were seen at R.S.M. this fall (PW), while another was at the

savanna 12 km s. of Celestun 20 Nov (VM). The spread of this species, an agricultural pest in s. Asia, should be carefully watched in this country.

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For all we don't know about the resident avifauna of Central America, we know even less about seasonal patterns of occurrence. One index of how much accumulated knowledge we possess may be seen in the rate of diminishing returns. For example, as the number of species on a regional list increases, the number of new ones added each year should diminish proportionally as the list approaches (but never reaches) its maximum potential. It follows that the number of "country firsts" should diminish with each passing year, unless, of course, (1) the coverage increases accordingly (increasing numbers of birders afield), (2) the combined identification skills of the birders afield increases, or (3) there are so many potential new species to add that the "maximum potential" is still far off in the future. Looking back on the four fall migration seasons documented in this journal since 2000, we can pretty much rule out No. 1; No. 2 is always a factor; and it appears that No. 3 also holds true: for the "vagrant chaser" in all of us, there are still many, many rarities yet to be recorded in Central America.

Let's take a closer look. In fall 2000, 25 contributors recorded one country first. In fall 2001, 44 contributors recorded a remarkable seven country firsts; in fall 2002, 34 contributors recorded only one country first. But this past fall, 2003, one-third fewer contributors than in 2001 recorded no fewer than six country firsts (pending review): Great Frigatebird and Grayish Saltator in Panama, White-winged Scoter and Yellow-winged Cacique in Belize, Barred Parakeet in El Salvador, and Plain-breasted Ground-Dove in Honduras.

Country firsts do not mean much in the overall scheme of things; after all, they're the flukes. But they are an easy-to-define, and therefore easy-to-measure, indicator of the amount of new data (read: accumulating knowledge) flowing into the system, and indirectly, an indicator of how much more there still is to learn. So, for those who like to be on the cutting edge of discovery, Central America is still a great place to be.

FRIGATEBIRDS THROUGH RAILS

A male and female Great Frigatebird associating with a feeding flock over Spotted and

Central America



Spinner Dolphins at 5° 36.1' N, 82° 59.9' W (226 km ssw. of Isla Jicarón, Panama) on 12 Nov (ph. MF) represented the first photographic record from Central America and only the 4th documented American record away from the Islas Revillagigedos off Mexico, where the species breeds. It can be very difficult to differentiate the occasional Great Frigatebird from the abundant Magnificents in the field, and few people in North America are familiar with its distinguishing characteristics. To what extent may we be overlooking this wide-ranging species?

Rare in Panama were a Glossy Ibis 7 Sep (GA) and a male Cinnamon Teal 23 Sep (JT), both at Costa del Este near Panamá City. One and possibly 2 Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures closely observed at Barra de Santiago, *Ahuachapán* 22 Oct (ph. TJ) were unexpected, as this species is rare in El Salvador. Absolutely astounding, if confirmed, was a **White-winged Scoter** seen and well described in Ladyville, Belize 10-15 Nov (TR). Unfortunately, it was seen by a single observer and not photographed and thus may not constitute an acceptable record. This species is unrecorded in the Caribbean s. of the U. S. Gulf Coast states.

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Eighteen Snail Kites at L. Güija, *Santa Ana* 30 Nov (NH) was the largest concentration yet observed in El Salvador. An imm. Solitary Eagle soaring over Llano del Muerto at Perquín, *Morazán* 25 Oct (ph. TJ) was only the 5th for El Salvador and the first documented with a photograph. Also in El Salvador, a flock of 40 Short-tailed Hawks mixed in with migrating Turkey Vultures 2 km sw. of Suchitoto, *Cuscatlán* 14 Nov (NH) illustrated a rare example of migration in this species. Just two years ago, Swainson's

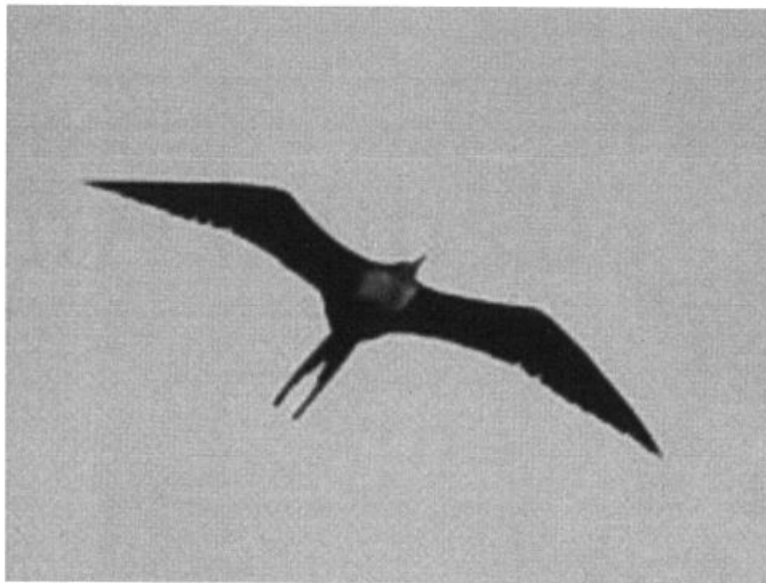
Hawk was finally documented in Belize after nearly 30 years of unsubstantiated reports, many of which were likely based on misidentifications. On the morning of 21 Sep, JN (*fide* LJ) reported seeing a rising kettle of about 100 large, long-winged, whitish hawks near his house in Punta Gorda. Based on this description and the time of year, LJ believed that they may have been Swainson's. Eight days later, just outside Punta Gorda, LJ observed a group of 26 juv. Swainson's Hawks migrating south with 9 juv. Mississippi Kites, another rare transient in Belize.

In Costa Rica, a light-morph ad. Crested Eagle was observed by several gondola-loads of visitors and guides (*fide* DT) as it perched along the Rainforest Aerial Tram, lower Braulio Carrillo N.P., *Heredia*. Although reported sparingly from nearby La Selva and Rara Avis, this was the first report for the tram area. The first Paint-billed Crane reported in Costa Rica in about two years was one flushed from the margin of a recently harvested rice field at Zapote de Río Frío 20 km e. of Puerto de Sarapiquí, *Heredia* 11 Oct (JRZ). Almost all previous reports have come from this area.

PLOVERS THROUGH DOVES

An American Golden-Plover at the mouth of Río Jiboa, *La Paz* 4 & 21 Oct (TJ) was the first fall report for El Salvador. One was also seen 26 Sep (GA, JT) at Costa del Este in Panama, where it is rare to very uncommon. Rare in Costa Rica was a Snowy Plover seen on the beach near Limón airport 11 Sep (DM, AS, DS, AA). Not rare, but present in an unusually large concentration, were 193 Wilson's Plovers near the mouth of Río Jiboa 7 Sep (TJ). Also near the mouth of Río Jiboa were an injured American Oystercatcher 12 Oct (ph. TJ), the first recorded in *La Paz*, and an American Avocet 7 Nov (ph. TJ). The latter, while not especially uncommon in El Salvador some years, now goes unrecorded most years and had not been reported since 1994. Long-billed Curlews were reported from El Salvador where one, possibly representing the first fall record, was present at Barra de Santiago, *Ahuachapán* 22–25 Oct (TJ, OK), and from Panama, where one was seen at Costa del Este 12 Sep (GA, JT, RM, KK). There are fewer than 10 records for this

species in Panama. Approximately 20 Marbled Godwits at Barra de Santiago 25 Oct (OK) represented the largest concentration on record for El Salvador. The rarest bird seen at the mouth of Río Jiboa this season



This female Great Frigatebird and an accompanying male—seen 226 km out in the Pacific Ocean off Panama on 12 November 2003—were the first ever recorded in the Central American region. The record is remarkable, even though the pelagic avifauna of Central America is still quite poorly known. Photograph by Michael P. Force.

was a Baird's Sandpiper, only the 2nd recorded in El Salvador, on 21 Oct (TJ). The most unexpected bird recorded at Costa del Este this fall was a female Ruff on 11 & 21 Aug (JT, DB), the 3rd recorded in Panama



A Gray-hooded Gull, one of two present at Costa del Este near Panama City, Panama 14 August 2003, provided the first photographic record for the Central American region; there are two previous sight records for Panama. Photograph by Rosabel Miro.

and first since 1974. Less unusual, but still noteworthy, were 2 Wilson's Phalaropes, also at Costa del Este, on 14 Aug (GA, JT, RM).

Representing the first photographically documented record for Panama and Central

America—and only the 2nd for North America as broadly conceived—were 2 Gray-hooded Gulls at Costa del Este 14 Aug (ph. RM; VENT tour led by TN). There are three previous sight records from Panama and a 26

Dec 1998 photographically documented record from the Florida panhandle. Much less spectacular, but nevertheless noteworthy, were a Ring-billed Gull at Costa del Este 7 Sep (GA, JT) and 10 Black Skimmers there five days later (GA, JT, RM, KK). Two Mourning Doves seen on 19 Oct (NH) at Barra de Santiago, *Ahuachapán* were early. The long-awaited first documented Honduras record of Plain-breasted Ground Dove came 2–4 Aug, when 5 or more pairs were observed along the road to Catacamas, 5 km ene. of Juticalpa, *Olancho* (ph. TJ, JF, MB). There was an undocumented report from near Copán in early 2003.

PARROTS THROUGH JAYS

One or more Barred Parakeets were heard flying over Montecristo N.P., *Santa Ana* 26 Oct (OK). Although park guards indicated that the species was a regular visitor to the park, this represented the first specific record for El Salvador. In Costa Rica, a White-tipped Sicklebill mist-netted at the Pitilla Biological Station, *Guanacaste* 22 Aug (ph. DC) represented a slight northward range extension from its previously known northernmost occurrence at Rincón de la Vieja. A disjunct population of Wedge-tailed Sabrewing in *Olancho*, Honduras, last reported in 1962, is alive and well. On 3–4 Aug, TJ and JF recorded and photographed the species in several gorges in El Boquerón N.M. 20 km ene. of Juticalpa. In w. El Salvador, where the Green-breasted Mango is presumed to be a migrant, 2 females at Santa Rita forest, Municipio San Francisco Menéndez, *Ahuachapán* 12 Sep (OK, MT) represented an early fall record. The earliest previous record was 25 Oct. Two Long-billed Starthroats there on the same date (OK, MT) were also noteworthy, given the paucity of distribution and status information for this species in El Salvador.

Four drumming Hairy Woodpeckers at Montecristo N.P. 26 Oct (OK) were noteworthy, as this species was not recorded there on a breeding bird survey in 1999. Like the White-tipped Sicklebill, the Brown-billed Scythebill was thought to be at the n. end of its range at

Rincón de la Vieja, at least until one was mist-netted at the Pitilla Biological Station, *Guanacaste* 24 Aug (ph. DC). A Mouse-colored Tyrannulet seen and heard 50 m above sea level at La Gamba de Golfito, *Puntarenas* 4 Sep (JRZ) was the first recorded in the coastal lowlands of Costa Rica. All previous records have been from interior valleys above 600 m. A Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher at Caserío San Miguelito, *Ahuachapán* 13 Sep (OK, MT) was the latest recorded in El Salvador. Rare anywhere in Costa Rica, a Gray Kingbird at Palo Verde Lagoon, *Guanacaste* 8 Nov (ph. JA, MM, IM, EC) may be the 2nd ever recorded on Costa Rica's Pacific slope. Seldom seen in Panama, a male Bare-throated Umbrellabird in the Fortuna Forest Reserve, Río Hornito, *Chiriquí* 13 Aug (ML) is worth noting. A Blue-headed Vireo at the Rainforest Aerial Tram 23 Sep (AS) was s. of its normal winter range and constituted an early fall record for Costa Rica. In El Salvador, 2 Red-eyed Vireos at Caserío San Miguelito 12–13 Sep (OK, MT) provided the 2nd and 3rd fall records for El Salvador and only the 4th and 5th records for the country. Two Black-chested Jays at the Río Negro de Coto Brus, *Puntarenas* 1 Sep (JRZ) provided the 4th record for the Pacific slope of Costa Rica since the species was first reported there three years ago.

SWALLOWS THROUGH ESTRILDID FINCHES

The Blue-and-white Swallow is a common resident at middle and higher elevations in Costa Rica, so birds seen at sea level are worthy of close scrutiny. Three ads. and 2 imms. seen at Chomes 29 Aug (JRZ) had notably different vocalizations, longer wings, and longer tails than seen in the resident subspecies, and the appearance of more white in the face, all indicative of the migratory South American subspecies *N. c. patagonica*, which is seldom reported as far n. as Costa Rica. Three Tennessee Warblers at Caserío San Miguelito 12–13 Sep (OK, MT) were considered to be early migrants in El Salvador. The Orange-crowned Warbler is exceptionally rare as far s. as Costa Rica, so one closely observed near Purisil on the road to Tapanti N.P., *Cartago* 21 Sep (DM and members of Asociación Ornitológica de Costa Rica) was especially noteworthy. A first-year male Black-throated Blue Warbler at the Biotopo Mario Dary Rivera (Quetzal Sanctuary), *Baja Verapaz* 20 Oct (TJ) provided only the 2nd record for Guatemala. Noteworthy were 2 ad. male Golden-cheeked Warblers 26 Oct at Montecristo N.P. (OK); there are only four previous reports for El Salvador, none fully documented. Rare in Panama was a Yellow-throated Warbler at Cerro Azul 1 Oct (JT). Nine Canada Warblers recorded at various points in El Imposible N.P., *Ahuachapán* 13 Sep (OK, MT) were indicative of a major

SA Tricolored Munia (*Lonchura malacca* [sensu *stricto*], formerly lumped with other taxa as Chestnut Mannikin) was first reported in Central America in Costa Rica four years ago, when 3 ads. were found at the La Guinea sugar cane farms, *Guanacaste*. At the time, concern was expressed that this small population could grow and expand into a nearby large rice producing area (this granivorous species is considered a major pest in its native Asia). It has now made that 6-km leap. On 6 Nov, JRZ flushed a group of 12 birds, mostly juvs., from a mature rice field at Pelón de la Bajura, the first reported occurrence away from the La Guinea sugar cane farms. It has also been recently reported in Honduras, Belize, and Mexico (*N.A.B.* 57: 553 & 555). These recent sightings may represent the beginning of a major multi-front invasion of Central America and the beginning of a significant agricultural nightmare.

wave of this species on that date.

An exhausted Lincoln's Sparrow was found resting on the beach at Adolfo Downs, Tortuguero, *Limón* 17 Oct (AD). A Grayish Saltator, the first record for Panama, was seen and tape-recorded on the outskirts of Changuinola, *Bocas del Toro* 13 Sep (GB, VW). The species may be spreading southward from Costa Rica as a result of deforestation. Two Bobolinks, a seldom-reported species in Costa Rica, were flushed from a grassy area at 1450 m at Las Concavas, *Paraiso de Cartago* 30 Sep (DM, AS). A female Baltimore Oriole at Caserío San Miguelito 13 Sep (OK, MT) was an early migrant. Hard to explain was a well-described Yellow-winged Cacique well out of range near Gales Point, *Belize* on 6 Oct (MG et al.). If of wild origin, this would be the first record for Belize. A similar bird, thought to be of the same species, was seen briefly by LJ about 25 km n. of Gales Pt. as it darted low across the road in front of his vehicle 19 Sep. A group of 5 Red Crossbills present at Montecristo N.P. 26 Oct (OK) were the first reported from *Santa Ana* and only the 3rd reported from El Salvador.

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