

RECENT OBSERVATIONS ON THE BIRDS OF ISLA CONTRAMAESTRE AND ISLA MAGDALENA, STRAITS OF MAGELLAN

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While participating in the National Science Foundation's (USARP) Weddell Sea Expedition of 1973, we visited two small islands with large bird populations in the Straits of Magellan near Isla Grande (Tierra del Fuego). With assistance from helicopters aboard the U.S.C.G.C. *Glacier*, we reached Isla Contramaestre (52°57' S, 70°21' W) on 13 and 15 January and Isla Magdalena (52°55' S, 70°35' W) on 17 January 1973. Except for Olrog (Acta Zool. Lilloana 5:437, 1948), who estimated numbers of penguins breeding on Isla Magdalena in 1940, ornithologists evidently have not reported on the islands since naturalists explored the region during the past century. Humphrey et al. (Birds of Isla Grande, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1970) did not visit them while undertaking a study of the birds of Isla Grande, though they included previous records for the islands in their report. Isla Contramaestre and Isla Magdalena appear to be important avian breeding sites; the following annotated list provides additional information about breeding schedules and distribution on the birds of these little known islands.

Isla Contramaestre is of fairly low relief and roughly 2.5 km long and slightly less than a kilometer at its greatest width. Gently sloping banks rise from stony beaches along the eastern shores, gradually giving way to fairly steep ones along northern and western shores, finally terminating in sheer cliffs approaching 16 m in height in the southwest. Much of the land back from the beaches and cliffs is covered with a coarse turf utilized to some extent by sheep herders. Although an abandoned lighthouse and one sheep shed are obvious signs of human intrusion, the island remains essentially a bird haven within a few kilometers of Punta Gente, northwestern Isla Grande.

Isla Magdalena, some 12 km farther out in the Straits of Magellan, is a noticeably shorter island of higher relief. Some of its cliffs probably exceed 30 m in height. Its vegetation is thin and spotty, barely supporting a hare population but evidently not sheep. An abandoned lighthouse commands the highest point of land. Birds dominate the scene everywhere; a fairly large colony of sea lions occupies the rocky beaches below the high cliffs.

Scientific and common names that follow are derived from Humphrey et al. (1970).

Spheniscus magellanicus. Magellanic Penguin. According to Humphrey et al. (1970), penguins do not breed on Isla Grande and the only recorded nesting colony for the Straits of Magellan is on Isla Magdalena where Olrog (1948) estimated the breeding population at 50,000 individuals. We found many thousands breeding on Isla Magdalena where nesting holes occur throughout the island, and on Isla Contramaestre where at least a few thousand breed on the northeast end of the island. It appears that the

smaller colony may not have been extant when naturalists visited the islands during the past century. On both islands nesting holes occur commonly on level ground, some of it covered with sparse turf, or on barren slopes, often steep. In mid-January many of the holes were occupied, usually with two large young and attending adult, but creches already were forming at the beaches. We saw no small young or live eggs in the many hundreds of nesting holes we examined.

Pelecanoides magellani. Magellanic Diving-Petrel. Occasionally we saw this species swimming in the Straits of Magellan but failed to note it on the islands. Conceivably, it breeds sparingly on Isla Contramaestre where we dug out a half dozen old petrel burrows in soft banks above a colony of nesting cormorants. According to Humphrey et al. (1970), there is no evidence that diving-petrels nest on Isla Grande or any of the nearby islands, but it is probable they do.

Phalacrocorax olivaceus. Neotropic Cormorant. One or possibly two single birds flew at sea just off the beaches of Isla Contramaestre on 13 and 15 January. We found no evidence of nesting on the island where trees are lacking.

Phalacrocorax magellanicus. Rock Cormorant. The assumption by Humphrey et al. (1970) that Rock Cormorants probably nest along the northeast coast of Isla Grande is substantiated by our finding breeding colonies close by. At least 50 pairs nested on the highest cliffs on the southwest end of Isla Contramaestre, and a half dozen more on lower cliffs along the northwest shore. Less than 25 pairs nested on Isla Magdalena, where all were situated on high cliffs of the northwest section. Most nests held young of various ages, from small to large, though none had young ready to fledge. A few held eggs, seemingly heavily incubated. One on Isla Contramaestre held a single bluish egg, evidently fresh, on 13 January.

Phalacrocorax albiventer. King Cormorant. Apparently, King Cormorants bred formerly on Isla Contramaestre (Cunningham, Notes on the natural history of the Straits of Magellan, Edmonston and Douglas, Edinburgh, 1871) where we failed to see adults or even a trace of old nesting sites. A compact colony of several hundred pairs still breeds on Isla Magdalena. The cone-shaped nests were close together on fairly level ground some distance back from rather steep banks above the beach. Although we did not check many nests for fear of dislodging young, nearly all that we observed held young ranging in size from newly hatched to near fledging. We saw no more than nine with eggs; all but one clutch appeared to be heavily incubated. Nowhere on the islands or nearby waters did we note the similar appearing Blue-eyed Cormorant (*P. atriceps*), though we were ever watchful for it.

Theristicus caudatus. Buff-necked Ibis. We did not see this species anywhere on Isla Magdalena, but it was conspicuous on Isla Contramaestre where, on 15 January, we recorded: two nests each with two fresh or nearly fresh eggs (one of these had one egg on the 13th); two nests each with two heavily incubated eggs; one nest with two recently hatched young; two nests with one and two medium-sized young, respectively; one nest with one nearly fledged young. All eight nests were on ledges of fairly steep banks or cliffs. Three were isolated, but five were fairly close together, the two closest being less than 3 m apart. Several ibis nests were within a few meters of active penguin burrows.

Chloephaga picta. Upland Goose. Probably three pairs bred on Isla Contramaestre where, on 13 Jan-

uary, we noted a pair with a well-feathered but flightless young hiding among rocks at the beach, and a pair with five somewhat smaller young swimming in kelp beds offshore. On 15 January we found a recently abandoned nest in a grassy area well inland, where we had flushed a pair earlier on several occasions. A flock of five adults flushed from the top of a cliff were the only Upland Geese we saw on Isla Magdalena.

Chloephaga hybrida. Kelp Goose. We noted flocks composed of both sexes on Isla Contraamaestre (about 25 birds each day) and Isla Magdalena (7 birds) but saw no evidence of nesting.

Polyborus plancus. Crested Caracara. On Isla Magdalena we noted two, seemingly a pair, but found no evidence of nesting.

Haematopus leucopodus. Magellanic Oystercatcher. Noted by us only on Isla Contraamaestre: on 13 January a flock of five adults on the beach; on 15 January a flock of four adults and two adults (possibly a pair) at the beaches. The only evidence of nesting was the remains of a young that was too small to have flown to the island.

Haematopus ater. Blackish Oystercatcher. Breeds at least sparingly on Isla Magdalena where, on the beach, we found a pair with two young who flew so weakly that they could not have flown in from another area.

Arenaria interpres. Ruddy Turnstone. We noted a lone turnstone on the beach of Isla Contraamaestre on 13 January. Heretofore the species had not been reported for the region, including Isla Grande, by Humphrey et al. (1970) and others.

Calidris fuscicollis. White-rumped Sandpiper. Single individuals and a few small flocks of two to six birds each were at the beaches of Isla Contraamaestre on 13 and 15 January. According to Humphrey et al. (1970), the species is a regular visitor to Isla Grande.

Catharacta skua. Great Skua. Breeds commonly on Isla Contraamaestre where we often saw 50-75 birds in the air at one time. The favored nesting ground was gently rolling terrain of the grassy interior where there were numerous empty nest depressions and quite a few single young ranging in size from fairly small downies to well-feathered young, none approaching the flying stage, however. Three active nests held two addled eggs, two well-incubated eggs, and two small downies, respectively, on 13 January. Not nearly so numerous on Isla Magdalena, the species also bred in the interior. We saw only young out of the nest there, including one nearly ready for flight. On both islands the remains of a number of partly decomposed adults were scattered about. Evidently, flying birds had been shot and left where fallen.

Leucophaeus scoresbii. Dolphin Gull. We noted only a few adults on Isla Contraamaestre where the species evidently does not breed. The birds are conspicuous on Isla Magdalena where Olrog (1948) reported upwards of 500 pairs, a somewhat higher figure than we estimated for 1973. On top of a steep bank overlooking the beach, we observed a number of active nests spaced close together in an area hardly 10 m². All were well-constructed affairs of grasses, feathers, and debris washed up from the sea. On 17 January we recorded: one nest with one egg; three nests each with two eggs; four nests each with three eggs; one nest with two eggs and one young hatching; five additional nests with young or eggs and young; several empty nests. About 25 half-grown young attended by adults were on the beach below the colony. Taking into account the number

of nests and young out of the nest, many more adults were at this colony than expected. More puzzling was the fact that some of the clutches had embryos of vastly different ages, indicating great lapses of time between laying of the eggs of a clutch. Since the eggs of a clutch were uniformly colored and marked, it seems unlikely that several females had contributed to the peculiar clutch. Apart from this colony, on the other side of the island was another, also situated high on a bank overlooking the beach. Only two active nests with two eggs each were there. Scores of adults occurred elsewhere on the island, especially among the sea lions and within the cormorant colonies where they scavenged or robbed continually.

Larus dominicanus. Kelp Gull. Breeds abundantly on Isla Contraamaestre, as a rule in colonies of a few to many pairs, in turf a short distance back from the banks or cliffs overlooking the beaches. Most pairs avoid the grassy interior where the Great Skua predominates, and also within penguin colonies, though many nest close by. A few isolated pairs nest in odd places, including areas near the beach. By the time we visited the island, numerous young of various ages were scrambling about in many places. A few dozen nests held well-incubated eggs, many of them pipped. We saw no eggs that appeared fresh, nor did we see a single flying young, though some were approaching flight age. Reproduction was well advanced on Isla Magdalena, where large numbers colonize on top or just back from the cliffs.

Sterna hirundinacea. South American Tern. Two pairs defended an apparent nesting ground near the northeast corner of Isla Contraamaestre, but we failed to find eggs or chicks there on 13 and 15 January. A large flock of at least 40 adults was on the beach there on the 13th, and one of at least 75 on the beach of Isla Magdalena on the 17th.

Cinclodes fuscus. Bar-winged Cinclodes. On Isla Contraamaestre we saw this species several times on 13 and 15 January. One noted on the 13th was carrying food.

Lessonia rufa. Rufous-backed Negrilo. Conspicuous on Isla Contraamaestre, where we noted single males and paired birds on 13 and 15 January. One pair behaved as if a nest were close by, but we failed to find either eggs or young.

Cistothorus platensis. Grass Wren. We noted one individual in very dense, high grass on Isla Contraamaestre on 13 January.

Anthus correndera. Correndera Pipit. Common on Isla Contraamaestre where we encountered the species frequently in the grassy interior. On 13 January we flushed an adult from three nearly fresh eggs and later the same day flushed a recently fledged juvenile that flew out over the sea, where it was soon caught in a wave and washed ashore. Several adults were on Isla Magdalena on the 17th.

Passer domesticus. House Sparrow. We flushed a female from a nest (contents not determined) in the roof of a shed on Isla Contraamaestre on 13 January.

Pezites militaris. Greater Red-breasted Meadowlark. During both visits to Isla Contraamaestre, we noted a few of these birds, including a pair with four fledged young on 13 January.

Sicalis lebruni. Patagonian Yellow-Finch. A few apparently inhabit Isla Contraamaestre and Isla Magdalena, but we found no evidence of nesting. According to Humphrey et al. (1970), the species is uncommon on Isla Grande.

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FIRST NEST RECORD OF THE WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL IN HISPANIOLA

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Although the resident West Indian race of the holarctic White-winged Crossbill (*Loxia leucoptera megaplaga*) was discovered in 1916 (Wetmore and Swales, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 155:440, 1931), very little is known about the bird. It is restricted to discontinuous areas of mountain pine forest (*Pinus occidentalis*) at high elevations in the Dominican Re-

public and southern Haiti, and is possibly nomadic, moving in small flocks between localized patches of food (Wetmore and Swales 1931). The breeding season has remained unknown and no nest has been described, although Bond (Birds of the West Indies, p. 228, Collins, London, 1971) has speculated that it breeds in "midwinter" and "doubtless nests high in the pines."

On 2 April 1971, while we were camping in southwestern Dominican Republic above El Aguacate in the Sierra de Baoruco (the eastern extension of the Massif de la Selle, the only known crossbill location in Haiti), one of us (A. D.) was attracted to a chattering pair of crossbills carrying small twigs in their bills to a nest they were constructing. The habitat was open *Pinus occidentalis* forest, at 1475 m elevation. The forest canopy was approximately 20 m high, with a 0-3-m understory of bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*), herbs, and pine-duff (fig. 1). The pines merged into denser moist limestone forest at slightly higher elevation, and only smaller trees remained, as the area had been recently logged.

The nest, probably in its first or second day of construction, was situated approximately 15 m high in a 20-m pine, and was about 3 m from the trunk in an area where branches and clusters of pine needles partly obscured it. It was placed squarely on a main horizontal branch about 5-6 cm in diameter, and additionally supported by a projecting cross-branch. On 2 April it was merely a flimsy open platform of loosely woven pine twigs, foliose lichens, and the fruticose Old Man's Beard lichen (*Usnea* sp.). During the first day's observations (2 April), the pair gathered primarily large twigs, spending much of their time weaving these into a solid framework, into which lichens and smaller twigs were interwoven. In the three days we remained in the area, the pair transformed their nest from an amorphous mass of twigs, through which we could see (using binoculars), to a reasonably compact, opaque, cup-shaped structure. More lichens, fluffy grass tufts, and pine needles were added last, serving both to bind and line the nest. It was difficult to judge the nest's diameter because of its distance and position, but it was approximately equal to the length of nearby pine needles, roughly 15-19 cm.

While searching for nesting materials, members of the pair remained in close proximity, although the female undertook the greater share of the work, while the male often fed actively. In a half-hour period, the female visited the nest five times, the male once. They gathered material primarily from adjacent pine trees at heights from 7 to 10 m, occasionally descending to the ground to inspect seeding grasses. In a highly selective manner, the female inspected dead twigs and pine needles resting in the crotches of branches, as well as living twigs and epiphytic lichens. With slightly opened bill placed around the basal portion of a twig, she twisted her head jerkily to sever fresh material, usually 8-12 cm long and approximately 5 mm in diameter. Many nest components, even after selection, were discarded; once we observed the male work several twigs and lichens

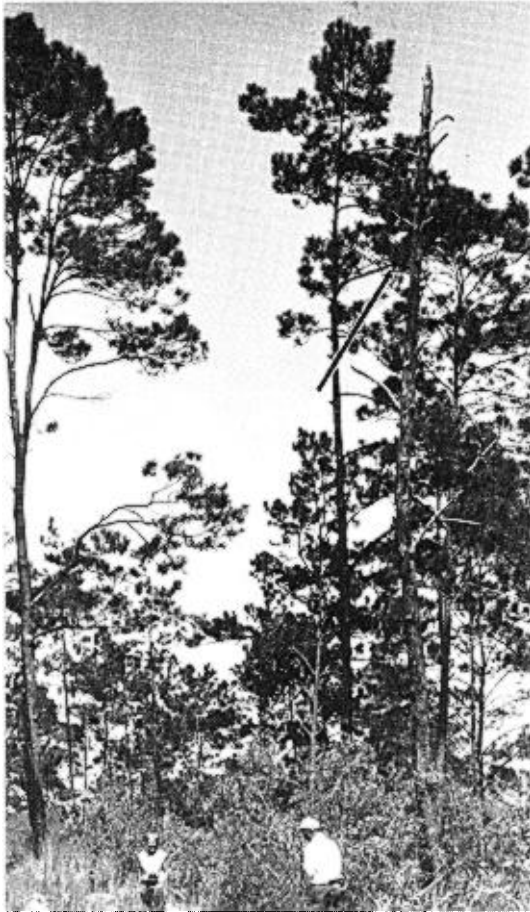


FIGURE 1. Nesting habitat and nest site (arrow) of the White-winged Crossbill (*Loxia leucoptera megaplaga*) in Hispaniola.