

Central America

The fall season once again was characterized by several firsts: the first documented Golden-cheeked Warbler in Costa Rica, the first Nazca Booby from the Caribbean/Atlantic, and the first report of Steller's Jay in El Salvador since 1927. But this year marks another significant milestone: the first bird record from Honduras to grace these pages! Can Nicaragua be far behind?

I would like to make a plea for readers to submit all occurrences of Mangrove Cuckoo in Central America away from well-documented breeding areas. Determining the regional and seasonal status of this species in the Region must be one of the most under-appreciated challenges here. Where is it resident? Where is it only a migrant or winter visitor? In thousands of hours of field work over a decade, I have yet to see this species in Belize, yet it has been variously reported over the years to be resident in a number of coastal areas.

STORM-PETRELS THROUGH TERNS

An ad. Red-billed Tropicbird found stranded on the beach at Malpais, Península de Nicoya on 2 Sep (FL) later recovered and flew off. This pelagic species is seldom reported from nearshore Costa Rica. In El Salvador, 30 American White Pelicans at Cerrón Grande near Río Soyate, *Chalatenango* 28 Sep (NH) were either early fall arrivals or possibly overwintering. Magnificent Frigatebirds are occasionally reported far inland, but a group of 15 circling over the old airstrip at Tikal N.P. 23 Sep (JT) must have come as quite a surprise! Two days later, 2 were present at nearby Flores (EP). Such observations raise the question: How much gene flow might there be between Atlantic and Pacific populations? A kettle of 69 Swallow-tailed Kites migrating e. past the Snake Cayes 2 Aug (LZ) were clearly taking an overwater shortcut from Belize across the Bay of Honduras on their annual aerial trek to South America. The presence of Double-toothed Kite in Belize's northernmost district was established 21 Sep when one was seen near Shipstern, *Corozal* (JL). Three Zone-tailed Hawks were reported in Belize this fall: one on 23 Oct at Punta Gorda, one near All Pines, *Stann Creek*, 6 Nov (both LJ), and one 10 Nov near Monkey River, Toledo (PB, RZ, EM).

A Ruddy Crane heard at Plan de Amayo 1 Sep (NH) established the first record for *Sonsonate*, and one heard and seen at Laguna de Olomega, *San Miguel* 13 Nov (NH, WR) was



the first recorded at that locality since 1925. This species is at the s. limit of its range in El Salvador. A Black Rail heard repeatedly at close range near Big Falls, *Toledo* 9 Nov (LJ) was the most recent of a mere handful of records of this enigmatic species in Belize. A Rufous-necked Wood-Rail heard and seen 18 Aug at 1500 m elevation on the slopes of San Salvador Volcano (NH, RIP) lends credence to the notion that this species is an altitudinal migrant, breeding in mountainous forest understory and wintering (Sep–Apr) in coastal mangrove swamps.

Southern Lapwings continue to be reported from Costa Rica and from an increasing number of sites. One was in the interior at Los Lagos de San Ramon (850 m elev.) 31 Aug–30 Nov+ (BY, RD, EA); 2 were at Playa Herradura, near Jaco 23 Sep (WG); and one was at the San Isidro de El General S.T.P. 25–26 Sep (JRZ, NU, WO). In El Salvador, 20 Snowy Plovers and 48 Wilson's Plovers at Bocana El Cordoncillo, *La Paz* 6 Sep (NH) were considered to be unusually large concentrations for this date, and 15 Wilson's Phalaropes at Cerrón Grande Reservoir near Colima 28 Sep (NH) was the largest concentration of this species yet recorded in the country. A visiting V.E.N.T. tour group had the good fortune of finding a Long-billed Curlew in a large flock of shorebirds on the extensive

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mudflats at Panama Viejo 24 Oct (BZ, VE et al.). This species is very rare as far s. as Panama. Also rare in s. Central America was an ad. Forster's Tern in basic plumage well seen at Tarcoles, Costa Rica 28 Nov (BT). A flock of 372 Elegant Terns at the mouth of Río Jiboa, *La Paz* 25 Nov (TJ) was considerably larger than the previous El Salvador high count of 80.

PARAKEETS THROUGH THRUSHES

A flock of 25 Red-throated Green Parakeets on San Salvador Volcano, *La Libertad* 25 Aug (NH) was present at an unusual date in an area where the species is believed to be a seasonal visitor. Rarely reported in Costa Rica, but probably not as rare as the few records indicate, was a Black-billed Cuckoo on 12 Oct (JRZ) at 1100 m elevation in Naranjo de Alajuela. Two separate Mangrove Cuckoos were present near Shipstern, *Corozal* 4, 7 & 13 Sep (JL). Although not recorded in Belize until 1998, the Short-tailed Nighthawk has now been recorded in the country on four occasions, three times on cays. The latest comes from Caye Caulker (the 2nd from this cay), where one was carefully studied perched on a tree limb 13 Aug (J&DB). An impressive flock of 370 Chestnut-collared Swifts at El Boquerón Crater, San Salvador Volcano 10 Aug (NH) was easily the largest assem-

SA Two summer-season reports were received too late for inclusion in the last issue, and both involve beached seabirds. Following the Spring Season report of two unidentified storm-petrels, thought to be Leach's, found ashore at Tortuguero in May is a report of yet another emaciated storm-petrel found on the beach there in front of the conservation center, this time on 2 Jul (TB). The oil-soaked bird was still alive, but attempts to nurse it back to health were unsuccessful, as were attempts to preserve the specimen when a misguided employee tossed the carcass in the river. Fortunately, it was videotaped and its body-length was given as 19 cm. From the evidence at hand, it appears to be a Leach's Storm-Petrel. Although regular off the Pacific coast, these appear to be the first Leach's Storm-Petrel records for the Caribbean coast. Where are these birds coming from? Were there two oil-spills far out at sea in late Apr and late Jun that went unreported? Is there a recent natural oil seep somewhere off Caribbean Costa Rica?

Equally interesting was a juv. Nazca Booby found dying in Cristóbal Harbor near Colón on the Atlantic side of Panama 19 Jul (ph. NP). The bird had been banded in the Galapagos Islands in Apr. This appears to be the first record from the Atlantic for this recently recognized species.

SA Pine Warblers continue to be reported in Central America from as far s. as Costa Rica, yet there is only one credible record from s. of northeastern Mexico (where it is a vagrant)—an astounding but carefully documented multiple-observer sight record of 2 individuals in Costa Rica in Aug–Sep 1976 (Stiles and Smith 1980). Unlike most other North American warblers, this species is *not* a long-distant migrant. It is also one of the most challenging of the group to identify. Even seasoned observers thoroughly familiar with the species have been fooled. Any convincing report of this species in Central America *must* be accompanied by a detailed description that decisively rules out all other species, and ideally should be accompanied by a photograph or museum specimen.

blage yet recorded in El Salvador. A lone Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift at Fireburn, *Corozal* 18 Oct (JL) was the northernmost documented occurrence of this species in Belize and the Yucatán Peninsula. In El Salvador, 5 or more male Sparkling-tailed Hummingbirds (no females were seen) frequented a coffee plantation at Apaneca, *Ahuachapán* from May to Oct (AMC). This species is rarely seen in El Salvador, and little is known of its seasonal movements.

In El Salvador, a Scaled Antpitta seen at 1800 m elevation at Los Planes de Montecristo, *Santa Ana* 24 Nov (AMC) was the first recorded in Montecristo N.P. since the 1970s, and a Bright-rumped Attila heard on San Salvador Volcano, *La Libertad* 23 Nov (NH) was in an area where it is seldom recorded. A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher near Shipstern, *Corozal* 23 Sep (JL) was the earliest fall report yet for Belize, eclipsing the old record by five days. In Costa Rica, the Warbling Vireo is a very rare migrant and winter visitor, so one seen 13 Oct at Home Cr., Limón (JS, EC et al.) was noteworthy. A group of 3–4 Steller's Jays on Cerro El Pital, *Chalatenango* 12 Oct (AMC) was the first recorded in El Salvador since 1927. The previous report was also from Cerro El Pital. Whether these birds represent a small but elusive resident population or wanderers from nearby Honduras is not known. Farther s., a Black-chested Jay at Agua Buena near San Vito at 1100 m 22 Aug (JRZ) was the 3rd record for the Pacific slope of Costa Rica, all coming within the last two years, an indication that this species may be extending its range beyond the divide. A flock of Rufous-collared Robins appeared 10 Sep (AMC) at 1525-m Apaneca, 17 km w. of its closest known breeding site in El Salvador. This may represent a new record for *Ahuachapán*.

WARBLERS

Both Northern Parula and Black-throated Blue Warbler are rarely seen as far s. as Costa Rica, so an ad. male of the former 7 km n. of Río Estrella 24 Nov (BT) and a female of the latter at Braulio Carrillo N.P. 1 Oct (GO) were quite unexpected. Chestnut-sided Warbler is a common winter visitor on the Caribbean slope of n. Central America but very rare on the Pacific

slope; thus one seen 27 Oct (TJ) at Nuevo Ocotopeque, Honduras, only 10 km from El Salvador where there is only one record, was noteworthy. Similarly, the Myrtle Warbler is nearly as rare on the Pacific slope of n. Central America as its counterpart Audubon's is on the Caribbean slope; thus, 3 Myrtle Warblers 25 Nov at Río Jiboa, *La Paz* (TJ) was a significant observation for El Salvador. But the best warbler of the fall was clearly the first-fall female Golden-cheeked Warbler closely studied at 1400 m on Cerro Pata de Gallo, San Ramón de Alajuela on 2 Sep (†JRZ). This observation represents the first record for Costa Rica and the southernmost record ever for this species. Setting the record straight, a healthy number of Hermit Warblers on El Pital, *Chalatenango* 13 Oct (AMC) supports the prevailing evidence that this species is a rather common winter visitor in the interior highlands of El Salvador, *contra* its portrayal in the literature as very rare.

A male Prairie Warbler at Summit Gardens nw. of Panama City 27 Oct came as a real surprise to its discoverers (BZ, VE, and other V.E.N.T. participants). This species is very rare as far s. as Panama. A Blackpoll Warbler, a rare late fall migrant in Costa Rica, was at Birrisito de Paraiso e. of Cartago 10 Oct (EC). Like Chestnut-sided Warbler, Hooded Warbler is common on the Caribbean slope of n. Central America but is rarely seen on the Pacific slope,

so 2 males at San Salvador Volcano, *La Libertad* 23 Nov (NH) were unexpected. Farther s., in Panama, it is at the extreme s. limit of its winter range, so a female at Tocuman Marsh 2 Oct (GA) was certainly noteworthy. An estimated 25–35 Wilson's Warblers in a flock at Apaneca, *Ahuachapán* 28 Aug (AMC) represented a surprisingly large number, especially for so early in the season. A Canada Warbler at San Salvador Volcano, *La Libertad* 2 Nov (NH) was the latest date on record for this transient in El Salvador.

HONEYCREEPERS THROUGH BLACKBIRDS

Thanks to JL's exhaustive year-long study of birds in *Corozal*, we now know that the Red-legged Honeycreeper is not resident in n. Belize but departs in Sep. It also appears to be decidedly less common during most winters farther s. in Belize.

This past season, JRZ documented several groups of the elusive and peripatetic Slate-colored Seedeater in Costa Rica. At Sabalito de Coto Brus, he found many females and singing males in at least five small forest fragments between 900 and 1100 m elevation with an understory of fruiting bamboo during two visits to the site 23 Aug and 11 Sep. In his words, they "seemingly appeared en masse out of the

ether" in an area where they had never been reported before. He also heard songs from at least 2 birds in similar habitat at 750 m elevation in Los Altos de Salitre, Buenos Aires de Puntarenas on 29 Sep, and had several females and singing males in a mature rice field and adjacent swamp forest at Zapote de Sarapiquí about 10 km e. of Puerto Viejo on 17 Oct. The latter were the first reported from Costa Rica's Caribbean slope in many years. He recorded another itinerant bamboo feeder,



This emaciated Leach's Storm-Petrel was found dying on the beach at Tortuguero, Costa Rica 2 July 2002. Incredibly, two other dying storm-petrels, thought to be Leach's, were found in the same location in early May. Photograph from video by Gary Neuman.

Blue Seedeater, at Cerros Diria, near Santa Cruz 5 Nov. This female was the first of the species reported from the mountains of Península de Nicoya.

Of the handful of Lincoln's Sparrow records from Belize most are from the cayes; thus one seen in the Mtn. Pine Ridge 30 Nov by CB and Field Guides tour participants was noteworthy. A Melodious Blackbird 23 Aug at Sabalito de Coto Brus (JRZ) was at the s. extreme in Costa Rica of its slowly expanding range. Coto Brus is only 4 km from Panama, where the species is yet to be recorded.

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Literature Cited

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This dying juvenile Nazca Booby, photographed near Colón on the Atlantic-side entrance to the Panama Canal, established the first record of this species away from the Pacific Ocean basin 19 July 2002, though the possibility that it rode a ship through the Canal cannot be dismissed. The bird had been banded in the Galápagos Islands in April 2002. Photograph by Alvaro A. Jaén Collado/CEASPA.