

## **NORTH AMERICAN MIGRANT BIRDS ON CLIPPERTON ATOLL**

STEVE N. G. HOWELL, PETER PYLE, AND LARRY B. SPEAR, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, 4990 Shoreline Highway, Stinson Beach, California 92038

ROBERT L. PITMAN, National Marine Fisheries Service, Southwest Fisheries Center, P.O. Box 271, La Jolla, California 92038

Clipperton Atoll lies in the eastern Pacific Ocean about 1000 km southwest of Guerrero, Mexico, at 10° 18'N, 109° 13'W, and, like many remote islands, is visited rarely by biologists. Although known mostly as a major breeding ground for seabirds, 29 species of northern migrant birds have been reported from the island (Beck 1907, Ehrhardt 1971, Gifford 1913, Haeze et al. 1967, Howell 1959, Niauxsat et al. 1968, Stager 1964).

We visited Clipperton on seven occasions: 19 August 1986 (Pitman), 6 May 1987 (Pitman), 1 November 1987 (Pyle and Spear), 24–25 October 1989 (Howell and Spear), 11 November 1990 (Pitman), 4 December 1990 (Howell, Spear, and S. Webb), and 23 October 1991 (Spear). During these visits we recorded a total of 80 species of North American migrants, 57 of them previously unreported from the atoll. Here we summarize records of



Figure 1. Clipperton Atoll, 23 October 1991. A view across the lagoon from the small coconut grove at the landing site on the atoll's northeast side; on the opposite shore note the large coconut grove, a major concentration point for vagrant land birds.

*Photo by Larry B. Spear*

## MIGRANT BIRDS ON CLIPPERTON ATOLL

migrant birds from Clipperton, with the exception of pelagic migrants and breeding seabirds. Previously unreported species whose identification we consider problematic are described.

The atoll, approximately 10.5 km in circumference and 50–300 m wide, surrounds a stagnant murky lagoon up to 1.5 km in diameter. Most of the land is bare coral rubble except for a few coconut palms (*Cocos nucifera*), the main groves of which (Figure 1) act as magnets for migrant landbirds. In addition, a few grassy islets in the lagoon and the muddy bay at Clipperton Rock (see map in Stager 1964) concentrate waterbirds. Except in 1991 (when only the north side of the atoll was visited briefly), we were able to make observations at all of these points, and walks around the entire island confirmed that very few migrants occurred away from them. We have considerable experience with all species encountered, and identifications were often facilitated by the birds' being tired and easily approached.

Several of the landbirds in October and November, and all of those in December, were weak and sickly-looking; this, together with the paucity of landbirds in December, suggests that many perish on the island. Some waterbirds, however, in particular herons and ducks, may be able to overwinter or at least survive longer on Clipperton. Common Moorhens have successfully colonized the atoll since 1968, but American Coots, reported as breeding commonly by Stager (1964), now occur in reduced numbers and may no longer nest on Clipperton. Relatively few shorebirds were found in December, suggesting that the majority occurring earlier in the autumn were transients or vagrants.

The following species accounts summarize the occurrence of all North American migrants recorded on Clipperton Atoll. The only other landbird known from Clipperton is the Dark-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus melacoryphus*), an austral migrant from South America (Stager 1964). In the list, lack of reference to other sources indicates a species previously unreported from Clipperton.

### SPECIES ACCOUNTS

American Bittern, *Botaurus lentiginosus*. Nov 1987, 1.

Least Bittern, *Ixobrychus exilis*. Aug 1958, 1 female collected (Stager 1964).

Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias*. May 1987, 1; Nov 1987, 4; Nov 1990, 1.

Great Egret, *Casmerodius albus*. Nov 1987, 1.

Snowy Egret, *Egretta thula*. Nov 1987, 3.

Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*. Aug 1986, 1; May 1987, 2; Nov 1987, 100; Oct 1989, 32; Nov 1990, 25; Dec 1990, 3. Also reported by Haeze et al. (1967) and Niauxsat et al. (1968).

Black-crowned Night-Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*. Nov 1987, 1 adult.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, *N. violaceus*. Nov 1987, 1 immature; Nov 1990, 1 first-year; Dec 1990, 1 second-year.

White-faced Ibis, *Plegadis chihi*. Oct 1989, 3; Dec 1990, 1. Identified by reddish irides and plain slaty gray lores (see Howell and de Montes 1989).

## MIGRANT BIRDS ON CLIPPERTON ATOLL

*Plegadis* sp. Nov 1987, 1; Nov 1990, 2. Also reported in Nov 1901 (Beck 1907).

White Ibis, *Eudocimus albus*. May 1987, 1 adult (Figure 2); Nov 1987, 1 adult.

Northern Pintail, *Anas acuta*. Nov 1987, 5; Nov 1990, 50; Dec 1990, 50. Also Nov 1901 (Beck 1907).

Blue-winged Teal, *A. discors*. Nov 1987, 16; Nov 1990, 30; Dec 1990, 9. Also Nov 1901 (Beck 1907).

Cinnamon Teal, *A. cyanoptera*. Dec 1990, 1. Carefully compared with accompanying Blue-winged Teal, identified by more spatulate bill, overall warm brown plumage including head and neck, plain face with whitish eye-crescents.

Blue-winged/Cinnamon Teal, *A. discors/cyanoptera*. Dec 1990, 55.

Northern Shoveler, *A. clypeata*. Nov 1990, 6; Dec 1990, 20. Also Nov 1901 (Beck 1907).

Eurasian Wigeon, *A. penelope*. Dec 1990, 1. Among 140+ ducks present, Howell and S. Webb found a female Eurasian Wigeon. The bird associated with a male American Wigeon which it resembled in shape and size. The head and neck were grayish chestnut, without a dark eye patch, and did not contrast with the chest. In flight the axillars were seen to be grayish.

American Wigeon, *A. americana*. Dec 1990, 1 male. Also reported by Beck (1907).

Canvasback, *Aythya valisineria*. Nov 1901, 1 seen (Beck 1907).

Ring-necked Duck, *A. collaris*. Dec 1990, 2 females.



Figure 2. Adult White Ibis at Clipperton. 6 May 1987.

Photo by Robert L. Pitman

## MIGRANT BIRDS ON CLIPPERTON ATOLL

- Lesser Scaup, *A. affinis*. Dec 1990, 2 males, 2 females.
- Unidentified scaup, *Aythya affinis/marila*. Nov 1990, 5.
- Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*. Nov 1987, 1; Oct 1989, 1; Dec 1990, 1. Also reported by Stager (1964).
- Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*. Nov 1987, 1 adult; Dec 1990, 1 juvenile.
- Virginia Rail, *Rallus limicola*. Nov 1987, 1.
- Sora, *Porzana carolina*. Nov 1987, 1; Oct 1989, 1; Dec 1990, 1.
- Purple Gallinule, *Porphyryla martinica*. Oct 1989, 1 immature. Also reported by Haeze et al. (1967).
- Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus*. Aug 1986, 4; May 1987, 30; Nov 1987, 35 including chicks; Oct 1989, 15 including one small chick; Nov 1990, 20; Dec 1990, 40 including 5 or 6 small chicks. A recent and apparently successful colonist.
- American Coot, *Fulica americana*. Nov 1987, 3. Nov 1990, 10; Dec 1990, 2. Uncommon and apparently irregular in recent years, but bred commonly at Clipperton from at least 1958 to 1968 (Stager 1964, Ehrhardt 1971).
- Black-bellied Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*. Aug 1986, 1; Nov 1987, 1; Nov 1990, 1. Also Nov 1901 (Beck 1907).
- Pacific Golden Plover, *P. fulva*. Nov 1987, 1. Also Aug 1958, 1 collected (Stager 1964).
- Unidentified golden plover, *P. dominica/fulva*. May 1987, 1; Oct 1989, 1.
- Semipalmated Plover, *Charadrius semipalmatus*. Nov 1987, 8; Oct 1989, 4; Nov 1990, 6; Dec 1990, 12.
- Killdeer, *C. vociferus*. Nov 1987, 1; Nov 1990, 1; Dec 1990, 3.
- Greater Yellowlegs, *Tringa melanoleuca*. Nov 1987, 1; Oct 1989, 1. Also reported by Ehrhardt (1971).
- Lesser Yellowlegs, *T. flavipes*. Nov 1987, 1; Oct 1989, 1. Also reported by Ehrhardt (1971).
- Solitary Sandpiper, *T. solitaria*. Nov 1987, 1; Oct 1989, 1.
- Wandering Tattler, *Heteroscelus incanus*. Aug 1986, 30; May 1987, 29; Nov 1987, 100; Oct 1989, 24, Nov 1990, 25; Dec 1990, 1. Also reported by Gifford (1913) and Stager (1964).
- Spotted Sandpiper, *Actitis macularia*. Nov 1987, 1. Also Aug 1958, 1 collected (Stager 1964).
- Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*. May 1987, 2; Nov 1987, 4. Also Nov 1901 (Beck 1907).
- Ruddy Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*. Aug 1986, 1; Nov 1987, 17; Nov 1990, 1. Also Aug 1958, 7 (Stager 1964).
- Sanderling, *Calidris alba*. Nov 1987, 2; Oct 1989, 6.
- Western Sandpiper, *C. mauri*. Nov 1990, 1; Dec 1990, 1.
- Least Sandpiper, *C. minutilla*. Nov 1990, 3; Dec 1990, 4.
- Pectoral Sandpiper, *C. melanotos*. Nov 1987, 2; Oct 1991, 2.
- Long-billed Dowitcher, *Limnodromus scolopaceus*. Nov 1990, 3.

## MIGRANT BIRDS ON CLIPPERTON ATOLL

Wilson's Phalarope, *Phalaropus tricolor*. Aug 1958, 1 collected (Stager 1964).

Red Phalarope, *P. fulicaria*. Dec 1990, 2.

Laughing Gull, *Larus atricilla*. May 1987, 23; Oct 1989, 4; Nov 1989, 4; Dec 1990, 2.

Franklin's Gull, *L. pipixcan*. Nov 1987, 1.

Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo*. Nov 1987, 1.

Arctic Tern, *S. paradisaea*. Nov 1987, 50.

Black Tern, *Chlidonias niger*. Nov 1987, 1 corpse found. Also Aug 1958, 1 collected (Stager 1964).

Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura*. May 1987, 2.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo, *Coccyzus americanus*. Reported by Niauxsat et al. (1968).

Common Nighthawk, *Chordeiles minor*. May 1987, 1 female. Observed and photographed at close range, roosting on the coral rubble and in flight (Figure 3).

Belted Kingfisher, *Ceryle alcyon*. Nov 1987, 2; Oct 1989, 1; Nov 1990, 1; Dec 1990, 1.

Eastern Wood-Pewee, *Contopus virens*. Nov 1987, 1. Identified by olive-green upperparts: mostly pale underparts (including the median chest) with diffuse dusky streaking on the chest sides; bright, whitish to lemon wingbars and secondary edges; bright orange basal 4/5 (including the sides) of the lower mandible; and the song, a



Figure 3. Female Common Nighthawk at Clipperton, 6 May 1987. In spring the combination of a white wing band and the lack of a white tail bar rules out the Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*); note also the position of the white wing band.

Photo by Robert L. Pitman

## MIGRANT BIRDS ON CLIPPERTON ATOLL

full, clear *peeew-weee* of 1–2 seconds duration. From extensive experience with both wood-pewees and the problems of their separation, Pyle considered the plumage and song outside the range of Western Wood-Pewee variation.

Unidentified pewee, *C. virens/sordidulus*. Oct 1989, 1.

*Empidonax* sp. Nov 1987, 1, probably a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, *E. flaviventris*.

Purple Martin, *Progne subis*. Aug 1986, 15; Nov 1987, 1. Also Aug 1958 (Stager 1964) and 1968 (Ehrhardt 1971).

*Progne* sp. Nov 1987, 2; Oct 1989, 1. These birds were not Purple Martins and probably were Gray-breasted Martins, *P. chalybea*.

Tree Swallow, *Tachycineta bicolor*. Dec 1990, 2.

Bank Swallow, *Riparia riparia*. Nov 1987, 1; Oct 1989, 3.

Cliff Swallow, *Hirundo pyrrhonota*. Aug 1986, 1.

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*. Nov 1987, 100; Oct 1989, 2; Nov 1990, 2; Dec 1990, 3; Oct 1991, 100.

*Troglodytes* sp. Nov 1987, 1, probably a House Wren, *T. aedon*.

Gray-cheeked Thrush, *Catharus minimus*. Oct 1989, 2 or 3. These birds were tired and could be observed at close range. Identified by the gray-brown head and upperparts, including upper tail, the inconspicuous narrow whitish eyering that widened slightly behind the eye, and the whitish throat and underparts washed pale buff on the chest and spotted dark brown on the chest and sides of throat.

American Pipit, *Anthus rubescens*. Nov 1987, 1.

Golden-winged Warbler, *Vermivora chrysoptera*. Nov 1987, 1 male.

Tennessee Warbler, *V. peregrina*. Nov 1987, 2. Also Oct 1956, 1 collected (Howell 1959).

Yellow Warbler, *Dendroica petechia*. Nov 1987, 1. Also Aug 1958, 1 collected (Stager 1964).

Magnolia Warbler, *D. magnolia*. Nov 1987, 1; Oct 1989, 1.

Black-throated Green Warbler, *D. virens*. Oct 1991, 1.

Yellow-throated Warbler, *D. dominica albiflora*. Aug 1958, 1 collected (Stager 1964).

Prairie Warbler, *D. discolor*. Nov 1987, 1.

Palm Warbler, *D. palmarum*. Nov 1987, 2.

Bay-breasted Warbler, *D. castanea*. Oct 1956, 1 collected (Howell 1959).

Blackpoll Warbler, *D. striata*. Oct 1989, 1; Nov 1990, 1; Oct 1991, 1.

American Redstart, *Setophaga ruticilla*. May 1987, 1; Nov 1987, 3; Oct 1989, 1. Also Aug 1958 (Stager 1964).

Prothonotary Warbler, *Protonotaria citrea*. Nov 1987, 1; Oct 1989, 2; Nov 1990, 1.

Ovenbird, *Seiurus aurocapillus*. Nov 1987, 2; Oct 1989, 1.

Northern Waterthrush, *S. noveboracensis*. Nov 1987, 3; Nov 1990, 1; Oct 1991, 1.

Connecticut Warbler, *Oporornis agilis*. Nov 1987, 1, probably an immature female. Studied walking under some shrubbery in the main grove. A large *Oporornis*

## MIGRANT BIRDS ON CLIPPERTON ATOLL

warbler, uniformly dull olive on the back and rather bright yellow on the lower underparts. The throat and breast were buffy brown. A full buffy-white eyering was present. The legs were bright pink. These characters plus the persistent walking habit are diagnostic of Connecticut among the *Oporornis* warblers (Pyle and Henderson 1990).

Common Yellowthroat, *Geothlypis trichas*. Nov 1987, 1.

Canada Warbler, *Wilsonia canadensis*. Nov 1987, 1.

Summer Tanager, *Piranga rubra*. Nov 1987, 3; Oct 1989, 1. Also Oct 1956, 1 collected (Howell 1959).

Scarlet Tanager, *Piranga olivacea*. Oct 1991, 1 immature male (Figure 4).

*Piranga* sp. Nov 1990, 1, probably a Summer Tanager.

Bobolink, *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*. Nov 1987, 3; Oct 1989, 6; Dec 1990, 2.

Icterus sp. Nov 1987, 1, probably a Northern Oriole, *I. galbula*.



Figure 4. Immature male Scarlet Tanager at Clipperton, 23 October 1991.

Photo by Larry B. Spear

## MIGRANT BIRDS ON CLIPPERTON ATOLL

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Research conducted by Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) on seabird ecology at sea, coordinated by David Ainley and Chris Ribic, enabled access to Clipperton by Howell, Pyle, and Spear. National Geographic Society grants 3321-86 and 4106-89 and National Science Foundation grants OCE 8515637 and OCE 8911125 supported the research cruises in which PRBO personnel participated. Pitman's visits coincided with studies by the National Marine Fisheries Service, during which field support was provided by J. and G. Friedrichsen, R. Rowlett, J. Cotton, J. Carretta, and J. Gilardi. Our visits to Clipperton were arranged and made possible by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and we thank the officers and crew of the NOAA ships *Discoverer*, *Oceanographer*, *Malcolm Baldrige*, *David Starr Jordan*, and *McArthur* for logistical support. We thank David Ainley and Roger B. Clapp for helpful comments the manuscript. This is contribution 530 of Point Reyes Bird Observatory.

### LITERATURE CITED

- Beck, R. H. 1907. Notes from Clipperton and Cocos islands. *Condor* 9:109-110.
- Ehrhardt, J. P. 1971. Census of the birds of Clipperton Island, 1968. *Condor* 73: 476-480.
- Gifford, E. W. 1913. Expedition of the California Academy of Sciences to the Galapagos Islands, 1905-1906. VIII. The birds of the Galapagos Islands with observations on the birds of Cocos and Clipperton islands. (Columbiformes to Pelecaniformes). *Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci.*, 4th ser., 2:1-132.
- Haeze, G., Wissocq, J. C., Barloy, J., and Niaussat, P. 1967. Etude zoologique des espèces rapportées de la Mission Bougainville, Groupe Rouge. Rapport particulier du Centre de Recherches du Service de Santé des Armées (C.R.S.S.A.), Division de Biologie Générale et Ecologie (*Biol. Ecol.*) 25:16-18.
- Howell, S. N. G., and de Montes, B. M. 1989. Status of the Glossy Ibis in Mexico. *Am. Birds* 43:43-45.
- Howell, T. R. 1959. Land birds from Clipperton Island. *Condor* 61:155-156.
- Niaussat, P., Barloy, J., and Haeze, G. 1963. Contribution a l'étude des oiseaux de l'atoll de Clipperton. Rapport particulier, C.R.S.S.A., *Biol. Ecol.* 32:1-17.
- Pyle, P., and Henderson, P. 1990. On separating female and immature *Oporornis* warblers in fall. *Birding* 22:222-229.
- Stager, K. E. 1964. The birds of Clipperton Island, Eastern Pacific. *Condor* 66:357-371.

Accepted 24 July 1992