

Central America



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There is still much to learn about the resident avifauna of many areas of Central America, especially in the often hard-to-reach areas such as highlands where there are few or no roads. A Rapid Ecological Assessment this summer in the Guatemalan and Honduran part of Cerro Montecristo, a mountain with cloud forest spanning the borders of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, produced several previously unrecorded species for that range, including the first records of Hutton's Vireo for Honduras. In Panama, a small group of birders spent the summer in the El Valle-Altos del Maria highlands west of Panama City and, likewise, recorded a number of species previously unreported or seldom reported from that region.

Pelagic trips into the Pacific Ocean continue to break new ground regardless of sea-

son. This season, there were three ornithological expeditions into the Pacific, two off El Salvador and one off Costa Rica. Because of the paucity of information on pelagic birds in the Region and little information on seasonality, almost every species recorded on these trips adds significantly to our knowledge of pelagics in the Region. Although Pink-footed Shearwater and Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrel were recorded for the first time in El Salvador waters, more pelagic trips out into the Pacific will probably document their regular presence in the area. Elsewhere, Blue-chested Hummingbird and Olive Tanager were photographically confirmed in Honduras for the first time, and Yellow-winged Cacique was photographically confirmed in El Salvador.

Abbreviations: KUNHM (University of Kansas Natural History Museum); MUHNES (Museum of Natural History of El Salvador).

SHEARWATERS THROUGH HERONS

The highlights of the summer season in El Salvador were two pelagic expeditions, one on 2 Jul to the edge of the continental shelf 114 km offshore of Jiquilisco Bay (OK, TJ, BS), and the other on 11 Jul to an area about 55 km offshore s. of the Gulf of Fonseca (AM). These trips documented the first El Salvador records of Pink-footed Shearwater (5 on 2 Jul, 2 on 11 Jul) and Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrel (2 on 2 Jul), along with 2nd records (first specimens) for Red-footed Booby (2 on 2 Jul, one on 11 Jul), Audubon's Shearwater (2 on 2 Jul, 5 on 11 Jul), and Black Storm-Petrel (4 on 2 Jul). Voucher specimens of each species (*MUHNES; duplicates to KUNHM) were taken on 2 Jul. The storm-petrel, booby, and

Audubon's Shearwater were last reported by Jehl (1974) over a one-and-a-half day period in Apr 1973. The 11 Jul expedition also found 3 Red-billed Tropicbirds, only the 3rd record for El Salvador. Three ad. Nazca Boobies on 2 Jul (*MUHNES) and 2 ads. on 11 Jul were the first recorded in summer in El Salvador. None of these species were especially surprising, as all are regular off the coast of Central America.

In Costa Rica, a Blue-footed Booby was seen during a Gulf of Nicoya crossing from Puntarenas to Paquera on 10 Jul (RN, BS). This species is presumed to be an irregular visitor at any time of year in the Gulf of Nicoya but is seldom reported by birders. A male Least Bittern in El Salvador at Hacienda Nueva York, Cantón Cara Sucia, 10 Jun (RIP) was considered rare for *Ahuachapán*. A female was seen nearby in Jul 2004. Elsewhere, 2 heard and a male seen at The Dump ricefields 20 km nw. of Punta Gorda, Toledo 19 Jun (LJ) confirmed the breeding-season presence of this species in s. Belize.

Providing perhaps the 3rd confirmed record for Honduras was an imm. Rufescent Tiger-Heron *mist-netted* in a swampy area in Las Marias, *Gracias a Dios* 26 Jul (ph. TJ, BS). The bird was first seen in a tree, but when the observers returned with a camera, it had flown into one of their nets. Other records are from the Moskitia at Segovia R, *Gracias a Dios* in 1887, the Rio Platano, *Gracias a Dios* in 1983, and near Tela, *Atlántida* in 1993. According to DA, the latter record, from a Christmas Bird Count, was published in a birding magazine with an accompanying photograph; however, the photograph did not include observer credit or any other information that would suggest that it was anything other than a stock photograph of a bird perhaps taken elsewhere. Rare in summer in Panama, an ad. Great Blue Heron was at Punta Chame, *Panamá* 31 Jul (GA).

HAWKS THROUGH DOVES

The Gray-headed Kite that appeared on Caye Caulker, Belize in Mar was seen again 14 Jul (J&DB). In El Salvador, a group of 4 Snail Kites, including 2 ad. males, was reported 10 Jun from Hacienda Nueva York Cantón Cara Sucia (RIP), where this somewhat nomadic species had not been reported previously. In Guatemala, where uncommon, a Black-collared Hawk was seen in a swamp in Rubelsanto, *Alta Verapaz* 19 Jun (KE). Reports of Zone-tailed Hawk on the Caribbean slope of Honduras are increasing, perhaps as people become aware of their potential to occur in the area. The most recent report is of an ad. at Olanchito, *Yoro* on 30 Jul (DS). A Red-throated Caracara was heard near the Arboretum at the OTS La Selva Biological Station 1 Jul (AD, OV, and student group). This species still appears at La Selva

about once every two years, usually stays for a few days, then moves on. It is an increasingly rare bird in the Caribbean lowlands of Costa Rica.

Three Black Guans were seen 15 Jul at Cerro Gaital above El Valle, *Coclé* (MH, JP), an area in Panama from which they are rarely reported. A juv. Singing Quail captured in cloud forest at Los Volcanes N.P., *Santa Ana* 20 Jul (LCA, BS) provided El Salvador's first confirmed breeding record for this very locally distributed resident species. In The Dump ricefields, several calling Gray-breasted Crakes 19 Jun (LJ) further established the breeding-season presence of this species in Belize. Farther n., on Caye Caulker, the last wintering Rufous-necked Wood-Rail lingered until 8 Jun (J&DB). Black-bellied Plover was not seen on Caye Caulker between 2 Jun and 13 Jul (J&DB), suggesting that no individuals summered on the cay. Likewise, Western Sandpiper was absent from the cay 4 Jun–30 Jul (J&DB). This species is not known to summer in Belize, and the 3 Jun date is the latest on record. Although nonbreeding Willets remain year-round in El Salvador, fall migration was evidently under way by 11 Jul (AM), when southbound flocks of 16 and 13 were seen at sea 36 km s. of the entrance to the Gulf of Fonseca. In Belize, first-of-the-fall Willet, Spotted Sandpiper, and Whimbrel were reported 12 Jul from Caye Caulker, with Short-billed Dowitcher recorded the next day and Least Sandpiper not until 24 Jul (all J&DB).

An imm. Pomarine Jaeger was seen during the Puntarenas-to-Paquera crossing of the Gulf of Nicoya 10 Jul (RN, BSc). Two Elegant Terns just offshore of *Usulután* 2 Jul, and a basic-plumaged Black Tern far out at sea the same day (OK, TJ, BS), established rare summer records for both these species in El Salvador. Inca Dove may be on the move in Costa Rica. The first report from anywhere in the Caribbean lowlands of Costa Rica was one at La Virgen de Sarapiquí at 100 m 13 Jun (JA) about 15 km wsw. of La Selva. According to JRZ, this species is likely to expand into the Caribbean lowlands either from the northwest, perhaps even from Nicaragua, or from across the central valley. On the Caribbean slope, the species is presently confined to higher elevations along some of the lower passes along the n. continental divide as between San Ramón and La Tigra. The Caribbean Dove on Caye Caulker this past winter was last seen 13 Jun (J&DB). Purplish-backed Quail-Doves present at 800–1050 m at Altos del María, *Panamá* throughout the period (MH, RA) were the first reported from this area. One

reported from El Valle 5 Aug (MH) provided the first record for *e. Coclé*.

OWLS THROUGH HUMMINGBIRDS

A Bare-shanked Screech-Owl, not previously reported above 2100 m in Panama, was seen the night of 10 Jun at 2950 m on the Summit Rd., Volcán Barú, *Chiriquí* (GA, WA, DW). Two days later, the rarely reported Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl was seen during the day along the Continental Divide Trail, Fortuna, *Chiriquí* (GA, WA). A male and a female Black-crested Coquette frequented a



This juvenile Rufescent Tiger-Heron, only the third confirmed in Honduras, was mist-netted in the Departamento Gracias a Dios on 26 July 2005. Photograph by Tom Jenner.

yard on Ambergris Caye 5–28 Jul (SL), thus providing the northernmost record for this uncommon and local species in Belize. As we learn more about seasonal (?) movements of subtropical and tropical hummingbird species, we are finding that Black-crested Coquette, like several others in the Region, demonstrates a tendency to turn up, at least occasionally, 100 km or more out of range. Two Green Thorntails were seen 21 Jul near El Valle, *Coclé* (MH, DR, JP), where they are rarely reported, and one was also found 27 Jul near Altos del María, *Panamá* (MH), the first reported from this area.

A Blue-chested Hummingbird was caught in a mist-net 27 Jul in Las Marias, in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, *Gracias a Dios*. The bird was first seen in the house garden of a Pech Indian family 26 Jul and was netted in swampy, mature secondary forest the following day (ph. TJ, BS). Al-

though recently reported in the same area, this record firmly establishes the species on the Honduran list. At El Valle in *e. Coclé*, White-tailed Emeralds were seen near the summit of Cerro Gaital (1200 m) 27 Jun (MH, DR, JP). There was only one previous record of this species from the El Valle area.

Snowcaps were reported 1 & 9 Jul between 950 and 1100 m at Altos del María, *Panamá* (MH, DR, JP, RA). There have been only two previous records from this province. In Honduras, a male and a female Snowcap were captured in mist-nets about 5 km w. of Las Marias 31 Jul and 1 Aug (ph. TJ, BS). All prior records of the species in Honduras are more or less anecdotal. Monroe included Snowcap in his 1968 monograph based on verbal descriptions, and there have been sporadic unpublished reports since. A male Purple-throated Mountain-gem was seen 27 Jun at 1100 m near the summit of Cerro Gaital above El Valle, *Coclé* (MH, DR, JP), and 3 were seen 11 Jul at Altos del María, *Panamá* (MH, DR). These are the first reported from *e. Coclé* and *Panamá*, and the latter represents the easternmost record for the species. Providing only the 4th convincing record of Long-billed Starthroat in Belize, an imm. was seen and adequately described from near San Pedro Columbia, *Toledo* 4 Jul (JM).

KINGFISHERS THROUGH JAYS

A Belted Kingfisher seen on utility lines at Mile 10 along the Western Hwy., Belize 29 Jul (MC) was likely an early fall migrant. A Red-faced Spinetail near Altos del María, *Panamá* 1 Jul, and 2 Spotted Barbtails at Cerro Gaital above El Valle, *Coclé* 16 Jun (all MH, DR, JP) were the first of those two species ever reported from the respective provinces.

In Honduras, two vocalizing Spotted Woodcreepers in cloud forest at Cerro La Esperanza, *Ocoatepeque* 17 Jul (KE) were the first recorded for Cerro Montecristo. In Costa Rica, an Ivory-billed Woodcreeper was heard and seen in moist cove forest on Cerro Guayacán, Palo Verde N.P. 16 Jun (CJ). This is the first report of this species from heavily birded Palo Verde in many years. A Brown-billed Scythebill found at 1050 m near Altos del María 27 Jul (MH) provided the first record from w. Panama e. of Veraguas.

A Scaled Antpitta nest with eggs in cloud forest at Los Volcanes N. P., *Santa Ana* 20 Jul (BS, LCA) provided the first nesting documentation at that site in over 25 years. A Rufous-browed Tyrannulet seen 1 Jul (MH, DR, JP) and 3 seen 18 Jul (MH, DR) at Altos del María, *Panamá* were the first recorded between w. *Coclé* and e. *Panamá*. Another first

for Cerro Montecristo was at least 5 Paltry Tyrannulets heard 10, 11, & 15 Jul (KE) in cloud forest at Cerro Capucal, *Ocotepeque*. Two White-throated Spadebills 12 Jun on Cerro Gaital (MH, DR, JP) were the first recorded from e. *Coclé*. Representing a range extension, **Hutton's Vireos**, including several singing individuals, were recorded this summer in cloud forest in both the Honduran and Guatemalan part of Cerro Montecristo as follows: one at Montaña Las Hojas, *Ocotepeque* 16 Jul (KE); 2 at Cerro La Esperanza, *Ocotepeque* 17 Jul (KE); and one at Duraznal, *Chiquimula* 5 Aug, with 2 there 7 Aug (KE, CA). The birds in *Ocotepeque* were the first ever recorded in Honduras.

A Black-chested Jay finally made a visit 4 Jun to the heavily birded Wilson Botanical Garden in San Vito (ph. CM), where it was photographed for the first time on Costa Rica's Pacific Slope. This 6th report for the Pacific Slope is the only one that has not been within a km or so of the Panama border. Another was mist-netted 15 Jul (VR) in a small forest patch in coffee fields within a km of the Panama border at Santa Rosa, another new locality 3 km s. of Sabalito. A group of at least 8 Azure-hooded Jays in cloud forest at Duraznal, *Chiquimula* 5 Aug, with 2 or more heard the following two days (KE), established the first records for Cerro Montecristo. The first Black-capped Swallow found in Honduras since 1963 (Monroe 1968) was heard and audio-taped 17 Jul at Cerro La Esperanza, *Ocotepeque* (KE). This is also the first breeding season record for Honduras. Not unexpectedly, nests were found several km away over the border in Duraznal, *Chiquimula* 30 Jun (OK, BS, KE) and 6 Aug (KE); breeding was known previously from the same area but in El Salvador (Komar 2002).

WRENS THROUGH BLACKBIRDS

Two Ochraceous Wrens on Cerro Gaital 24 Jul (MH, DR, JP) established the first records

for *Coclé*. Pale-vented Thrushes were present in numbers throughout the period at 850–900 m at La Mesa, El Valle (MH, DR, JP), establishing the first records from e. *Coclé*. A young bird was observed there 19 Jun. The first Yellow-throated Warbler of the season was recorded 12 Jul in Belize City (MC),



Olive Tanager was first observed in Honduras in December 2002. This bird, mist-netted near Las Marías, Departamento Gracias a Dios in late July, provided the first photographic documentation of its occurrence in the country. Photograph by Tom Jenner.

and the first Black-and-white Warbler was recorded 28 Jul on Caye Caulker (J&DB). An unseasonably early American Redstart was an imm. at Antigua Cuscatlán, *La Libertad* 19 Jul (ph. AM). The first migrant Louisiana Waterthrush was observed within cloud forest at Montaña Las Hojas, Montecristo-Trifinio N.P. 15 Jul (KE). An Olive Tanager was caught in a mist net at an altitude of 400 m on the lower slopes of Pico Dama, about 5 km w. of Las Marías, *Gracias a Dios* around 31 Jul (ph. TJ). The species was first observed in Honduras in Dec 2002 (also TJ), but this was the first to be photographically documented. Establishing first records from e. *Coclé* were a number of Blue Seedeaters observed throughout the period

at 900 m on Cerro Gaital, including a pair with a fledgling on 12 Jun (MH, DR, JP).

Approximately 4 territorial singing male Wedge-tailed Grass-Finches were present all summer along the El Valle Rd. near La Estancia, *Coclé*. Although not previously reported from Cerro Montecristo, Prevost's Ground-Sparrow was common between 1500 and 1800 m in secondary growth coffee plantations and cornfields at Cerro Capucal, *Ocotepeque* 9–17 Jul and in Duraznal *Chiquimula* 2–8 Aug (both KE, CA). At the northernmost limit of its range on Costa Rica's Pacific Slope, where they are not often seen, lone male Red-breasted Blackbirds were at the Tarcoles R. bridge 21 Jun (RC) and about 2 km downriver near the estuary 25 Jun (AD). Representing a range extension of about 70 km eastward, a group of Yellow-winged Cacicques (5 males, one female) observed nesting at Los Cóbano, *Sonsonate* 25 Jun (ph. MR, RIP) furnished El Salvador's 2nd report and the first documented by photographs. Possibly representing a nw. range extension of about 50 km, a Crested Oropendola was observed in flight about a km s. of the Inter-American Hwy. bridge over the Terraba R. at Palmar Norte, Costa Rica 17 Jul (NU).

Literature cited

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Corrigenda: The Black Skimmer at Santa Isabel, Panama was seen on 27 Jun, not 27 Jan (N.A.B. 58: 611). The date for Panama's 5th Gray-hooded Gull was 26 Sep (N.A.B. 59: 163).

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