



Summer Birds at Polol, Guatemala

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In the tropics, any extended visit to a new area may produce worthwhile data on distribution. The results of one such visit to the Peten are summarized here

FROM 1 to 14 June, 1980, we worked at the archaeological site of Polol near the village of La Libertad in the Department of El Peten, Guatemala. At the suggestion of Dr. Gary W. Pahl, director of the project, we made a survey of the birds of the Polol — La Libertad area.

La Libertad, formerly called Sakluk, is a lumber and cattle town located 32km southwest of Flores, the capital of El Peten.

Continuous forest covers most of El Peten, including the famous and ornithologically well-known archaeological site of Tikal. La Libertad, however, is surrounded by an extensive area of short grass savanna, dotted with small trees and occasional *bajas* (low places) in which brambly, tree-studded thickets occur. Breaking up the savanna are a series of low hills and ridges covered with heavy semi-deciduous tropical forest. This forest does not seem to be as tall or complex as that at Tikal. On one of these low ridges some 7km southwest of La Libertad is the ancient Maya site of Polol, currently being surveyed and partially excavated by Gary W. Pahl, Ph.D., of the Anthropology Department at San Francisco State University. Some clearing of the undergrowth and smaller trees has taken place to facilitate this archaeological work, though many trees were left to provide shade for the workers. Some of the larger trees in the area have traditionally been harvested for lumber and a short lumber road penetrates the forest east of the site. A few survey lines were being cut through the forest.

Elevations lie between 190m on the savanna and 290m on the hilltops. There are no rivers or creeks in this thin-soiled limestone area. Water collects in *aguadas* (ponds) and in the *bajas* from the rains that fall chiefly from June through November in the form of heavy showers, usually in the afternoon.

There are some days when no rain falls and others when it rains all day. The rains



had started just before our arrival on 1 June. The countryside was quite green with little evidence of the recent dry season. Most of the trees were in full leaf, some in blossom or bearing fruit. The grass on the savannas seemed quite short, possibly caused by grazing cattle.

Our study consisted of (a) 1 hour on each of 7 mornings of intensive observation at the Polol site and the savanna boundary; (b) 4 hours of intensive birding in second growth woodland and savanna at La Libertad; and (c) countless hours of casual observation at our quarters in La Libertad, while performing archaeological duties at Polol, and during the hour or so daily travel time across the savanna between the village and the archaeological site.

The following list is based on sight and sound observation only; no mist netting or collecting was done. All but a few of the species were familiar to us from previous trips to Mexico, Costa Rica, and northern South America. Sightings of new species were checked very carefully and eliminated if there was any doubt whatever as to their identity. We found "A Field Guide to Mexican Birds" by Roger Tory Peterson and Edward L. Chalif (whose species sequence and scientific nomenclature this paper follows), along with Land (1970) and Smithe (1966) cited below, most useful in the field. A tape recorder was used to good advantage attracting birds by playing back their own songs. We also used tapes made from L. Irby Davis' recording "Mexican Bird Songs" and John W. Hardy's recording "Voices of Neotropical Birds" as an aid to identification.

The following keys are used:

Habitats

- P — The forest at the archaeological site of Polol
- S — Savanna between La Libertad and Polol
- L — Immediate vicinity of La Libertad
- W — Second growth woods to the north and west of La Libertad
- M — Savanna to the west of the woods
- T — Tikal (based on our observations from 15 to 21 June, 1980; included for comparison)

Status

- a — abundant, species seen on every visit to its habitat
- c — common, species seen on most visits to its habitat
- u — uncommon, species seen only occasionally on visits to its habitat
- r — seen only once
- * — an asterisk indicates the bird was heard only

The above categories do not necessarily represent an accurate measure of abundance, but rather a measure of conspicuousness.

THICKET TINAMOU, *Crypturellus cinnamomeus*, Wc * — quite a few heard in semi-deciduous second growth woodland.

GREAT EGRET, *Casmerodius albus*, Lr — 5 June (Tu) — one seen flying high over village.

CATTLE EGRET, *Bubulcus ibis*, Su — four or five birds seen near *aguada* with

cattle.

GREEN HERON, *Butorides virescens*, Lr — 2 June, one seen flying.

TURKEY VULTURE, *Cathartes aura*, Pu, Sc, Lu, Mc, (Tc) — most common over savannas.

BLACK VULTURE, *Coragyps atratus*, La, Su, (Ta) — most common near village.

KING VULTURE, *Sarcoramphus papa*, Lr — 10 June, (Tu) — one subadult bird soaring with Black Vultures over north edge of village.

PLUMBEOUS KITE, *Ictinia plumbea*, Pc, (Tc) — frequently seen soaring over forest. On 3 June, one bird was seen on nest 15m up in large tree. Nest supported by bromeliad. Bird got up from nest and put head into it, as if turning eggs or caring for small young.

ROADSIDE HAWK, *Buteo magnirostris*, Sc, Mc, (Tc) — very vocal; adults seen tending recently fledged birds.

PLAIN CHACHALACA, *Ortalis vetula*, Sa, Lc, (Ta) — very vocal; common in *bajas*.

BLACK-THROATED BOBWHITE, *Colinus nigrogularis*, Sa, Ma — seen in small covies of 2 to 6 birds. Not shy. Calls heard.

RED-BILLED PIGEON, *Columba flavirostris*, Pc — more easily seen, less vocal than Short-billed; higher in trees. Not listed for the Peten by Land (1970).

PALE-VENTED PIGEON, *Columba cayennensis*, La, Sa — common pigeon of open areas and village.

SCALED PIGEON, *Columbia speciosa*, Sc, Mc — usually seen flying.

SHORT-BILLED PIGEON, *Columba nigrirostris*, Pa, Wc, (Ta) — calls constantly, rarely seen (but not shy). Middle levels of forest.

RUDDY GROUND-DOVE, *Columbina talpacoti*, La, Sa, (Ta).

GRAY-HEADED DOVE, *Leptotila plumbeiceps*, Pc, Wc, (Tc) — heard more often than seen. Usually seen on ground, shy. (Other *Leptotila* doves seen flying singly and in pairs over the savanna were probably White-tipped, *verreauxi*, but we could not get close enough to verify.)

SCARLET MACAW, *Ara macao*, Pc — seen in flocks of 3 to 20 birds.

AZTEC PARAKEET, *Aratinga astec*, Lc, Mc, (Tc) — seen flying in large tight flocks.

WHITE-CROWNED PARROT, *Pionus senilis*, Pc, Sc, (Tc) — large flocks.

WHITE-FRONTED PARROT, *Amazona albifrons*, Sc — 2 seen daily at La Libertad coming in to a feeder. Least common of parrots.

RED-LORED PARROT, *Amazona autumnalis*, Pa, Sa — large flocks, vies with next species as most common parrot.

MEALY PARROT, *Amazona farinosa*, Pa, Sa, (Ta) — flocks not as large.

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO, *Coccyzus americanus*, Pr — 13 June, one seen high in large tree in forest along lumber road east of site. According to Land (1970), there are no spring records for Guatemala — and none for El Peten at any season.

SQUIRREL CUCKOO, *Piaya cayana*, Pr — 7 June, (Tc) — creeping in vines, upper mid levels.

GROOVE-BILLED ANI, *Crotophaga sulcirostris*, Sc, Mc, (Tc) — in small flocks.

STRIPED CUCKOO, *Tapera naevia*, Sr — 13 June, one seen well by side of road; none heard; Land (1970) does not indicate this species for the Peten.

VAUX'S SWIFT, *Chaetura vauxi*, La, (Ta) — large flock seen above village.

LONG-TAILED HERMIT, *Phaethornis superciliosus*, Pa, (Tc) — seen and heard in low forest.

LITTLE HERMIT, *Phaethornis longuemareus*, Pc, (Tc) but less common than

above.

- WHITE-BELLIED EMERALD, *Amazilia candida*, Lr — 2 June, (Tu) — one seen feeding in flowering hedge.
- RUFOUS-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD, *Amazilia tzacatl*, Pa, Lc, (Ta) — most common hummer of the region.
- SLATY-TAILED TROGON, *Trogon massena*, Pu, (Tc) — in heavier woods than Citreoline Trogon.
- CITREOLINE TROGON, *Trogon citreolus*, Pc, (Tc) — favors more open, scrubby situations; calls in groups.
- BLUE-CROWNED MOTMOT, *Momotus momota*, Pc, (Ta) — its double hoot call is one of the more characteristic sounds of the forest.
- RUFOUS-TAILED JACAMAR, *Galbula ruficauda*, Pc, (Tc) — seen in pairs, noisy.
- KEEL-BILLED TOUCAN, *Ramphastos sulfuratus*, Pu, Sa, Wu, (Ta) — usually seen early A.M. flying across the savanna.
- COLLARED ARACARI, *Pteroglossus torquatus*, Sr — 2 June, (Tc) — only one seen at edge of forest in bare tree.
- CHESTNUT-COLORED WOODPECKER, *Celeus castaneus*, Pc, (Tr — 19 June) — the common forest woodpecker here, seen eating red seeds from a common round pod.
- GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER, *Centurus aurifrons*, La, Sa, Mc, (Ta) — the common open country and backyard woodpecker.
- LINEATED WOODPECKER, *Dryocopus lineatus*, Su, (Tc) — only two seen.
- OLIVACEOUS WOODCREEPER, *Sittasomus griseicapillus*, Pc, (Tc) — common in thicket type situations.
- BARRED WOODCREEPER, *Dendrocolaptes certhia*, Pr — 13 June — one seen along lumber road east of main site.
- IVORY-BILLED WOODCREEPER, *Xiphorhynchus flavigaster*, Pc, (Ta) — common in larger trees on hillsides and pyramids.
- PLAIN XENOPS, *Xenops minutus*, Pc, (Tc) — in vines and tangles, mid-levels.
- BARRED ANTSHRIKE, *Thamnophilus doliatus*, Pc, Lc, Sc, (Tc) — a bird of edges not found inside the forest.
- PLAIN ANTVIREO, *Dysithamnus mentalis*, Pc, (Tc) — seen in pairs at low level.
- DOT-WINGED ANTWREN, *Microrhopias quixensis*, Pc, (Tu) — seen in pairs, usually low to middle levels in vines.
- DUSKY ANTBIRD, *Cercomacra tyrannina*, Pu — soft wrentit-like calls heard in thick vines (and taped) near edge of savanna.
- BLACK-FACED ANTTHRUSH, *Formicarius analis*, Pc, Wc, (Tc) — often heard, seldom seen though not shy; walks on forest floor.
- RED-CAPPED MANAKIN, *Pipra mentalis*, Pc, (Tc) — both manakin species had individual males performing; this one at mid level on bare horizontal vine or branch.
- WHITE-COLLARED MANAKIN, *Manacus candei*, Pc, Wu, (Tc) — this species more common than the preceding; dances at eye level on horizontal vine over clear space in heavy growth; heard often buzzing and snapping.
- ROSE-THROATED BECARD, *Platypsaris aglaiae*, Mr — 10 June, one seen mid-level in savanna; very dark; rose on throat faint but noticeable.
- MASKED TITYRA, *Tityra semifasciata*, Lc, (Tc) — pair nested in hole 20m up in dead tree in backyard; seen everyday (1 to 14 June).
- VERMILION FLYCATCHER, *Pyrocephalus rubinus*, Sa, Lc — many males seen

performing butterfly display.

- FORK-TAILED FLYCATCHER, *Muscivora tyrannus*, Sa, Lc — some seen in display flights.
- TROPICAL KINGBIRD, *Tyrannus melancholicus*, Sa, Ma, Lc, (Ta) — open areas of the lowlands.
- STREAKED FLYCATCHER, *Myiodynastes maculatus*, Lc, (Tc) — seen usually in large trees near the *aguada*.
- SOCIAL FLYCATCHER, *Myiozetetes similis*, La, Ma, Sa, (Ta) — common backyard bird; vies in abundance with Tropical Kingbird.
- BROWN-CRESTED (WIED'S) FLYCATCHER, *Myiarchus tyrannulus*, Sc, Lc, (Tc) — prefers mid-level of larger trees. Vocal.
- DUSKY-CAPPED (OLIVACEOUS) FLYCATCHER, *Myiarchus tuberculifer*, Su — saw only three in small trees in savanna.
- TROPICAL PEWEE, *Contopus cinereus*, Mr — 10 June — one adult with young bird (still had an orange gape and was begging) seen in small trees near edge of savanna.
- SULPHUR-RUMPED FLYCATCHER, *Myiobius sulphureipygius*, Pu — three scattered individuals seen mid-level; feeding over areas recently cleared of undergrowth.
- NORTHERN ROYAL-FLYCATCHER, *Onychorhynchus mexicanus*, Pu, (Tr-16 June) — seen in forest mid-level to fairly high; usually near cleared places, *brechas*, etc.
- WHITE-THROATED SPADEBILL, *Platyrinchus mystaceus*, Pu, (Tc) — seen at eye level, not shy.
- EYE-RINGED FLATBILL, *Rhynchocyclus brevirostris*, Pr — 4 June, (Tu) — another mid-level forest flycatcher.
- YELLOW-BELLIED ELAENIA, *Elaenia flavogaster*, Sc, Mc — another widespread tropical species.
- NORTHERN BEARDLESS TYRANULET (BEARDLESS FLYCATCHER), *Camptostoma imberbe*, Pr — 4 June, one seen at mid-level.
- MANGROVE SWALLOW, *Tachycineta albilinea*, Lu — one pair only seen flying over *aguada* and perching on posts rising from *aguada*.
- GRAY-BREASTED MARTIN, *Progne chalybea*, Lc, (Tc) — these birds frequently seen over village.
- BROWN JAY, *Psilorhinus morio*, Pc, Sc, Wc, Mc, (Tc) — large and noisy.
- BAND-BACKED WREN, *Campylorhynchus zonatus*, Pr — 13 June — one pair seen once in brushy ravine on west side of pyramid, mid-level in scrubby trees.
- CAROLINA (WHITE-BROWED) WREN, *Thryothorus ludovicianus*, Pc, Wc, (Tu) — more common in woods near La Libertad than at Polol; feeds lower down than Spot-breasted Wren.
- SPOT-BREASTED WREN, *Thryothorus maculipectus*, Pc, (Tc) — most common forest wren; usually seen and heard in mid-level vines.
- HOUSE WREN, *Troglodytes (musculus?)*, Lu — a few seen in yard.
- WHITE-BREASTED WOOD-WREN, *Henicorhina leucosticta*, Pu, (Tc) — feeds very low in forest, more secretive than other forest wrens.
- WHITE-THROATED ROBIN, *Turdus assimilis*, Pu, (Tu) — found in thicker forest than Clay-colored Robin; more secretive.
- CLAY-COLORED THRUSH (ROBIN), *Turdus grayi*, Pa, La, (Ta) — needs only the smallest woodlot to survive.

- BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER, *Poliophtila caerulea*, Sc, Mc — birds seen in pairs; too late for migrants. Breeding suspected.
- MANGROVE VIREO, *Vireo pallens*, Mr — 10 June — one found at eye level at the edge of the woods, responded to “pishing”.
- YELLOW-GREEN VIREO, *Vireo flavoviridis*, Sa, Ma, La, (Tc) — abundant everywhere but in deep forest.
- TAWNY-CROWNED GREENLET, *Hylophilus ochraceiceps*, Pu, Wu, (Ta) — mid to higher levels, responds to “pishing”.
- LESSER (GRAY-HEADED) GREENLET, *Hylophilus decurtatus*, Pa, Wc, (Tu) — mid to higher understory; responds to “pishing”.
- RED-LEGGED HONEYCREEPER, *Cyanerpes cyaneus*, Lr — 2 June, Pr — 11 June, (Tu) — probably more common than our two sightings would indicate.
- GOLDEN-CROWNED WARBLER, *Basileuterus culicivorus*, Pa, Wa, (Ta) — lower levels, in pairs, responds to “pishing”.
- MONTEZUMA OROPENDOLA, *Gymnostinops montezuma*, Pc, (Tu) — noisy.
- YELLOW-BILLED CACIQUE, *Amblycercus holosericeus*, Pr — 13 June — one seen hiding in vines along survey line, near edge of savanna.
- GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE, *Quiscalus mexicanus*, La, (Ta) — especially abundant near water.
- MELODIOUS BLACKBIRD, *Dives dives*, Sa, Ma, La, (Tc) — seen and heard everywhere in open country.
- EASTERN MEADOWLARK, *Sturnella magna*, Sa.
- YELLOW-THROATED EUPHONIA, *Euphonia hirundinacea*, Pc, Lc, (Tc) — found from backyards to deep forest.
- BLUE-GRAY TANAGER, *Thraupis episcopus*, Lc — prefers village to wilder places.
- YELLOW-WINGED TANAGER, *Thraupis abbas*, Lc, (Tc) — only slightly more rural than the preceding species.
- RED-CROWNED ANT-TANAGER, *Habia rubica*, Pr — 4 June, (Tu) — male only identified once, probably more common.
- RED-THROATED ANT-TANAGER, *Habia fuscicauda*, Pa, Wa, (Ta) — most obvious forest bird of the Peten. Responds to “pishing”.
- GRAY-HEADED TANAGER, *Eucometis penicillata*, Pu, (Tc) — seen twice at eye level in forest.
- GRAYISH SALTATOR, *Saltator coerulescens*, Su, Lu — probably more common than our observations indicate.
- BLACK-FACED GROSBEAK, *Caryothraustes poliogaster*, Pr — 13 June, (Tr — 17 June) — only one pair seen along lumber road; moderately high in trees.
- BLUE-BLACK GROSBEAK, *Cyanocompsa cyanoides*, Pc — obvious and vocal; courting pairs; seen in undergrowth; more common here than in most forests we have been in; for instance, we did not see any at Tikal (15 to 22 June) though it is listed by Smithe (1966) as “fairly common”.
- WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER, *Sporophila torqueola*, Sa, La, Ma, (Ta) — any open space suffices for this common species.
- BLUE-BLACK GRASSQUIT, *Volatinia jacarina*, Sa, Ma — another very common widespread species.
- OLIVE SPARROW, *Arremonops rufivirgatus*, Mu — seen in brush in savanna; stripes on crown definitely brown; back dull olive. The following species was found only a hundred or so meters away in second growth forest. These birds had crown stripes that looked dull black. In spite of the dull light in the forest, the

back looked much brighter — a yellow olive green. Both birds seemed to forage on, or very close to the ground.

GREEN-BACKED SPARROW, *Arremonops chloronotus*, Wu, Pr — 13 June, (Tr — 16 June) — see preceding species.

BOTTERI'S SPARROW, *Aimophila botterii*, Su — several pairs around the *aguada* near Polol.

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