

Central America



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This spring season produced more reports by more observers—and more country first records—than any previous seasonal report from Central America. And more and more of these reports are coming from local residents, not tour groups and other visitors, a solid indication that serious birding is taking root. A remarkable nine species this spring were firsts for their respective countries (pending confirmation in some cases): Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Flame-rumped Tanager, and Shiny Cowbird in Costa Rica; Great Jacamar, Stripe-breasted Wren, and Black-throated Wren in Honduras; Swainson's Warbler in Panama; Giant Cowbird in El Salvador; and Spotted Rail, long overdue, in Guatemala. Three of these, the jacamar and the two wrens, were found in a period of less than 24 hours by Robert Gallardo in the remote and seldom explored Sutawala Valley near the Nicaraguan border.

With the continuation of the long-term bird monitoring program in El Salvador into its first spring, a number of first spring records were established for the country. Oth-

er species, for which little was previously known of their spring presence, proved to be of regular occurrence, at least in 2004 (Pectoral Sandpiper, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Blackburnian Warbler).

Abbreviations: KUNHM (University of Kansas Natural History Museum); LSMNH (Louisiana State University Museum of Natural History); MHNES (Museo de Historia Natural de El Salvador), MNCR (Museo Nacional de Costa Rica).

HERONS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

A Rufescent Tiger-Heron seen in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, *Gracias a Dios* 22 April (CT), was the first reported from there since 1983 and one of the few ever recorded in Honduras. Four days later, on 26 Apr, a rare Agami Heron was also found in the core of the reserve (CT). An ad. **Striated Heron** was seen in Palo Verde N.P. in mid-Feb (ph. DVW, CJ), providing only the 2nd record for Costa Rica, the previous one being from Cañas, about 40 km away, in 1923.

A Muscovy Duck at El Amatal, *La Libertad* 18 May (NH) and 720 Lesser Scaup on L. Güija, *Santa Ana* 28 Mar (NH et al.) were both noteworthy for El Salvador. A Barred Hawk, a pair of Solitary Eagles, and a Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle were all seen in Chagres N.P. below Cerro Jefe 8 Apr (GR, PAH, KyE, IHQ). The eagle and hawk-eagle are both rare in Panama, and the hawk is rare in cen. Panama. Clearly, mangroves support significant populations of black-hawks in El Salvador, as demonstrated by 13 Mangrove Hawks and one Great Black-Hawk observed 5 Apr at Estero Jaltepeque, *La Paz* (NH). A White-tailed Hawk near Blue Creek Village,

Toledo 11 Mar (CMS) was at an unexpected location s. of its normal range in Belize, and a Zone-tailed Hawk seen along the road from Tegucigalpa to Bonanza in Apr (CT) provided the first spring record for this rarely reported species in Honduras. A Merlin of the nominate subspecies seen 10 Apr on San Juan del Gozo Pen, *Usulután* (OK, MBR) represented the first spring record for El Salvador. An Ocellated Turkey at the entrance to Mayflower-Bocawina N.P., *Stann Creek* 20 Mar (A&JC), confirmed that a small, now isolated, population of this Yucatán endemic remains at the southernmost limits of its range in Belize.

Attention to shorebirds in El Salvador paid off this spring. A female Wilson's Plover collected at Bahía de Jiquilisco, *Usulután* 12 Apr (MBR; *KUNMH) was ready to lay. On the same date on nearby San Juan del Gozo Pen., which forms the s. boundary of the Bahía, MBR found an American Oystercatcher nest with eggs. This date represents the earliest nesting record for each of these two species in El Salvador. Four Upland Sandpipers heard flying over San Juan del Gozo Pen. on the night of 8 Apr (OK, MBR), and another seen 12 Apr (MBR), provided only the 2nd and 3rd records for El Salvador. An impressive 45 Marbled Godwits and 15 Buff-breasted Sandpipers were on San Juan del Gozo Pen. 12 Apr (MBR). The number of godwits was the highest count yet reported in El Salvador, and the Buff-breasted Sandpipers provided only the 2nd record for El Salvador. Five Red Knots at Bahía de Jiquilisco 9 Apr (OK, MBR) established the first spring record for the country. Rounding out the list, several Pectoral Sandpipers were reported from various locations through 19 May (NH et al.). Considering that there is only one published spring record for El Salvador, this species undoubtedly has been overlooked. In Costa Rica, 2 White-rumped Sandpipers were at Las Marías, about 15 km ne. of Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí 19–25 Apr (JRZ, ph. ERIC, RZ). Although a common late spring migrant locally in C.A., this species is seldom reported in Costa Rica.

JAEGERS THROUGH KINGFISHERS

Pomarine Jaegers were reported at two inland localities this spring. In El Salvador, an ad. male light morph, was grounded at San Juan Opico, *La Libertad*, about 40 km inland, 10 Apr (*vide* MS). The bird was taken to the National Zoo, where it died (ph. OK; *MHNES). In Costa Rica, another ad. male light morph, was found alive by locals at 2400 m on the Caribbean side of the divide in San Gerardo de Irazú, *Costa Rica* 18 Apr. It died a short while later (*MNCR; CQ). A flock of 200 Least Terns at Bahía de Jiquilisco 9 Apr (OK, MBR) was a remarkable concentration for El Salvador. A Gray-chested Dove, a species generally restricted to elevations below 500 m, was seen at 900 m in the Sacranix Mts. (Sierra de

SA This spring was, in many ways, the "season of the rail," with interesting records for five species. Gray-breasted Crake was found at two new sites in Honduras this spring. Previously known only from Río Segovia on the Nicaraguan border, RG obtained voice recordings of the species at L. Yojoa in w. Honduras in Feb and found them at two other sites around the lake 24–25 Apr. He and others also found them in e. Honduras on Río Patuca in the village of Wampusirpe in Mar, where they were able to call one out into the open right at their feet. The number of Rufous-necked Wood-Rails visiting J&DB's yard on Caye Caulker, Belize, is increasing at the rate of about 50% a year, with as many as 20 in sight at one time on several occasions this spring! Incredibly, also in J&DB's yard this spring was a **Uniform Crake**. The bird, seen 20 Mar (†), is a rare resident on the mainland, with no previous island records. Although not known for vagrancy, perhaps this species, like so many other near-sedentary rails, is prone to occasional dispersal. Taylor (1998. *Rails: a guide to the rails, crakes, gallinules and coots of the world*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press) states that no geographical movements are known for the species, but Howell and Webb (1995. *A Guide to the birds of Mexico and northern Central America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press), leaving open the possibility, stated that a record from the Pacific coast of s. Mexico could represent a vagrant. Paint-billed Crake, on the other hand, is known for long-distance vagrancy, as far n. as Virginia in the United States. In Costa Rica, one was at Charcarita near Palmar Sur 6 Apr (MD and Birdquest), and several were found over a two-day period (3 on 16 Apr and 5 on 21 Apr) at Zapote de Río Frio about 20 km e. of Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí (JRZ, ERIC, CJ, GV). There are few previous records of this species in Costa Rica. And last, a **Spotted Rail** on the Guatemala side of the Río Ostúa 26 Apr (ph. NH), near L. Güija (which straddles the border of Guatemala and El Salvador), established the first documented record for Guatemala.

Chamá), *Alta Verapaz* 3 May (KE). A White-faced Quail-Dove at Laguna de Alegría, *Usulután* 14 May (NH) represented a range extension of this highland species into the volcanic range of e. El Salvador. A Mangrove Cuckoo at Cerro El Pericón, *Arambala, Morazán* 1 May (TJ) was unexpected at that location. Pheasant Cuckoos are rare and seldom seen in Costa Rica, as they are in most other parts of C.A., and always worth reporting. One was heard at Las Alturas de Cotón at 1400 m on the Pacific slope 29 Feb (JRZ), and another was heard four days later 4 km away (JRZ, DM, AO). There are several recent records of Great Horned Owl from the Monteverde cloud forest, including a report from 8 Apr at 1550 m on the Pacific slope. These are the first records from this part of Costa Rica.

The earliest nesting record of Lesser Nighthawk in El Salvador was established when a nest with eggs was discovered 9 Apr (OK, MBR, AN) on San Juan del Gozo Pen. Northern Potoo is a rare bird in El Salvador, at one time recently believed to have been extirpated. However, it still persists in mangroves along the coast, where one was collected 9 Apr at Estero de Jaltepeque, *La Paz* (NH; *KUNHM). A pair of Lesser Swallow-tailed Swifts bred in El Imposible N.P., *Ahuachapán* in Apr and May (MLó, fide OK). The Bronzy Hermit was not recorded in Honduras until 1998, yet it has proven to be common at the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, where first discovered. Several were seen there in the latter half of Apr (CT). Rarely reported in El Salvador, an Emerald-chinned Hummingbird was at the Santa Ana volcano 19 Apr (OK, JPD). A Rufous-crested Coquette, rare in Panama, and a Green-crowned Brilliant, rare in cen. Panama, were at Chagres N.P. below Cerro Jefe 8 Apr (GR, PAH, KyE, IHQ). In El Salvador, a Long-billed Starthroat was at Montecristo N.P., *Santa Ana* 18 Mar (NH), a first for that locality. Additionally, a Plain-capped Starthroat was at El Imposible

N.P. 29 Mar (ph. OK, JS), where there are few records, and an impressive 4 were seen in the Las Lajas forest, *Sonsonate* 21 Apr (OK, MBR). An Amazon Kingfisher on the Río El Desagüe near L. Güija 25 May (NH) established the 4th recent record (since 1975) for El Salvador and the first for *Santa Ana*.

PUFFBIRDS THROUGH FLYCATCHERS

A Barred Puffbird photographed at the entrance to the Pipeline Rd. in Soberanía N.P. 21 Mar (JO, RK, CC) was the first reported in the Canal area since around 1870. On a mid-Mar expedition into the Sutawala Valley in the Tawahka Asangni Biosphere Reserve, *Gracias a Dios*, RG discovered and videotaped Honduras' first Great Jacamar, an ad. male, on 20 Mar. This is especially remarkable since

(GR, PAH, KyE, IHQ). A Pale-billed Woodpecker at Pantano de Mehotique, *Usulután* 13 May (NH) was an exciting find, as the species was believed extirpated from El Salvador in all but westernmost *Ahuachapán*. Unless this bird was wandering far from its original home in search of suitable habitat, perhaps a population still survives in e. El Salvador. A Black-crowned Antpitta, rare in Panama, was seen along the Vistamares Trail in Chagres N.P. 7 Apr (GR, PAH, KyE, IHQ).

A Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher in the Sutawala Valley 21 Mar (RG) was the first recorded in *Gracias a Dios*. Although **Yellow-breasted Flycatcher** (*Tolmomyias flaviventris*) has been reported, and even tape-recorded, in Panama on several occasions in the past 12 years, it was not until this spring that the species was finally confirmed by specimen in the A.O.U. Area. From 2 seen, one was taken on 4 Apr at Pirre Uno along the road s. of El Real, *Darien* (RBr, MB; *LSUMNH). Three singing Belted Flycatchers were found in Montecristo N.P. 14–20 Apr (MBR), the first recorded there since 1980. The Eastern Wood-Pewee is a decidedly less common migrant on the Pacific slope of n. C.A. than on the Caribbean side, so 13 heard and observed in Montecristo N.P. 16 Apr (MBR) was an impressive number, considering that there were only four previous records of this easily overlooked species in El Salvador. New for Costa Rica was a **Rusty-margined Flycatcher** seen and heard along a gravel road in an area of open pastures in La Gamba de Golfito 7 Apr (ph. MD and



A new species for Honduras, this Stripe-breasted Wren was discovered by Robert Gallardo—along with two other birds new to the country, Black-throated Wren and Great Jacamar—in the remote Sutawala Valley in the Tawahka Asangni Biosphere Reserve on 21 (here 23) March 2004. Photograph from videotape by Irma Fernandez de Gallardo.

this species is unrecorded in neighboring Nicaragua—the closest previously known locality being on the n. Caribbean coast of Costa Rica more than 500 km away. But the birds of Nicaragua are poorly known compared with other countries in the Region, and it is likely that this species has been overlooked. Rare anywhere in Panama, a Crimson-bellied Woodpecker was seen at Cerro Azul 7 Apr

(Birdquest). It responded readily to tape playback. This species previously had not been reliably reported w. of cen. Panama and was not high on the list of species expected to turn up in Costa Rica. A Western Kingbird seen in Belize City 2 Mar (†MC, EC, ES, JK, AC) represented only the 3rd convincing record for Belize. Two Eastern Kingbirds on South Water Caye 15 Mar (CMS) were early migrants, and

a Gray Kingbird there the following day (CMS) was noteworthy, as the species is an infrequent visitor in Belize. A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at 1300 m elevation in Alta Verapaz, 10 km wnw. of Cobán near Sanimta Village, 1 May (KE) was at an unexpected location on the Caribbean slope of interior Guatemala.

VIREOS THROUGH WARBLERS

Although now known to be common at three cloudforest locations in El Salvador, a Brown-capped Vireo taken in Montecristo N.P. 14 Apr (NH, MBR; *KUNHM) provided the first specimen evidence for the country. Two Steller's Jays seen at Cantón El Limo, Metapán, just outside Montecristo N.P. 29 May (OK), were at the same locality where they were first reported in Mar 2003. This species is very rare in El Salvador. Remarkably, less than 24 hours after finding Honduras' first Great Jacamar, RG documented two additional species never before reported n. of Nicaragua: Black-throated Wren and Stripe-breasted Wren. Both were seen 21 Mar in the same location in the remote Satawala Valley, and both responded vigorously to tape-recordings of their songs. The former was audiotaped, and the latter, a pair, was also videotaped. A Banded Wren in Las Lajas forest 21 Apr (OK, AN, MBR) was the first reported from this well-studied locality in El Salvador. Providing only the 2nd record for El Salvador was a Brown Creeper in Montecristo N.P. 19 Apr (MBR). A Wood Thrush at 2300 m in primary cloud forest at Chelemhá, 36 km wsw. of Cobán, 22 Mar (KE) was at a considerably higher elevation than expected. Tropical Mockingbirds were seen at two new locations in Costa Rica: one at a backyard feeder in Cartago in early Mar (CS), and another at a banana dump in Las Marías, about 15 km ne. of Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí 19 Apr (JRZ). The Cartago bird established the first record from the cen. valley. Two pairs of Olive Warblers, with females constructing nests 1–7 Mar at La Montaña, Chalatenango (NH), provided the first confirmed breeding record for El Salvador.

The first spring record of Golden-winged Warbler in El Salvador came 15 Apr, when one was found in Montecristo N.P. (MBR). The country has only a handful of records, all in winter. Providing only the 4th record for El Salvador was a male Northern Parula seen about 10 km s. of Zacatecoluca, La Paz 7 Apr (MBR). A female Cape May Warbler was at the Savegre Mt. Lodge at 1800 m on the Pacific slope of Cerro de la Muerte 2 Mar (RiZ, CS). This species is a rare winter visitor in Costa Rica. An impressive wave of migrant warblers in Montecristo N.P. on 20 Apr produced El Salvador's 2nd Chestnut-sided Warbler, a male, as well as an impressive 148 Black-throated Green Warblers, 11 Blackburnian Warblers, and 75 Wilson's Warblers

(MBR). In addition to the 11 Blackburnians on the 20th, 2 were seen on 16 Apr and one on 17 Apr. All but one were males. Another male was captured on 8 May at a bird monitoring station in Izalco, Sonsonate (ph. JS). There are no published spring records for this species in El Salvador. Also impressive were 9 Hermit Warblers 16–19 Mar at Montecristo N.P. (NH).

The unprecedented numbers of warblers in El Salvador were upstaged in Panama by a remarkable Swainson's Warbler mist-netted and photographed in the Canal area along Old Gamboa Rd 13 Mar (JB, ML, MH, SA, RB, IO). Other than an equally remarkable sight record from Venezuela, this bird provided the first record for the species s. of Belize and n. Guatemala. El Salvador's first spring records of Louisiana Waterthrush were established by 2 birds collected at La Montaña 2 Mar (NH, SL; *KUNHM) and another bird banded 29 Mar at El Imposible N.P. (ph. OK, JS). Rare in Panama, a Hooded Warbler was mist-netted on Old Gamboa Rd. 12 Mar (ph. JB, ML, MH, SA, RB, IO). Individual Red-faced Warblers in Montecristo N.P. 16 & 19 Mar (ph. NH) continue last winter's surge in records in El Salvador, the first since 1980. One of these may have been the same individual recorded nearby the previous Dec.

TANAGERS THROUGH BLACKBIRDS

A male Scarlet Tanager at San Pedro Masahuat, La Paz 16 Apr (†RP, FP, AP) was only the 3rd recorded in El Salvador and the first in spring. A male Western Tanager on Caye Caulker 2 May (†J&DB) provided the first fully documented record for Belize. This species is reported occasionally, but most previous reports have been second-hand and lacking details. A male and a female-plumaged Passerini's Tanager at 1300 m near Sanimta Village 10 km wnw. of Cobán, Alta Veracruz 29 Apr and 1 May (EPC, KE) were at an unusually high elevation. Interestingly, the location is in a karst sink hole completely surrounded by mountains 1500–1800 m high. Yellow-rumped male Flame-rumped Tanagers were reported from two locations on the s. Caribbean coast of Costa Rica near Panama, providing the first records for Costa Rica. One was seen from a bus along the road from Hone Creek to Bribri in early Mar (EC), and another was seen earlier in the Manzanillo area (PP). Although this species is easily identified, the lack of specifics, including dates, for these two individuals may preclude their acceptance as first country records. It is likely, however, that more birds will be seen in this area, as this second-growth species is expanding its range. Two Azure-rumped Tanagers, mostly a Mexican endemic, were seen 15 May in a coffee plantation at 1700 m in Los Terrales Reserve, Suchitepéquez, Guatemala (IM, EL). In Montecristo N.P.,

where the Elegant Euphonia is rare, 5 seen 14–20 Apr (MBR) was an usually high concentration. Yellow-crowned Euphonia was first recorded in Honduras in Apr 2003, when RG found a male and 2 females on the Rio Platano in the Tawahka Asangni Biosphere Reserve. In Mar, RG returned and found many, both in the Reserve and in Wampusirpe. This time, he documented its occurrence with audio-recordings.

Three Yellow Grosbeaks seen near the village of Cabañas, Zacapa, Guatemala 12 Mar (KE, CA) were in an area at the se. extreme of its range, where rare and, apparently, not previously well documented. A flock of 1100 Dickcissels at Zacatecoluca, La Paz 3 Apr (OK) established the highest concentration yet for El Salvador. A female Red-winged Blackbird at The Dump ricefields 20 km w. of Punta Gorda 22 Mar (A&JC) was at least 150 km s. of its known range in Belize. In El Salvador, the first San Vicente record of Eastern Meadowlark was established 20 May, when one was seen in Laguna El Talquezal (NH). One recent country first will not be celebrated widely. Costa Rica recorded its first Shiny Cowbird, a female on a lawn in Hone Creek, Limón 25 Apr (ErnC, DM). El Salvador got its first Giant Cowbird 29 May (†OK), a female in the recently established Chestnut-headed Oropendola colony at Cantón El Limo, Metapán, in Santa Ana. The oropendola colony, discovered a year ago, became active in late Feb, when 22 nests were constructed in two trees. Nesting was completed around the first of Jun. Chestnut-headed Oropendola was first recorded in El Salvador in spring 2000.

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