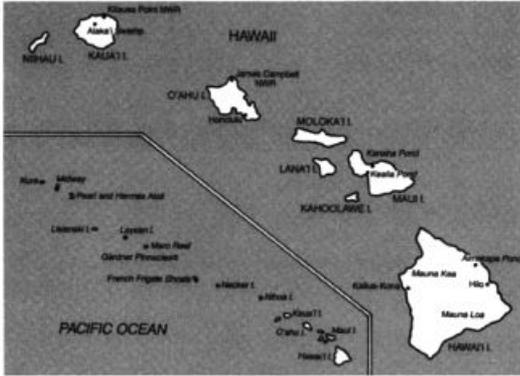


# west indies region



## ROBERT L. NORTON

The West Indies hurricane season this fall was one of the worst in recent history. Of the 11 named storms, four were severe and one, Hurricane *Georges*, affected about 75% of the land mass of the region. Its initial landfall at Antigua, northern Lesser Antilles, was at 155 mph Sep. 20. The Greater Antilles received significant or catastrophic damage as *Georges* passed directly over the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico at 115 mph, the Dominican Republic at 120 mph, and Cuba at 75 mph. A large number of endemic species and subspecies were potentially negatively affected by this storm. Puerto Rico, for example, with 12 endemic species, has been hit hard in the last decade by storms that further imperil the Puerto Rican Parrot. Its population was already fragmented and declining from the effects of *Hugo* in 1989. Hurricane *David* in 1979 seriously reduced the Cayman Brac subspecies of the Cuban Parrot. Hurricane *Mitch* reached maximum strength of 180 mph after passing over Swan Island in the western Caribbean on Oct. 27. The island's bird fauna includes an endemic warbler, *D. vitellina nelsoni*, which may depend in part on mangrove habitat. The current condition of this habitat warrants survey to determine the survivability of these species. Although endemic species may be adapted to changes in habitats as a result of hurricanes through the millennia, other modern factors must be considered as contributing factors to insular species' endangerment, such as habitat alteration, pollution, and deforestation.

*North American Birds* has recently devoted much discussion recently on the effects of El Niño/Southern Oscillation on

bird populations and wanderings. I have contended that large ENSO events influence seabirds of the tropical Atlantic Ocean (Duffy et al. 1986), albeit on a smaller scale than has been documented elsewhere. I invite the reader to visit the Naval Meteorological/Oceanographic website <http://www.navo.navy.mil/noframe/elino/elmino.htm> to consider the area of influence in the Atlantic. One can readily see that the warming of the tropical Atlantic has affected—and will continue to impact—seabirds of the West Indies. Efforts to monitor seabird ecology of the region should take a long-term approach, over 20 years or more, to capture several ENSO events of varying intensity.

Finally, observers in Bermuda (Be), the Bahamas (BI), and one in the British Virgin Islands (BVI) reported exceptional diversity this season, making it one of the best reported seasons in many years.

## GREBES THROUGH TERNS

Least Grebes were nesting at Paradise Island, New Providence (NP), BI, Oct. 10 (PD&TW). A Bermuda Petrel was seen Oct. 13, indicating a timely return to nesting burrows near Castle Harbour, Be. A moribund Leach's Storm-Petrel was recovered from Hamilton Harbour, Be, Oct. 19, for one of the island's few fall reports. Several White Ibis were recorded in the Bahamas, including 12 at Wilson's Pond, NP, Nov. 3 (AB, CG). A White Ibis at Devonshire Marsh, Be, has remained there for an unprecedented 2 years. Glossy Ibis numbered 14 at Wilson's Pond, NP (AB&CG). A Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was photographed at Hog Cay, Long Island, BI, Sep. 27 (BD) in the company of West Indian Whistling-Ducks. Sibley confirmed it as the southern race, *D. a. discolor*. A Snow Goose was also seen and photographed at Hog Cay, Long Island (BD), Sep. 9. Six or more Snow Geese were seen at Port Royal Golf Course, Be, Nov. 9. A pair of Ruddy Duck seen Oct. 25 at Andros, BI, provided a first local record (ANS). The first report of a Sharp-shinned Hawk from the BVI, and only the 2nd from the Virgin Islands since 1988, came from Guana Island Oct. 28 (FS).

A Black Rail was seen at North Pond, Be, Oct. 8. A Curlew Sandpiper at Mid-Ocean

Golf Course, Be, was only the 5th record in the last 20 years. A Hudsonian Godwit was reported from Sandy Point, Abaco, BI, Sep. 7 (CM). **Thirteen Sabine's Gulls** were counted together about 10 miles n.e. of Bermuda Oct. 27, eclipsing the single record of 1977. A well-studied Parasitic Jaeger was recorded at Fresh Creek, Andros, BI, Oct. 25 (ANS), one of the few shore-based reports of this genus here.

## QUAIL-DOVES THROUGH ORIOLES

A Key West Quail-Dove was noted at Treasure Cay Oct. 9–10 (EB). Several Rose-throated Parrots were heard but none seen well until two sat along the roadside for Sep. 10 near the parrot reserve on Abaco (DS, NM). West Indian Woodpeckers were seen nesting near Abaco Beach Resort and Marsh Harbour, Abaco, BI, Sep. 6 (CM). Six Hairy Woodpeckers were counted at Abaco National Park Oct. 8 (EB). Also at the national park was an Eastern Wood-Pewee Oct. 8 (EB). Other migrant flycatchers seen at Abaco were Acadian Flycatcher Sep. 7 (CM) and an Eastern Kingbird on Sep. 6, s of Marsh Harbour, Abaco (DS, NM). A male Purple Martin was noted near Sandy Point, Abaco, Sep. 7 (CM). A **Varied Thrush** was found at Paget Marsh Pond Oct. 9 for a first record for Bermuda (DW). Two Red-eyed Vireos were banded at Guana Island, BVI, Oct. 19–20 (FS).

Bermuda's fall warbler count was nothing short of astounding, with 38 species recorded! Highlights were a Golden-winged Oct. 24 at Talbot Estate, a Townsend's Oct. 4 at Fort Scaur, a Swainson's Nov. 10–11 at Paget Sound, and a Yellow-breasted Chat in Oct. at Outer Lea Dairy. Eighteen species of warbler were reported from the Bahamas during Oct. (TW et al.), notables being Chestnut-sided at Lyford Cay, NP, Oct. 9 (TW), Bay-breasted at West End, Grand Bahama, Oct. 19 (RO, EM, TW), and Louisiana Waterthrush at Paradise Island, NP, Oct. 10 (PD,TW). A female Nashville Warbler at the South End of Elbow Cay, Abaco, Sep. 9 (SD, NM). Sibley found that Blackpoll Warblers were abundant (100+) during a day trip to Sage Mountain, Tortola, BVI, Oct. 18. Only two Black-and-white Warblers and a single Am. Redstart were present elsewhere in the national park

that day, and the same species and numbers were banded at Guana I. Ovenbirds and N. Waterthrushes were also noted there. Species diversity there was well off from the fall 1996 census, when 12 species were recorded (FS).

Painted Buntings were seen at Rand Nature Center, Grand Bahama, Oct. 17, and three were seen at Fresh Creek, Andros, Oct. 26 (ANS). On Sep. 8 at the famous Marsh Harbour dump, a remarkable birding location, a female **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was studied by Mann and Sandee for the first record from Abaco and perhaps only the 4th for the Bahamas. A singing Black-cowled Oriole was noted along with another oriole at Fresh Creek, Andros, Oct. 27 (ANS)—some good news from that island.

#### ADDENDA

Received too late to be included in the Spring Report were sightings from Cayman Brac May 23–30 (KS et al.). In addition to a record of breeding birds were records of casual spring visitants such as Anhinga, perhaps only the 2nd record, and a Glossy Ibis. A search for Cuban Parrot there was unsuccessful. Of particular interest was the apparent ease or difficulty with which

observers found the small island's 8 endemic subspecies. Five of these (Loggerhead Kingbird, Caribbean Elaenia, Red-legged Thrush, Vitelline Warbler, and Bananaquit) were noted, but the rare Caribbean Dove, Cuban Parrot, and possibly extirpated Greater Antillean Grackle went unrecorded for that period.

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