

# Central America



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Other than El Salvador's first Pacific-origin hurricane in recorded history, which struck in May, the weather this spring was relatively uneventful. The waxwing invasion from last winter was still evident through April and well into May, with single flocks of up to 400 in El Salvador recorded in April. The unbroken string of country firsts since this column's inception in fall 2000 continues with a spectacular White-throated Sparrow on Half Moon Caye off the coast of Belize in May. Perhaps as impressive as the bird itself was the cosmopolitan nature of the birders who found it. It was discovered during a BirdLife Americas Regional Partnership Meeting field trip out of Belize City attended by about 20 delegates who are active from Central and South America to Europe and Africa. Other seasonal highlights included Costa Rica's second Rusty-margined Flycatcher and third Striated Heron, El Salvador's third Baird's Sandpiper, and Honduras's third American Bittern.

It is pleasing to see more and more reports of both typical and atypical arrival and de-

parture dates, as well as reports of unexpectedly high concentrations of migrants. These "extremes" help frame the expected periods of occurrence and expected numbers of birds passing through a given region during migration. Eventually, with enough historical occurrence and abundance data accumulated (providing so-called distributional bell curves), we can then begin to detect seasonal patterns that fall outside normal parameters, e.g., a spring migration that on the whole is earlier or later than normal, certain species that are earlier or later than normal, species that may be passing through in higher or lower concentrations than normal, and differences in timing of migration between Pacific and Caribbean slopes. Ultimately, these aberrations from "normal" patterns might then be correlated with weather events and other causal factors. While all this may be routine now in North America, we are still very much in the baseline data gathering stage in Central America. But at least we have made a start!

## ANHINGA THROUGH DUCKS

In Panama, 8 female Anhingas at a small lake near Pocrí 24 Apr (GA, JK) were the first ever recorded in *Los Santos*. In El Salvador, 4 Pinnated Bitterns at Laguna de Olomega, *San Miguel* 11 Mar (RIP, JH, IV) was a high count for that location. With only two published records for Honduras, an American Bittern flushed from a grassy marsh at L. Yojoa, *Cortés* between Isla del Venado and Hotel Agua Azul 27 Mar (DA) was unexpected. The two previous records were from the Swan Is. in 1909 and Tegucigalpa in 1936. The species may well be a regular but overlooked winter visitor. A male

Least Bittern at Laguna de Olomega 26 May (RIP, IV) was noteworthy, as this species is rarely reported in El Salvador. A female was seen there in 2004. Unexpected was a juv. Reddish Egret at Playa Blanca, Panama 16–17 Mar (BM, ph. RS) that appeared to be a rare intermediate morph. A bird believed to be a subad. Striated Heron was closely observed near Caño Negro, 10 km s. of Los Chiles, *Alajuela* 6 Mar (ph. BT, BL). Comments by FH on the photograph and description indicate that the bird was a subad. molting into definitive basic plumage, as evidenced by some grayish neck feathers. This represents the 3rd substantiated record for Costa Rica, only the 2nd in recent years, and the first on the Caribbean side. Three White Ibis at Laguna de Olomega 11 Mar (RIP, JH, IV) and 17 at the same location 29 Apr (RIP, IV) were unusual inland sightings for El Salvador. About 380 Glossy Ibis in a field one km e. of Santa María, *Herrera* 22 & 24 Apr (GA, JK) were by far the largest number ever seen together in Panama. Like elsewhere in Central America, the species has been increasing in number and spreading in recent years.

Fifteen Muscovy Ducks, including males and females, were at Barra de Santiago, *Ahuachapán* 22 Apr (RIP, MS, IV); this species is rarely reported from w. El Salvador. Received too late to include in the previous report was documentation of a female-plumaged Red-breasted Merganser in Placencia Lagoon, *Stann Creek* 25–27 Dec (ph. D&JW). This bird represents only the 4th, and southernmost, record for Belize. A



After much deliberation, it was determined that this bird—photographed near Caño Negro, Costa Rica on 6 March 2005—was a subadult Striated Heron. There were only two previous records for the country. Photograph by Bill Tweit.

group of 5 Masked Ducks, apparently from the same group of 10 present in Feb, were at Laguna de Olomega 11 Mar (RIP, JH, IV).

## HAWKS

A juv. light morph Gray-headed Kite showed up on Caye Caulker 17 Feb and was still present 29 May (ph. J&DB). Its appearance establishes the first record of this uncommon hawk from the Belize cayes. Farther s., a Hook-billed Kite was seen on Pipeline



This photograph of a Red-breasted Merganser at Placencia Lagoon 25 (here) through 27 December 2004 confirmed Belize's fourth record of the species. Photograph by Dan Williams.

Road 500 m beyond Río Limbo in Soberanía N.P. 2 Mar (DM). Incredibly, 2 Solitary Eagles were observed copulating 1 Mar at King Vulture Falls, Hidden Valley, Cayo (ph. †BF, JSm)—just four months after the species was first photographically documented in Belize in the same general area. In Costa Rica, a Merlin, thought to be a wintering bird, was seen 11 Mar (JZ) hunting Barn Swallows near the Coopeagri Sugar Cane Mill oxidation ponds 8 km se. of San Isidro de El General. In Guatemala, an unusually large concentration of 150 Mississippi Kites was observed flying northward over Rocjá Pomtilá, *Alta Verapaz* 23 Apr (JC, EC). In Panama, a pair of Pearl Kites was found nesting at Playa Blanca in mid-Mar, and a Barred Hawk was at El Valle 14 Mar (both BM).

On 6 Mar, a Harris' Hawk was seen s. of Los Chiles in Costa Rica along the road to Caño Negro (BT, BL). A major migratory push of Broad-winged Hawks was observed over Cerro de la Muerte in Costa Rica 13–14 Mar (BT, BL), with more than 2000 seen during casual observations. Systematic surveys would have produced far higher counts. An imm. White-tailed Hawk, a species rarely reported in El Salvador, was near Comalapa Airport, *La Paz* 28 May (ph. TJ).

Zone-tailed Hawk was observed in the town of Buenos Aires, *Cortés* 27 Mar (DA); the species is reported on average only once every two years on the Caribbean slope of Honduras, and breeding has not been confirmed there. Also in Honduras, an ad. Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle was seen perched at the edge of the clearing at 200 m elevation at CURLA Campamento in Pico Bonito N.P., *Atlántida* 23 Mar (DA). Like the preceding, this species is rarely reported in Honduras. Most reports have been either from this area or La Moskitia. At Metalio near Acajutla, *Sonsonate*, 2 Merlins reported on 30 Apr (RIP, MR) established the latest spring record for El Salvador; however, one in Belize at Half Moon Caye on Lighthouse

Reef 18 May (*vide* OK) was exceptionally late for anywhere in Central America.

### GUANS THROUGH DOVES

A Crested Guan seen 1 Apr in the Cordillera de Merendón just outside the town of Las Peñitas, *Cortés* (DA) was persisting in an area that is heavily hunted within just a few km of San Pedro Sula, Honduras's 2nd largest city. In fact, this highly prized game bird was within sight of a nearby Pizza Hut. By way of contrast, on a large private reserve in nw. Belize near Gallon Jug, *Orange Walk*, an assemblage of 13 male

Great Curassows, another popular game bird, was observed 31 May (B&CM), providing clear evidence of what one can expect in an area where hunting is strictly prohibited. Ten calling Ruddy Crakes at Laguna de Olomega 26 May (RIP, IV) was apparently a high one-day count for any locality in El Salvador. Also representing a high one-day count for El Salvador were 12 calling Ru-



This juvenile Reddish Egret, which appears to be of the rare intermediate morph (or perhaps a leucistic dark morph), was discovered at Playa Blanca in Panama 16 (here) through 17 March 2005 by members of the Maritimes Nature Travel Club. Photograph by Richard Stern.

fous-necked Wood-Rails in El Imposible N.P., *Ahuachapan*, the evening of 7 May (OK, MAL).

Noteworthy in Belize was an Upland Sandpiper at La Milpa, *Orange Walk* 14 Apr (ph. RP). Representing only the 3rd record for El Salvador, and the first in spring, was a Baird's Sandpiper at the mouth of the Río Ji-

boa, *La Paz* 3 Apr (ph., †TJ). Franklin's Gulls were unusually abundant along the Pacific coast of n. Central America this spring. Sizeable groups of breeding-plumaged birds continued to migrate up the coast of El Salvador through late May, including 50 seen passing by the mouth of the Río Jiboa 28 May (TJ). And in Guatemala, at least 5000 were observed flying along the coast near Tecojate 25 Apr (ph. AB). A Gray Gull at Costa del Este, just e. of Panama City, 13 Mar (GA, RM) provided one of the few Panama records. Also noteworthy were 4 Black Skimmers, 2 in ad. plumage, at Costa del Este 11 Mar (BM).

White-crowned Pigeon is still relatively common on the Belize cayes; however, it is rarely reported from the mainland; one seen with a small group of Scaled Pigeons at the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary visitor center, *Stann Creek* 4 Mar (BB, CL) was at a locality where previously unrecorded. The reverse is true of Red-billed Pigeon. While common on the mainland of n. Belize, one at Caye Caulker around the first of Mar (J&DB) established only the 2nd record for Caye Caulker and the cayes. Seen for only the 3rd time on Caye Caulker was a Caribbean Dove 7 Mar + (ph. J&DB), likely the same individual, then in juv. plumage, photographed in the same spot back in Nov. A female and male Ruddy Quail-Dove captured in mist nets 9 & 10 Apr, respectively, at El Imposible N.P. (ph. OK) were noteworthy for this rarely documented bird in El Salvador.

### PARROTS THROUGH ANTIBIRDS

The Scarlet Macaws first reported at the Bladen River Nature Reserve, *Toledo* in early Jan remained through the end of Mar (JM). This seasonal pattern of occurrence, Jan to Mar, is typical of the only other place e. of the Maya Mts. where they are seen regularly—Red Bank, 20 km to the ne. in *Stann Creek*. Apparently they cross the mountains at this time of year to take advantage of one of their favorite food trees when it is in fruit. Rarely reported in Costa Rica, single Black-billed Cuckoos at Rancho Naturalista, 15 km se. of Turrialba, on the Caribbean slope 18 Apr (LG) and at Carara on the Pacific coast 21 Apr (LG) were noteworthy. Yellow-billed Cuckoos at Rocjá Pomtilá 2 Apr (EC) and on Nicholas Caye in the Sapodilla Cayes 8 Apr (PB) were early spring migrants. A Mangrove Cuckoo in a coffee plantation at 1100 m elevation on San Vicente Volcano, *San Vicente* 11 Apr (LC) established the first departmental record but was not unprecedented for this habitat and elevation in El Salvador. Another was seen the same day at



This hawk, which showed up on Caye Caulker 17 February 2005 and remained through the end of the period (here 29 May), caused some confusion until identified by Bill Clark as a juvenile light-morph Gray-headed Kite, a first for the Belize cayes. Photograph by Jim Beveridge.

700 m in El Imposible N.P. (OK). In Costa Rica, one at La Selva 24 Apr (JZ) was of interest, as this species is a rare migrant in the Caribbean slope lowlands.

A Spectacled Owl turned up at 750 m elevation at the headquarters of El Imposible N.P. 20 May (JF) just hours after Hurricane *Adrian* made landfall (as a Category 1 storm) in El Salvador, pummeling the park during the night with tropical storm-force winds which may have pushed the bird upslope. The species is found nearby but below 300 m elevation. Hurricane *Adrian* was the first Pacific hurricane to reach El Salvador in recorded history but caused no structural damage and apparently had little impact on seabirds or other birds. A Whip-poor-will at the Sundancer Resort, Roatán, Bay Islands 21 Mar-1 Apr (TJ) may have been the first recorded on the Bay Is. The species is a fairly common winter visitor on mainland Honduras. A Great Potoo was heard calling around the clearing of the CURLA Campamento for a half hour at 20:00 on 23 Mar and again from 04:00-05:00 the following morning (DA). There are still too few records in Honduras for its distribution and relative abundance to be assessed.

Fifty or more White-chinned Swifts seen and heard on the evenings of 8 and 9 Mar at Rara Avis, Costa Rica (BT, BL) appeared to be heading for an evening roost nearby, possibly at the waterfalls near the lodge. A flock of about 25 Chestnut-collared Swifts was seen 14 Mar at Cerro Azul e. of Panama City (DM, RM), where the species is rarely reported. A Belted Kingfisher at Glover's Reef 22 May (PB) was a late migrant, but this species has been recorded in all 12 months in Belize. On Pipeline Road in Soberanía N.P., a female Great Jacamar was seen 2 Mar (DM). This species is not often reported

from this area of Panama. A male Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker, rare in Panama, was seen at Cerro Azul 14 Mar (DM, RM). A total of 4 Rufous-breasted Spinetails was heard near Barra de Santiago, on the coastal plain of *Ahuachapán* between 15 Apr and 6 May (RIP), confirming the persistence in that area of this rarely reported bird in El Salvador. A singing Bare-crowned Antbird near Volcán de Buenos Aires, 25 km wnw. of Buenos Aires, at 450 m elevation, 3 Mar (JZ) was at a new locality on the Pacific slope of Costa Rica where there are few records.



Shortly after this picture was taken 1 March 2005, this Solitary Eagle and a nearby mate were observed copulating at King Vulture Falls, Mountain Pine Ridge, Belize. This remarkable sight followed Belize's first photographically documented record of the species from the same area in November 2004. Photograph by Bert Frenz.

### FLYCATCHERS THROUGH WAXWINGS

Another very rare resident on Costa Rica's Pacific slope is Sepia-capped Flycatcher; thus one seen and heard singing 2 Mar at 1100 m at the Río Negro de Coto Brús near the Panama border (JZ, JG, AO, TM) was worth noting. A pair of Paltry Tyrannulets nest-building at El Imposible N.P. 21 May (JF, TJ) provided the first evidence of nesting for the park. The Alder Flycatcher may be a common spring transient in El Salvador (and elsewhere in n. Central America), but it is rarely identified. Two captured in mist nets in Izalco, *Sonsonate* 23-24 Apr (OK, LCA) and 3 captured in mist nets in El Imposible N.P. 6-7 May (OK) were identified based on measurements in the hand. Three others observed at the latter site 5-8 May (OK) were identified by the distinctive call note. A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher 21 May

and a Least Flycatcher 18 May in Rocjá Pomtilá (both EC) were late migrants.

A Rusty-margined Flycatcher at Tiskita Lodge near Pavones at the base of Burica Pen. 2 Mar (CS, SW) was the 2nd recorded in Costa Rica. The first came last year about 40 km to the northwest. There is abundant suitable habitat in the area, so has this species been overlooked all these years, or is it a recent colonist? It is considered a vagrant w. of the Canal Zone in Panama. At La Gamba, where the first Rusty-margined Flycatcher was recorded, one was again called in with a tape 29 Mar (MD; Birdquest). In Belize, one of the very few Gray Kingbirds ever recorded inland was at Belmopan 5 Apr (PB). A Fork-tailed Flycatcher seen on the road to Monteverde at 400 m elevation 1 Mar (BH) was noteworthy. The status of this species in nw. Costa Rica and the cen. highlands remains an enigma. Most records are from the dry season, and it may be only a migrant or seasonal visitor as opposed to resident.

Exceptionally late was a White-eyed Vireo at Rocjá Pomtilá 5 May (EC). A Black-whiskered Vireo, only the 4th recorded in Belize, was at Northeast Caye, Glover's Reef 22 May (PB). All have been seen in spring on the cayes. Two Bank Swallows on 7 May and one on 8 May migrating over El Imposible N.P. (OK) were first reported for that park. A Swainson's Thrush at Laguna de Olomega 29 Apr (RIP, IV) was thought to be unusual for this lowland locality, although the species is abundant in Apr and May at higher elevations in El Salvador. A Wood Thrush, rare in El Salvador, was at El Imposible N.P. 10 Mar (ph. JRS). On the Caribbean slope, where Wood Thrush is common, one at Rocjá Pomtilá 6 May (EC) was considered a late migrant. Also late were Gray Catbirds in Sanimtacá, *Alta Verapaz* 6 May (EPC, VXP), on



White-tailed Hawk, seldom reported in El Salvador, was photographed near Comalapa Airport in La Paz 28 May 2005; this bird is a juvenile. Photograph by Tom Jenner.



Upland Sandpiper is always an exciting find in Belize, where it is reported less than annually. This bird was noted 14 April 2005 at the La Milpa Field Station in the northwestern corner of the country. Photograph by Ryan Phillips.

Half Moon Caye 18 May (OBSERVER? *vide* OK), and on Glover's Reef 22 May (PB). The latter provided the latest spring record for Belize. A Tropical Mockingbird was seen 13 Mar (KEa) near San Isidro de El General just w. of the Río General. This is the 3rd location of this species in the San Isidro area and is about half way between the previous two locations.

Flocks of Cedar Waxwings numbering in the hundreds, first reported in Nov, continued through Apr and into May. In El Salvador, a flock of 20 in coffee plantations at San Vicente Volcano 2 Mar (LC) was the first record for *San Vicente*. Over 150 were seen at Cerro Grande de Apaneca, *Ahuachapán* 9 Apr (AM), but the largest single concentration ever reported in El Salvador was a flock of 400 at Los Naranjos, *Sonsonate* 8 Apr (RR). In Guatemala, at least 30 were in Vesubio, *Atitlán Volcano, Suchitepéquez* 30 Mar (KE, GD), and 50 were seen elsewhere in Los Tarrales Reserve 10 Apr (CA). In Costa Rica, a flock of 76 observed on the Amistad bird count n. of San Vito 5 Mar (observer unknown) was the largest concentration reported. The last waxwings reported were 8 at 1100 m in Naranjo de Alajuela, Central Valley (Costa Rica) 10 May (JZ) and 3 at Altun Ha, *Orange Walk* (Belize) 21 May (MH, OK).

## WARBLERS

A Blue-winged Warbler found 7 Mar on Dr. Skutch's farm, Los Cusingos, near San Isidro

de El General (JZ) was noteworthy, as were 2 ad. male Black-throated Blue Warblers seen 24 Mar and a male mist-netted 25 Mar at Caño Palma, *Tortuguero* (NS). Finding 3 Black-throated Blues in one locality at any time in Costa Rica is most unusual. In Honduras, 3 male Golden-cheeked Warblers observed in hedgerows at 1100 m in Buenos Aires in the buffer zone of Cusuco N.P., *Cortés* 24 Mar (DA) were likely migrants, as this species is rarely observed in winter outside of pine-oak associations and away from mixed species flocks. A male Cape May Warbler, a rare transient in Guatemala, was seen in Los Tarrales Reserve 12 Apr (CA, DDJ). A Blackburnian Warbler was at El Imposible N.P. 8 May (OK), and a Blackpoll Warbler was at Middle Caye, Glover's Reef 23 May (PB); the latter is turning out to be a rare-but-regular spring migrant on the Belize cayes. A Mourning Warbler captured in a mist net at El Imposible N.P. 6 May (OK) provided a rare spring record for El Salvador.

In one hour on 27 Mar, ca. 50 Common Yellowthroats were observed in reedy vegetation in the vicinity of Hotel Agua Azul, L. Yojoa (DA). This unusual concentration suggests that Yojoa may provide important



One of the highlights of the spring 2005 in El Salvador was this Baird's Sandpiper discovered at the mouth of the Río Jiboa on 3 April, providing only the third documented record for the country. Photograph by Tom Jenner.

wintering and/or migration habitat for this species.

Late warbler dates for the season were: Blue-winged, 4 May in Rocjá Pomtilá (EC;

exceptionally late); Tennessee, 8 May in Bosque Las Lajas, Izalco (FF); Yellow, 22 May at Glover's Reef (PB); Magnolia, 15 May in Rocjá Pomtilá (EC) and 22 May at Glover's Reef (PB); Black-and-white, 8 May in El Imposible N.P. (OK); Ovenbird, 21 May at Glover's Reef (PB); Kentucky, 26 Apr in Rocjá Pomtilá (EC); Common Yellowthroat, 23 May at Glover's Reef (PB); Wilson's, 18 May at Half Moon Caye (GaL), and 9 May in both Chelemhá (Guatemala) (KE) and Rocjá Pomtilá (EC); Yellow-breasted Chat, 22 Apr in Rocjá Pomtilá (RC).

## TANAGERS THROUGH BLACKBIRDS

A Summer Tanager in Rocjá Pomtilá 10 May (EC) was late. Two Azure-rumped Tanagers were seen 30 Mar in Vesubio (KE, GL, GD). These, along with several additional observations in the area (GL; dates unknown) since it was first recorded there in May 2004, indicate that the species is likely resident. A pair of Blue Seedaters carefully observed in

**SA** Eighteen Cerulean Warblers were observed at various locations 24 Mar-16 Apr during surveys for this species in Honduras headed by MW, DMe, and DA. This is almost double the number of all previous records for Honduras. Most were recorded in the low-ranging Cordillera Nombre de Dios and the Sierra de Omoa facing the n. coast at elevations of 100-200 m. Interestingly, no birds were found in surveys conducted in the vicinity of L. Yojoa, even though this was the location of several historical records. These sightings, along with recent studies in Belize (MW, pers. comm.), support Ted Parker's hypothesis (*American Birds* 48: 70-75) that in the spring Ceruleans make a brief stopover along the Caribbean coast of n. Central America during transit from n. South America to e. North America.

dense seeding bamboo at El Imposible N.P. 18 May (JF) was the first reported during the breeding season in El Salvador. While the species is probably a permanent resident in the country, all previous reports have come from Oct-Mar.

A Prevost's Ground-Sparrow seen 22 Mar (RD, RC) at Cerro Plano de Santa Elena (1200 m, Pacific slope, Monteverde) established a new n. limit for this species in Costa Rica. A singing male Rusty Sparrow present since early Apr at Acosta, about 20 km sw. of San José (JA, AS, DMa), represents a substantial range extension in Costa Rica—the first time the species has been recorded away from the Cordillera de Guanacaste. Nesting is suspected. Providing the 4th record for Costa Rica was a Lark Sparrow seen 5 Mar at Cenizas de Pérez Zeledón, 5 km se. of San Ididro de El General (JZ). All records have come in the past 12 years, and the other three were from lowland coastal areas in Oct, Nov, and Dec. The highlight of the season had to be the White-throated Sparrow that greeted nearly two dozen birders from around the world (AD, OK, ph. KB, PB, MC, GA et al.) shortly after their arrival on 18 May at Half Moon Caye 80 km se. of Belize City. The species had previously not been record-

ed s. of Florida and n. Mexico.

Late spring reports from Rocjá Pomtilá included Rose-breasted Grosbeak on 3 May, Blue Grosbeak on 10 May (exceptionally late; possibly breeding nearby?), Orchard Oriole on 24 Apr, and Baltimore Oriole on 17 May (all EC). The population of Chestnut-headed Oropendolas in El Salvador's Sierra de Metapán, *Santa Ana*, first discovered in 2003, continues to grow. Nesting trees were again found in Cantón El Lima (ML reported 15 nests active 12 May), and inside Montecristo N.P. (LP found 10 active nests on 26 May). Local residents estimate that the population has grown to over 100 birds.

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This male Ruddy Quail-Dove was mist-netted 10 April 2005 in El Salvador's El Imposible National Park. This retiring species is rarely recorded in El Salvador. *Photograph by Oliver Komar.*

Burge, Efrain Caal, Javier Caal, Roberto Caal, Mick Craig, Luis Cristiani, Matt Den-

ton, Don Desjardin, Geoffrey E. Dobbs, Kevin Easley, Knut Eisermann (Guatemala), Jesse Fagan, Felipe Franco, Bert Frenz, Leonardo Garrigues, Adri de Gelder, Julie Girard, Bert Harris, Floyd Hayes, Jorge Herrera, Mauricio Herrera, Ricardo Ibarra Portillo, Tom Jenner, **Lee Jones** (Belize), **Oliver Komar** (El Salvador), James Kushlan, Bruce LaBar, Cindy Lippincott, Mercedes Llord, Miguel Angel López, Gerardo López, Jacob Marlin, Daniel Martínez (DMA), Blake Maybank, David Medina (DMe), Bruce & Carolyn Miller, Rosabel Miró, Álvaro Moisés, Darién Montañez, Terrie Moss, Allison Olivieri, Ryan Phillips, Luis Pineda, Victor Xi Poou, Efrain Pop Chub, Marvin Rivas, Roberto Rivera, Milagro Salinas, César Sánchez, Julio Sánchez, Jennifer R. Smith, Judy Smith (JSm), Alejandro Solano, Richard Stern, Nicole Street, Bill Tweit, Iselda Vega, Melinda Welton, Soo Whiting, Dan & Jen Williams, **James R. Zook** (Costa Rica). 🌐

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