First Record of European Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) for Massachusetts

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Abstract

This article documents a record of European Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) from Tuckernuck Island, Nantucket, Massachusetts on 19 July 2001. Previous North American records of the species are known for the French island of St. Pierre, off Newfoundland, and the Florida Keys, in May 2001 and April 1990, respectively; these records have not been universally accepted as referring to naturally occurring vagrants, but all three records fall within the clear temporal pattern of vagrants to Iceland.

Field Encounter and Identification

On 20 July 2001, Natalie Brewer of Tuckernuck Island, Nantucket, Massachusetts brought to my attention a dead bird that proved to be a European Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) (Figure 1), a European species not previously reported in Massachusetts. Conversations with locals revealed that the bird had been run over by a truck the previous day, 19 July. The driver of the truck stated that he was driving at about 10 mph and that the dove unexpectedly failed to get out of the way.

The Tuckernuck dove was clearly identifiable as European Turtle-Dove rather than Oriental Turtle-Dove (*S. orientalis*) on the basis of measurements and coloration. The range of wing lengths for Oriental is 188–201 mm (Cramp 1985), and the wing of the Tuckernuck bird measured 170 mm. Similarly, the range of tarsus lengths for Oriental is 24.7–29.3 mm (Cramp 1985), and that of the Tuckernuck bird was 20.0 mm, smaller than Cramp's range of European, which is 22.1–24.2 mm. Furthermore, the tips of the rectrices on the Tuckernuck bird were white, not gray as they are in Oriental Turtle-Dove.

I studied *S. turtur* specimens at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) to see if I could identify the Tuckernuck specimen to subspecies. There are two African subspecies, *hoggara* and *rufescens* (the latter now including *isabellina*; del Hoyo et al. 1997), both of which differ considerably in coloration from the nominate subspecies of Europe and from the Tuckernuck bird. The subspecies *arenicola* breeds from North Africa and the Middle East through western China; it differs from the nominate in being smaller and paler, with paler (rufous rather than chestnut) fringes to the wing coverts and scapulars, a whiter face, and a paler crown. Based on my perusal of the AMNH skins (78 *turtur* and 69 *arenicola*), it does not seem possible to assign a single specimen unambiguously to *arenicola* rather than the nominate subspecies. Nevertheless, the Tuckernuck bird was darker than virtually all *arenicola* there, and even darker than most *turtur*, so it seems safe to conclude the Tuckernuck bird is in fact *turtur*, thus belonging to the population most likely, on geographical grounds, to disperse to North America. The Massachusetts specimen of European Turtle-Dove is now #336150 in the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University.

Figure 1. Specimen of European Turtle-Dove from Tuckernuck Island, Massachusetts, 20 July 2001. *Photograph by Jarrod Santora.*

Discussion

The European Turtle-Dove on Nantucket represents a first record for Massachusetts (and has been accepted to the state list by the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee [Rines 2006]) and the third record of the species for North America. Single birds have been documented previously at Lower Matecumbe Key, Florida on 9 April 1990 (Hoffman et al. 1990) and on the French island of St. Pierre, south of Newfoundland, in May 2001 (Maybank 2001). The American Ornithologists' Union has accepted the Florida record and placed the species on its main check-list (A.O.U. 1998). Citing reservations about the provenance of the Florida bird (DeBenedictis 1994), the American Birding Association included the species only within its "Origin Uncertain" category on the *ABA Checklist*; however, on 8 February 1997, the ABA abolished that category, thus removing European Turtle-Dove from the checklist entirely (A.B.A. 2002).

European Turtle-Dove is a long-distance migrant that regularly strays to Iceland, the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, and the Cape Verde Islands. There have been numerous (>200) published records of European Turtle-Doves initiating long-distance dispersal towards North America from Europe; and most records of vagrants appear to be from the coastlines of islands. Greenland apparently has no record of the species (Boertmann 1994), at least through 1993, probably reflecting the low level of birding coverage there. European Turtle-Dove is uncommon to rare in captivity in North America (ISIS [International Species Inventory System] database; accessed most recently 10 February 2006). Like most highly migratory birds, European Turtle-Doves are difficult to keep in captivity because of the migratory restlessness that they develop during spring and fall. Presumably for this reason, they are relatively rare in North American zoos and other collections. Only 10 individuals are listed in North American collections, compared with many hundreds of the sedentary African Collared-Dove (*S. roseogrisea*) and Spotted Dove (*S. chinensis*). Certainly there may be illegally imported or

otherwise unreported European Turtle-Doves in North America not listed by ISIS, but it seems likely that the relative rarity in collections of European Turtle-Dove is factual and moreover that bird smugglers would not tend to import this generally undesirable species.

Evidence from the life history and recent population dynamics of European Turtle-Dove suggest that it is an excellent candidate for long-distance vagrancy, especially to eastern North America. Columbids in general, including several *Streptopelia* doves, are renowned for their dispersals and for colonizations of oceanic islands (Bond 1980, Diamond 1975, Pratt et al. 1987, Sinclair and Langrand 1998); in many cases, this extensive distribution is surely the result of repeated instances of long-distance vagrancy. One of the best-documented instances of population expansion is the rapid colonization of Europe by Eurasian Collared-Dove (*S. decaocto*) (Fisher 1953) and the species' subsequent colonization of North America, from the Bahamas (Romagosa and McEneaney 2000).

Data on the occurrence of European Turtle-Dove in Iceland support the notion that the North American occurrences involve vagrants: the species has increased substantially as a vagrant to Iceland, with a sharp increase beginning about 1960 (Figure 2). This increase is certainly real, as *Streptopelia* doves are not secretive or difficult to identify, and indeed many of the records involve birds found in populated and frequently birded areas. The Icelandic data show seasonal peaks of occurrence in June and September–October (Figure 3). The three North American records (April, May, July) fall within the span of dates noted in Iceland. Interestingly, the increasing numbers of vagrants recorded in Iceland do not correspond to population growth in Great Britain (Browne and Aebischer 2005) as would be predicted by models that link vagrancy to population growth (Veit and Lewis 1996, Veit 2000). In fact, Browne and Aebischer (2005) show a declining trend in Great Britain beginning in about 1975 and continuing through the 1990s. It is possible, of course, that some subpopulation within Great Britain (or elsewhere with in the European range of the species) has been expanding in recent decades, which might account for the increase in numbers of vagrants to Iceland 1960–2006. On the other hand, it is possible that vagrancy may in some instances be a response to declining population growth. Birds may search for new, more suitable territory if reproductive success is declining within their current range.

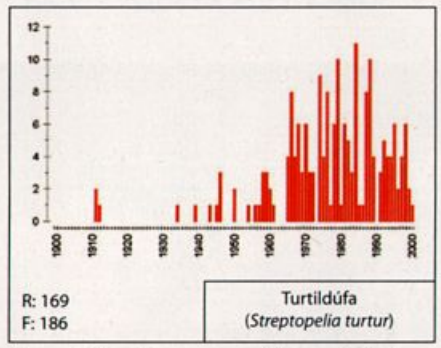

Figure 2. Increasing occurrence of European Turtle-Dove in Iceland, 1900–2000. From the "Birding Iceland" website (<http://www.hi.is/~yannk/>) by Yann Kolbeinsson. *Graphic courtesy of and © Gunnlaugur Pétursson.*

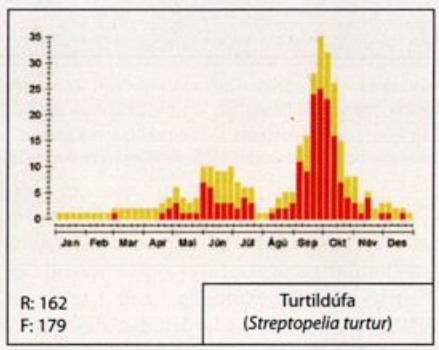

Figure 3. Seasonal occurrence of European Turtle-Dove in Iceland. From the "Birding Iceland" website (<http://www.hi.is/~yannk/>) by Yann Kolbeinsson. *Graphic courtesy of and © Gunnlaugur Pétursson.*

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