

AN ADDITION TO THE AVIFAUNA OF PANAMÁ: LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*NUMENIUS AMERICANUS*)

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On 30 September 1966 a specimen of *Numenius americanus* was collected on a grassy field at Fort Sherman, Canal Zone, near the Atlantic terminus of the Panama Canal at our request by Maj. C. L. Wallis, U.S. Army Jungle Operations Command, Fort Sherman. The specimen, a female with ossified skull, and ovary 14.5 mm, weighed 1.5 lbs. It has been placed in the collection of the American Museum of Natural His-

tory. This apparently is not only the first record of the species from Panamá but the most southern report of occurrence; the AOU Check-list of North American Birds (1957) lists it as wintering south to Guatemala, and there is a reported sight observation from Honduras (Eisenmann, Trans. Linnaean Soc. N.Y., 7:29, 1955). E. Eisenmann of the American Museum informs us that the measurements (wing chord, 277 and 280 mm; tail, worn, 105 mm; exposed culmen, 170 mm; tarsus, 85 mm), although within the reported mensural overlap of the two currently recognized subspecies, seem to agree better with those said to characterize the larger, less northern form, *N. a. americanus*.

Leon Linderoth and Loftin first noted a Long-billed Curlew on 24 September on this grassy field. Martin and Powell thereafter saw single, and on one occasion two, individuals there. None was observed after the specimen was collected. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Maj. Wallis, who secured permission and collected the specimen. Supported in part by PHS Research Grant AI 06072 from the National Institutes of Health.

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AGE DETERMINATION IN THE BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE

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During a study of breeding biology in Black-billed Magpies (*Pica pica hudsonia*), it was necessary to have a rapid and accurate method for determining age of live-trapped birds on the basis of external characteristics alone. Technics used in age determination in other corvids, such as gape coloration (Marshall and Coombs, Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond. 128:545-589, 1957) or degree of whiteness in the rachis of the primary feathers (Emlen, Condor 38:99-102, 1937), proved unsatisfactory. Linsdale (Pacific Coast Avifauna No. 25, pp. 132-134, 1937) reported several plumage qualities in magpies that made possible differentiation of adult birds and young up to the time of the second molt in the young, but presented neither mensural nor graphic data to support his observations. Measurements of certain characteristics mentioned by Linsdale have permitted separation of adults from first-year birds until the first postnuptial molt of rectrices and remiges of the latter. In southeastern Wyoming this molt occurs in July and August.

Measurements of the length of the black tip on the primary feathers afforded the best accuracy in distinguishing between the two age classes. The fourth primary (P4) was arbitrarily chosen for assessment of this characteristic. This measurement, recorded from banded, free-ranging birds, involved the distance from the apex of the white bar on the feather distally to the end of the feather's black tip. In 20 known-age first-year birds, this black tip averaged 26.9 (SD = 1.5) mm in length. In contrast, 14 known-age adults exhibited a black P4 tip averaging 11.5 (SD = 1.7) mm in length. The maximum length of the black

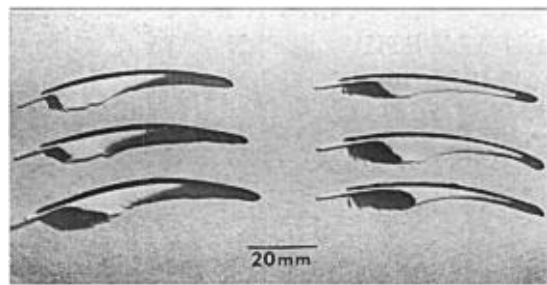


FIGURE 1. Reduced outer primaries from right wings of first-year magpies (on left) and adult magpies (on right).

tip on P4 in known adults was 13.6 mm. The minimal measurement recorded in known first-year birds was 19.8 mm. Overlaps in this plumage characteristic, therefore, were not noted in known-age birds.

In eight of the 140 birds examined during the study, P4 measurements were intermediate between known-age representatives of the two age classes. Age determination in these individuals was performed by means of supplemental indicators. These included characteristic variations in form of the reduced outer primary (fig. 1), sharpness of the black-white junction on the primaries, and the shape of the tip of the outer rectrix. Outer primaries of first-year birds also exhibited a longer black tip and, in addition, were usually broader than outer primaries in adults. In most instances, inspection of the outer primary alone allowed rapid age determination of trapped birds. In first-year birds, the black-white junction on the primaries was generally less well defined than in adults. The distal tip of the outer rectrix was usually rounded in first-year birds and was always squared in adults. It should be noted that the rectrices in magpies were easily pulled out and that, in one case, a first-year bird had outer rectrices in which the tips were heavily

worn and nearly square. Replacement of lost first-year retrices and the alteration, through wear, of typical first-year retrices to adult-type retrices could both result in erroneous age designation of first-year birds. Qualitative features of primary feathers, there-

fore, should probably be used in preference to tail characteristics in age determination in Black-billed Magpies.

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BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS, BANDED AT MIDWAY ISLAND, RECOVERED OFF BAJA CALIFORNIA IN FIRST YEAR

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A specimen of *Diomedea nigripes*, carrying U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leg band 767-93705, was caught on baited hook, with four other specimens of the species, on 11 December 1966, from a cluster of 11

that gathered for food about the stern of Scripps Institution of Oceanography RV *Horizon*, at 31° 55.5' N, 120° 14.0' W, off extreme northwestern Baja California near the extension of the international boundary. These birds were collected for the new marine-bird exhibit of the San Diego Zoo and for research, by Bernice M. Wenzel, of the University of California, Los Angeles, on the physiology of olfaction of the Tubinares. The banded individual had not attained the adult plumage.

Philip S. Humphrey, of the U.S. National Museum, provides the information that this albatross had been banded as a chick on Sand Island at Midway Island, in the Hawaiian archipelago, on 2 March 1966 (less than a year previous), by Chandler S. Robbins.

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DISPERSAL OF CATTLE EGRET AND LITTLE BLUE HERON INTO NORTHWESTERN BAJA CALIFORNIA, MEXICO

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In January 1967 the Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*, and the Little Blue Heron, *Florida caerulea*, appeared for the first time, so far as I can ascertain, in northwestern Baja California. For the egret there appears to have been no prior record anywhere in the Baja California peninsula. The dispersal of these birds into northwestern Baja California may be attributable to a severe storm of southern origin that swept the outer coast of the peninsula, and adjoining California, with strong winds and heavy precipitation, during the first week of December.

CATTLE EGRET

The first indication of the penetration of this notorious wanderer into Baja California was provided by two pictures (by Gene Behrman) of a "white tern" on the "Outdoors" page of the San Diego Union for 22 January 1967 (the identification was corrected in the 5 February issue of the newspaper). The caption indicated that this bird adopted the passengers on the sportfishing boat *Holiday*, out of San Diego, "on recent San Martin, Mex., fishing trip." One picture unmistakably showed a Cattle Egret, in drooping pose; the other showed the bird perched on the fishing pole of one of the anglers! Through the kind efforts of Rolla Williams, outdoors editor of the newspaper, I was able to obtain details of the strange occurrence, and corroborating photographs, from Captain Steve Giffin of the *Holiday*. The bird came aboard on 16 January, while the boat was at anchor, where the ocean is about 35 fathoms deep, about six

miles southwest of Punta San Isidro (as shown on H.O. Chart 1149). The location, therefore, was approximately 31° 13.5' N, 116° 30.2' W. The bird seemed "drunk or sick," "looked thin," and appeared fearless, but refused food. It stayed about an hour on deck, and when it lighted on a fishing pole the angler had to snap the rod to dislodge the bird. It stayed on or about the boat for about six hours.

Since the adjacent coast is very arid and very sparsely populated, with few cattle, it seems highly probable that this weakened Cattle Egret had just arrived from a long journey, presumably from the southward, or that it had come some time previously and had found the region inhospitable.

That the Cattle Egret is maintaining its spectacular wandering propensity on the Pacific side of the New World was indicated by the circumstance that an individual of this species flew aboard the Scripps Institution of Oceanography RV *Argo*, on 25 November 1961, between Cocos and Clipperton islands, at 06° N, 97° W, about 920 km west of the Central American mainland (Lint, Auk 79:483, 1962). Migrants have now reached the Galápagos (Lévêque, Bowman, and Billeb, Condor 68:85, 97, 1966).

These circumstances lend weight to the hypothesis that the Cattle Egret colonized the Americas by trans-Atlantic flight. The capture in Trinidad of a Little Egret, *Egretta garsetta*, which had been banded in Spain (Downs, Auk 76:241, 1959), confirms the plausibility of the transoceanic flight of the Cattle Egret. Presumably this species first became established on the western side of the Atlantic in northern South America, for Bond (Second Suppl. to W. Indian Check-list, 1957) has mentioned sight records between 1877 and 1882 and in 1911-12 in British Guiana and Surinam, and Wetmore (Auk 80:547, 1963) has presented evidence of its occurrence in Colombia in 1916 or 1917, whereas the earliest indication of its arrival in North America (in Florida) seems to have been in 1941 or 1942 (Sprunt, Smithsonian Rept. 1954:259-276, 1955). Its subsequent spread in North America has been notably rapid (Peterson, Natl. Geogr. Mag. 106:281-292, 1954;