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PROBABLE SIGHTING OF A BROWN-CHESTED MARTIN IN PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

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On 24 October 1991 at approximately 1100 hours, we observed a martin with unfamiliar markings at the south end of Brown's Farm Road (County Route 827) in western Palm Beach County, Florida. By using the car as a blind, we were able to get as close as 20 m to the martin, using 10x40 Leitz and Zeiss binoculars and a 40x Questar spotting scope. With the sun at our backs, we observed the bird for fifteen minutes.

We carefully studied the martin as it perched and preened on a low utility line among a flock of about twenty-five Rough-winged Swallows (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*). This martin was much larger than the Rough-winged Swallows nearby, but shared the same upperpart color. This bird's plumage resembled that of a Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*), but it differed in several features, most notably its larger size. The combination of distinctive field marks of this bird, including brown upperparts, distinct gray breast band, and white chin, throat, belly, and undertail coverts, was unfamiliar to us, so careful field notes and a drawing were made while watching the bird. The white of the chin and throat extended around the side of the neck. When the martin lifted its wing during preening, it revealed gray sides and flanks. When the wings were lowered to a normal position, this gray coloration was concealed. The tail possessed a shallow fork. While preening, the martin revealed a large fluff of white feathers near the crissum area. During flight, however, no white patch was visible in this area, so we incorrectly assumed that this white area was produced by underlying feathers that were exposed during preening.

After fifteen minutes of resting and preening, the martin left its perch, fed briefly, and then returned to perch again among the swallows. When it returned to its perch, two different swallows attempted to alight on its back, thus forcing it to fly again. After being harassed by the swallows, it fed over the Hillsboro Canal and nearby fields before finally disappearing. Further attempts to relocate the bird on subsequent days failed.

From the literature, we identified this bird as a Brown-chested Martin (*Phaeoprogne tapera*)—a species widespread in South America. The martin's brown upperparts, large size, white throat, and gray breast were most important in helping us make our identification. The photograph of the Brown-chested Martin in flight in Peterson et al. (1983) shows gray on the bird's sides, and the photograph of the perched bird depicts the wings covering this gray area. This gray area is also described by Stiles and Skutch (1989) and Meyer de Schauensee (1964). The white fluffy area near the crissum is depicted in Plate 40 of Hilty and Brown (1986). They describe these undertail coverts as silky white and usually protruding on sides and visible from above. Turner and Rose (1989) also remark that the undertail coverts are white and usually protrude from the side.

Photographs in *American Birds* (Petersen et al. 1983, Tingley 1983) looked exactly like our martin except that our bird lacked the dark splotches on the belly. The specimens of immature birds of the *fusca* race in the Instituto de Ciencias Naturals in Bogata lack the dark line of conspicuous spots down the middle of the breast below the chest band (Stiles and Skutch 1989), so the martin that we studied was probably immature. The breast band was distinct and not diffused like *tapera* so this detail would establish that the martin was probably the migratory *fusca* race (F. G. Stiles, pers. comm.).

The Brown-chested Martin was first recorded in North America on 12 June 1983 in Massachusetts (Petersen et al. 1983). Our 24 October sighting constitutes only the second

continental sighting and the first for Florida. According to Eisenmann (1955), this martin is one of the few South American land birds known to avoid the Southern Hemisphere winter by migrating north of the Equator. The *P. t. fusca* race breeds in Argentina and migrates into northern South America to winter during our summer in good numbers even in Panama (Eisenmann 1959).

The October 24 date of the Palm Beach County Brown-chested Martin sighting is interesting in that by 16 October most of the Brown-chested Martins that winter in Panama have apparently migrated south (Eisenmann 1955), although a few stragglers depart from their wintering grounds as late as early November (Turner and Rose 1989). The 24 October date suggests that the martin may have been in Palm Beach County considerably earlier than when it was discovered and that perhaps it failed to migrate south because of the unusually warm weather in 1991. An alternate hypothesis is that it may have been a reverse migrant, one of the few that flew the wrong way during fall migration.

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