

With each passing season, our understanding of both the resident and non-resident avifauna of six of the seven countries that comprise Central America increases incrementally (Nicaragua still awaits a dedicated local field ornithologist), but there is still much to learn. We are adding species to the list of known resident avifauna at a rapid pace. How many of these were there all along? How many are recent arrivals? Which ones are actually resident, as opposed to seasonal? Four years ago, we thought Rufous-necked Wood-Rail and Hook-billed Kite were resident wherever they occurred; now we have reason to believe otherwise. For years, it was thought in Belize that Gray-breasted Martin and Brown-crested Flycatcher were year-round residents. Now we know they are seasonal residents only. And hummingbirds: how many are truly resident? How much more seasonal movement, even limited migration, takes place among the tropical and subtropical hummingbird species than we are presently aware of? To what extent are the distributional patterns changing as a result of human alteration of the landscape? And the most important and difficult-to-answer questions of all: How many are in serious decline locally? Which species have been recently extirpated or nearly so? It is always hardest to prove a negative—that something is no longer present.

June and July are the months when the winter visitors and most migrants are absent, that is, the best time of year to learn more about local resident populations. Yet these are the two months when the least amount of field research is accomplished. I was dismayed, but not surprised, to find that this season's report is the briefest yet for Central America. But, as brief as it is, the number of country firsts continues to accumulate at a steady pace. Belize had its first Southern Lapwing, El Salvador had its first Tricolored Munia (a sign of things to come?), and Costa Rica may have recorded its first Black-vented Shearwater.

SHEARWATERS THROUGH STILTS

Practically any pelagic trip at any season off either coast of Central America is likely to add new information to our knowledge of Central American birds. Such was the case when eight intrepid birders explored the Pacific Ocean off Golfo Dulce, Costa Rica on 31 Jul. Although relatively few species were tallied, one, if correctly identified, would be a first for Costa Rica. A small black-and-white shearwater seen at close range and carefully studied about 30 km offshore from the mouth of Golfo Dulce 31 Jul (†JRZ, RD, AG, LJ, HK, DM, PN, AO) appears to have been a Black-vented Shearwater. The only species with which it is likely to be confused (e.g., *Puffinus gavia*, *P. huttoni*, *P. yelkouan*) are far less likely to occur here. Two of five other shearwaters seen 15–30 km offshore were identified as the more expected

Central America



Audubon's; 3 more were unidentified.

In El Salvador, a flock of 24 American White Pelicans flying over Chaguantique Forest, *Usulután* 27 Jul (CF) were probably summering in Central America; and in Belize, a lone Brown Pelican flying over Belmopan, well inland, 21 Jun (PB) adds support to the supposition that there is little, if any, seasonality to this species' occurrence inland. Two Anhinga nests with chicks and 8 Boat-billed Heron nests were found in the mangroves behind El Icacal Beach, *La Unión* 28 Jul (NH, EM). El Icacal is a previously unknown nesting area for these two rare species in El Salvador. Monthly visits to the Estero El Tamarindo, *La Unión* produced a maximum of 30 Roseate Spoonbills, including immes., on 28 Jul (RI, MS). Although the birds were at the site of last year's nesting colony, no nests were evident this year. At the other end of El Salvador in *Ahuachapán*, 50 spoonbills at the mouth of the Paz R. during a 6 Jul aerial waterbird survey (NH) established a high count for the country. A flock of 57 Wood Storks feeding at the confluence of the Sumpul R. and "5 de Noviembre" Res., *Chalatenango* 14 Jun (NH) was at an unreported location for this species in El Salvador.

Two Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at a swamp in Guatemala near Rubelsanto, *Alta Verapaz* 8 Aug (KE, SL) were noteworthy, as the species is uncommon there. Also at the same locality on the same day were 2 ad. Purple Gallinules (KE, SL), suggesting that the species may be breeding locally. This species was seen at the same site in May 2003 (KE). Rumors of a Southern Lapwing at Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, Belize began circulating as early as mid-Apr (fide GA). More specific information emerged in May (RC), but the bird's identity remained in doubt and at-

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tempts to photograph the bird at that time failed. Although visiting birders later recorded a digital image of the bird, they left the country before contact information could be obtained to properly record the photograph. Finally, on 15 Jul a detailed description of the bird was obtained (†RB), thus establishing the first record of this species in Belize. In Jul, Black-necked Stilts were documented breeding for the first time on Caye Caulker (J&DB). This species breeds locally in n. Belize.

GULLS THROUGH MUNIAS

The 31 Jul pelagic trip off Golfo Dulce produced an ad. Sabine's Gull about 15 km offshore and 2 Brown Noddies 6–7 km offshore (JRZ et al.). The gull, while not unusual, may have established the earliest fall record for the species in Costa Rica; fall migrants typically arrive in Central America in late (?) Aug. Not much is known about the seasonal status of Brown Noddy in Costa Rica, but these may represent the first Jul records away from the Cocos Is. where the species nests. A Black Skimmer, rare in Panama, was at Santa Isabel in e. *Colón* 27 Jan (CE, LS).

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Very rare in the Caribbean lowlands was a Violaceous Quail-Dove 30 Jul, only the 2nd reported from La Selva (JA, JC). Although probably resident in El Salvador, as it is in surrounding countries, a pair of Blue Ground-Doves observed 29 Jul in the Chaguantique Forest (NH, EM, MR) established the country's first late summer record.

Following close on the heels of a spring sighting of Pale-billed Woodpecker at Pantano de Mechotique, *Usulután* was the report of one in Chaguantique Forest 13 Jun (NH, MR). This species is now rare in e. El Salvador where, until recently, it was thought to have been extirpated. La Selva's first record of Slaty-capped Flycatcher came 31 Jul+ (RiG). This species is common above 500 m elevation only a few km from La Selva. Purple Martin is Belize's earliest arriving fall migrant, so several seen 10 km w. of Belize City 27 Jun (PB) were right on schedule. Honduras' 3rd record of Black-capped Swallow was established when 7 were seen at Guisayote Biological Reserve 15 Jun (RoG). Tropical Mockingbirds are on the increase in Costa Rica. One was seen 27 Jul at Rancho Quemado between Hatillo and Matapalo (JRZ), representing the 2nd record from the s. Pacific region of Costa Rica. There was an unconfirmed report by tourists earlier in the year of 2 birds at a nest in a highway sign in this same area. At least 3 male Slate-colored Seedeaters were singing along wooded streams next to mature rice fields along the highway at Matapalo in the Pacific lowlands of Costa Rica 31 Jul (JRZ), about as far n. as the species has been reported on the Pacific slope. This erratic and unpredictable species is worth reporting any time it shows up. Twenty Orchard Orioles observed in mangroves at Chaguantique Forest 29 Jul (NH) may have established the earliest fall arrival date for El Salvador. The Tricolored *Munia* invasion would seem to be upon us. El Salvador's first record came 3 Jul, when at least 12 individuals, and possibly many more, were found in sorghum fields adjacent to Chaguantique Forest (CF, RP, MR, EM, NH). The birds remained through the period. Belize had its 3rd record in less than a year, with a single in Sarteneja, Corozal 20 Jul (ZW, PW).

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