

# west indies region



## ROBERT L. NORTON

The winter period reports were fewer than expected. This is usually the season when north temperate zone birders visit the Caribbean islands for a break from colder climates, and to stir their imaginations with species not yet seen. The value of this report is the contribution by each of you to a larger understanding of trends, annual peregrinations, or rare occurrences of migrants as "overlays" on the native bird fauna. In fact, it's the life of the indigenous and endemic birds that is most curious to me as we close in on the story in the penultimate winter of the 20th century.

The majority of reports to this Region have come from visiting birders and periodically from professional ornithologists. It has been the desire of this editor to encourage resident amateurs and professionals to pass along information on the birds of their home island. Birding clubs and natural history societies in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Jamaica, The Bahamas, St. Lucia, Antigua, and others have made important contributions in the past when personal relationships were the basis for a consistent West Indies Regional Report. But as the years pass, many of those individuals have either moved on or passed away. Readers of this column will have to encourage in their own fashion ways to develop new relationships for the purpose of reporting the

status of avifauna from their homeland. It is with gratitude that I can report on birds from Bermuda through the efforts of Andrew Dobson, Carl Mowery who visited Jamaica, and Jon Dunn who visited the northern Bahamas last fall.

Lastly, word has come forward on the satellite launching station project at Sombrero in the Anegada Passage. There seems to be no progress for conservation of this Regionally important seabird colony and home to endemic herpetofauna. The depressed economy of St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands, seems to be an integral part of the mix and may have backing from stateside research and development, construction, and political interests.

**Abbreviations:** BVI (*British Virgin Islands*); DR (*Dominican Republic*); PR (*Puerto Rico*).

### SHEARWATERS THROUGH TERNS

A Manx Shearwater seen off S. Shore, Bermuda, Feb. 4 was considered relatively early (AD). An uncommon winter occurrence of Northern Gannet was noted Dec. 22 at Bermuda. A White Ibis wintered at Bermuda for the 2nd year. A Ring-billed Gull was noted at Negril, Jamaica, Jan. 22-27 (CM) for one of few reports from that location. A West Indian Whistling-Duck was reported (*vide* RR) from Tortola, BVI, during the last week of December. This is the first occurrence there in decades.

A Black Scoter was seen Dec. 8 at Spittal Pond, Bermuda. Two Eur. Green-winged Teal were present at Bermuda in December. A Merlin was noted near the lighthouse at Negril Jan. 22. Three Peregrine Falcons were counted at Cabo Rojo, PR, Dec. 20 (JC et al.), the same number as last winter; two were seen at Fajardo, PR, Dec. 21 (JW et al.), one at Tortola, BVI, Dec. 26; and a single Peregrine was seen several times from December through January at Bermuda, suggesting an unusual overwintering record. With the dramatic, managed comeback of this falcon in North America, we should now be able to understand the historical significance of wetlands and coastal habitats to the migration and wintering populations of this species in the West Indies. Perhaps a symbol of international interdependence, sustaining Peregrine populations in this hemisphere will take more than reducing chemical pollution and captive breeding programs in the United States and Canada.

Three Piping Plovers, another listed species dependent upon wetlands in the Region, apparently overwintered at Bermuda, and two were noted at Fajardo, PR, Dec. 21 (JW et al.). A high count of 27 Bonaparte's Gulls Dec. 17 provided a seasonal record at Bermuda. A Herring Gull was seen at Cabo Rojo, PR, Dec. 20 (JC et al.). Six Lesser Black-backed and 21 Great Black-backed gulls were counted Dec. 22 at Bermuda. A Black-legged Kittiwake was reported from Bani salinas, DR, Dec. 21 (KW et al.), but without any details as to age or plumage characteristics. Kittiwakes, however, are not unprecedented in the area; there was a mid-winter invasion into the Lesser Antilles in 1984. Common Terns numbered 61 (KW et al.) at Bani salinas. Seven Roseate Terns were reported from Cabo Rojo, PR, Dec. 20 (JC), and four were reported among 18 Royal Terns at San Juan estuary Dec. 23 (LR-H). This is one of the largest counts of Roseates on the Puerto Rico bank in winter in several years.

### DOVES THROUGH FINCHES

A Caribbean Dove was seen at Rocklands feeding station in w. Jamaica Jan. 28. Two White-winged Doves were counted Dec. 26 at Tortola, BVI (RR), representing the 2nd

consecutive winter and possibly an expansion e. of Puerto Rico. Olive-throated Parakeets were noted at Negril during Jan. 22–29. A Yellow-billed Cuckoo was seen as late as Dec. 20 at the east end of Bermuda. Four Puerto Rican Nightjars were counted Dec. 20 near Cabo Rojo (JC et al.). Black Swifts were seen throughout the period from Negril to the Rocklands feeding station in Jamaica. A Jamaican Mango, the least common of the island's hummingbirds, was noted at Negril Jan. 23 and two Jamaican Todies were seen at Rocklands Jan. 28. A W. Kingbird was present until Jan. 5 Talbot Estate, Bermuda. A rare occurrence of N. Rough-winged Swallow at Bermuda was noted from Dec. 10–22. The last record was in 1985 (*vide AD*). Cave Swallows numbered 1152 at Cabo Rojo, PR, Dec. 20 (JC et al.), 35 at San Juan harbor estuary Dec. 23, and 15+ were noted flying into a cave at RockHouse Resort, Negril, Jan. 27, indicating a likely nesting location on the w. coast of Jamaica. Tree Swallows were also noted on several days at Negril Jan. 22–29. Caribbean Martins in the Greater Antilles before February are rare, but 13 were counted in the vicinity of Cabo Rojo Dec. 20 (JC et al.). House Sparrows have been exploding in the British Virgin Islands, with 19 counted Dec. 26 (RR et al.) compared to four last winter.

The endemic Arrow-headed Warbler was seen at Rocklands, Jamaica, Jan. 28. Migrant warblers in Jamaica included Black-and-white at Rocklands, Black-throated Blue at Negril, Palm at both locations, Ovenbird at Rocklands, and Am. Redstart at both sites. Palm Warblers were apparently abundant this year as Mowery described them "as thick as flies." A Swainson's Warbler was present at Bermuda Dec. 22 and a Blackpoll Warbler at Bermuda Dec. 22 was very late. Also late were a Summer Tanager Dec. 18 at Devonshire Marsh and a Blue Grosbeak Dec. 19 at Bermuda. A White-winged Crossbill was present at Bermuda until Dec. 22 and 10 Com. Redpolls were counted Dec. 22 and one was last seen Jan. 4.

#### ADDENDUM

Received too late to be included in the fall report are some additions to the Bahamas occurrences. Jon Dunn provided these notes: an Am. Pipit seen and photographed at Marsh Harbour dump, Great Abaco, Oct. 25 & 27; a Nashville Warbler Oct. 27, also unusual in the Bahamas, following a report of one at New Providence in October 1997. **Contributors (subregional editors in bold-**

**face): Eric Amos, Jose Colon, Andrew Dobson, Jon Dunn, Penni Hill, Jeremy Madeiros, Carl Mowery, Bernardo Oatley, Roger and Patricia Pocklington, Andre Raine, Paul Reed, Luis Rivera-Herrera, Rowan Roy, Kate Wallace, David and Helge Wingate.**

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