

Central America



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Autumn in North America is arguably the busiest and most exciting time for birders. It is the best season for vagrants and for honing one's birding skills on confusing fall warblers, thrushes, and *Empidonax*, *Myiarchus*, and other flycatchers. Central America has a similar array of potential vagrants and the same identification challenges, but there has been little birding activity to fill this autumn gap, which is only recently being taken up by local birders and ornithologists. Much of this increased interest in birds on the local level has been the result of the dedicated work of organizations like BirdLife International, Birds Without Border/Aves Sin Fronteras, and local Audubon societies. Although an accurate portrait of fall migration through Central America is slowly emerging, we are still far from being able to correlate dynamics of fall migration here with events farther north: for example, how annual fluctuations in migration timing might relate to climatic cycles; how pulses of migrants relate to regional weather patterns; and how annual dif-

ferences in relative abundances of migrants relate to breeding success, shifting migration routes, or weather patterns generally.

August through November in Central America is not just about migration. As in North Temperate regions, the breeding season for most birds in Central America, especially in the north, is concentrated in the first half of the year, but, as Oliver Komar points out in his fall report, we are learning that a surprising number of species breed well into, or even throughout, the fall. In El Salvador alone, there were documented nesting records this fall for Anhinga, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, White Ibis, Berylline Hummingbird, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, and Eastern Meadowlark, and suspected breeding for Lesser Goldfinch. This is surely the case in other Central American countries as well, but autumn breeding is either going unnoticed or unreported. This is another fertile field for study.

Country firsts continue to accumulate each season. This fall, Glossy Ibis, Wandering Tattler, and Elegant Tern were added to the Honduras list, all in a five-day period in early November by a birder who knew where and when to look. Redhead, White-bellied Emerald, and Swainson's Warbler were added to the El Salvador list, and several additional species were documented for the first time with photographs.

Abbreviations: S.F (Shrimp Farm); W.S. (Wildlife Sanctuary).

SHEARWATERS THROUGH STORKS

Following the highly successful pelagic trip off the Pacific coast of Costa Rica this past Jul, Costa Rican birders (EA, AD, RD, RG, AO, JRZ) participated in a 24 Nov trip, this time out of Quepos. With each trip, more is learned about the distribution, seasonality, and abundance of seabirds off s. Central America. Among the Wedge-tailed Shearwaters observed 24 Nov was a Pink-footed Shearwater about 50 km ssw. of Quepos. This species, as far as known, is a rare visitor to Costa Rica in spring and fall, with previous records all much closer to the Cocos Is. On the same trip, a juv. Red-billed Tropicbird was seen about 25 km ssw. of Quepos. Also, 3 dark-morph Red-footed Boobies were observed 31.5 km ssw. of Quepos. This species is considered rare in Costa Rica so close to shore, and its seasonal movements outside the breeding season are poorly known.

An American White Pelican 28 Aug near Pasiga (ph. JO) represented the 2nd record for Panama and the first for Panamá Province. Numbers of white pelicans reported in n. Central America continue to increase. In Belize, 3 Brown Pelicans were observed flying overhead well inland near Caracol, Cayo 26 Nov (CB). While not all that unusual, records to date are still too few to establish a seasonal inland occurrence pattern. For now, all inland occurrences of this species (and, for the same reason, Magnificent Frigatebirds) should be reported. Anhingas are seldom seen on the Belize cays, so one that turned up on Caye Caulker in Sep and remained through at least mid-Oct (J&DB, EMc, LJ) was noteworthy. In El Salvador, 6 ad. Anhingas remained into fall at the El Icacal beach nesting site in *La Unión* where they were reported last sum-



Panama's second American White Pelican was photographed on the coast near Pasiga in eastern Panama province on 28 August 2004. Photograph by Jacobo Ortega.

mer. Two chicks in each of two nests were still being fed 2 Sep (NH, RIP, MS).

In Guatemala, 5 Least Bitterns were found in a reed swamp at Monterrico, *Santa Rosa* 12 Oct (KE, GM). A new nesting location of Bare-throated Tiger-Heron in El Salvador was discovered 2 Sep (NH, RIP, MS) at Estero El Tamarindo, *La Unión*. A Reddish



For all the reports of Solitary Eagle in Belize, at best only a few are credible. This adult Solitary Eagle photographed in the Mountain Pine Ridge 25 November 2004 provided the first photographic evidence of the species in Belize, but even this well-documented report caused considerable debate among experts. An article on the identification of the species is in preparation by the finder and others. Photograph by Chris Benesh.

Egret at the mouth of Río Huiza 10 Nov (RIP) may represent a first record for *La Libertad*. A new Black-crowned Night-Heron and White Ibis breeding site with 17 nests of the former and 20 nests of the latter was discovered in the mangroves behind El Icacal beach 2 Sep (NH, RIP, MS). A flock of 94 Glossy Ibis at El Jicarito Lagoon, *Choluteca* 2 Nov, with smaller groups and individuals present through 15 Nov (†TJ), provided the first documented record for Honduras (there is a 1953–1954 record of several *Plegadis* from Copán, *Cortés*). An ad. Jabiru soaring over Hone Creek near Bribri 20 Oct (ErC) was interesting, as this species is a rare, possibly seasonal, visitor to this part of Costa Rica. In Honduras, 3+ Jabirus at El Jicarito Lagoon 2–5 Nov (TJ) were on the Pacific slope, where they are seldom seen.

VULTURES THROUGH RAILS

A group of 12 Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures seen on the edge of a lagoon in Monterrico, *Santa Rosa* 12 Nov (KE, GM) is noteworthy. This species was unrecorded (or overlooked?) in Guatemala as late as 1970. It has become common in the Caribbean lowlands in recent decades but is still seen only occasionally on the Pacific side. Seen for the first time on the Pacific slope of Honduras were 3 American Wigeons at the estuary of the *Choluteca* R. 3 Nov (ph. TJ) and at least 50, and perhaps many more, Northern Shovelers at El Jicarito Lagoon 2–5 Nov (TJ). A little farther w., El Salvador got its first Redhead when a male was seen at Laguna El Jocotal, *San Miguel* 27 Nov (†EM, MR).

Participants in the Talamanca (Costa Rica) Hawkwatch program recorded nearly 3 million raptors Sep–Nov (PP et al.). Highlights were: 1,117,733 Broad-winged Hawks, 1,025,289 Turkey Vultures, 449,771 Swainson's Hawks, 262,129 Mississippi Kites (98% of these in Sep), and 3219 Peregrine Falcons. In Belize, 4 Mississippi Kites were seen near

Punta Gorda, *Toledo* on 10 Oct (LJ). This species is a rare fall migrant in Belize. Twenty-four late migrant Plumbeous Kites were seen flying over Bahía de La Unión, El Salvador on 3 Sep (NH, RIP, MS). An ad. Solitary Eagle in the Mountain Pine Ridge, *Cayo* 25 Nov (ph. CB) provided the first photographic evidence of this rare raptor in Belize. Noteworthy were several Harris's Hawks in Honduras at El Jicarito Lagoon 2 & 4 Nov (TJ) and an ad. in Guatemala near Puerto José, *Escuintla* 16 Oct (KE, CA). This species is rare in both countries, where it is confined to the Pacific coastal plain. Two ad. White-tailed Hawks at Chomes 8

Nov (JRZ) were a bit s. of the species' normal range in Costa Rica and the first for this locality. A Red-tailed Hawk at Toluca Beach, *La Libertad* 10 Nov (RIP) represents a rare low-



How many times can the same species be recorded for the first time in one country? This Wandering Tattler, photographed on the south side of Isla del Tigre in the Gulf of Fonseca 5 November 2004 provided the first record for modern Honduras—modern in that the tiny *Islas Farallones*, the site of Honduras's first record, were later ceded to Nicaragua. Photograph by Tom Jenner.

land record for El Salvador and may have been a migrant from North America. A Yellow-headed Caracara at Caño Negro 20 Oct (RG, PMu) was just short of the Nicaraguan border; the species is unrecorded in Nicaragua. A Bat Falcon flying over Caye Caulker 5 Oct (LJ, J&DB) provided the first

record of this species for any of the true cayes in Belize. The first Rufous-necked Wood-Rails of the fall were on Caye Caulker 13 Sep (J&DB). A juv. Common Moorhen on Half Moon Caye 18 Oct (LJ) provided the first record for Lighthouse Reef.

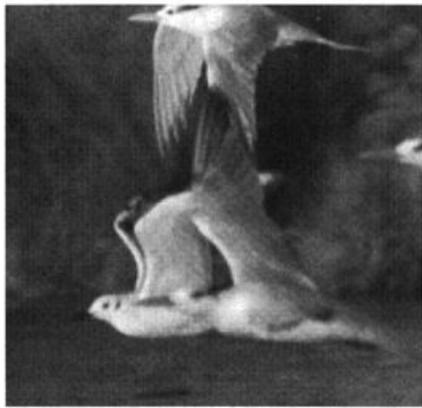
PLOVERS THROUGH GULLS

A Snowy Plover, a vagrant in Costa Rica, was at Chomes S.F. 8 & 14 Nov (JRZ). A Wandering Tattler on Isla de Tigre, Golfo de Fonseca 5 Nov (ph. TJ) was the first record for "modern" Honduras. The only other Honduras record, from *Islas Farallones*, was nullified when this island was ceded to Nicaragua. A flock of about 30 Long-billed Curlews foraging on wet grass in Margarita near Colón 16 Aug (DP, J&TP, CH) was by far the largest group yet recorded in Panama. In Belize, a Marbled Godwit appeared on Caye Caulker 11 Sep and was joined by another on 27 Oct (J&DB). A surprising 76 were present at the *Choluteca* R. estuary on the Pacific coast of Honduras 3 Nov (TJ). Roughly the 5th and 6th records of Surf-bird from El Salvador came this fall when 24 were seen at Playa El Maculiz, *La Libertad* 6 Aug (AM) and 6 were seen at the mouth of Río Jiboa, *La Paz* 5 Sep (TJ, OK).

A light-morph ad. Pomarine Jaeger was seen 44 km ssw. of Quepos 24 Nov (JRZ et al.). The tiny Río Jiboa delta produced several exceptional larids this fall: an exhausted Parasitic Jaeger was found on the beach 5 Sep (ph. TJ, OK), establishing only the 4th record for El Salvador and the first confirmed by photograph; a Bonaparte's Gull 22 Nov (ph. TJ et al.) established El Salvador's 2nd record for that species, the first documented with a photograph; a Roseate Tern there on the same date (ph. TJ) established the 2nd country record for this species; and a Forster's Tern there, also on 19 Nov (ph. TJ), was El Salvador's 4th. A Gray-hooded Gull at Costa del Este e. of Panama City provided the 5th record for Panama.

Rarely reported from the Pacific slope of Honduras were perhaps as many as 10 Caspian Terns at El Jicarito Lagoon 2–5 Nov (ph. TJ) and 100 or so at the *Choluteca* R. estuary during the same period (TJ). Two Elegant Terns at the Río Nacaome estuary off

SA Southern Lapwing continues to expand its range and numbers in Central America. The bird that appeared at Crooked Tree W.S., Belize last Mar was still present through the end of the period (LJ, m.ob.). In Costa Rica, the species may have bred at the Coopeagri coffee processing plant near Cenizas, San Isidro de El General. A worker at the plant claims that he saw a nest with five eggs, and later 3 chicks, this past summer. By 24 Sep, up to 10 birds were present, with much vocal commotion in the group. One pair appeared to be giving some sort of display where both birds stood side by side, drooped and shivered their wings, exposing a bright red wing spur, all while calling incessantly. According to Floyd Hayes (pers. comm.), Southern Lapwings have increased dramatically in Trinidad and Tobago in recent decades, and recent records have come from Aruba (*N.A.B.* 55: 371), Barbados (Frost, M., and Massiah, E. 1998. A new avian record for Barbados: Southern Lapwing [*Vanellus chilensis*]. *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 44: 69–71), and Mexico (Martin, J. 1998. The first Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis* in Mexico. *Cotinga* 8: 52–53).



This first-winter Bonaparte's Gull, observed at the mouth of Río Jiboa 21 and (here) 22 November 2004, provided only the second record for El Salvador and the first documented with a photograph. Photograph by Tom Jenner.

Puerto Grande just w. of Coyoilto 6 Nov (ph. TJ) may have been the first ever recorded in Honduras; however, this is likely an artifact of poor coverage in s. Honduras rather than the discovery of truly out-of-range birds. Brown Noddies were recorded off both coasts of Costa Rica this fall: a live but probably exhausted bird on the beach at Puerto Vargas near Cahuita 8 Oct (ph. HK) and another 58 km ssw. of Quepos 24 Nov (JRZ et al.). This species is rarely reported on the Caribbean side, and although much more frequent on the Pacific side, the Nov date may represent a seasonally late individual.

DOVES THROUGH SWIFTS

The 2nd documented record of Plain-breasted Ground-Dove in Honduras came when a male was observed at the Hotel Las Glorias, L. Yojoa, Cortés in mid-Aug (BL, RoG). This species is now common in s. Belize and is probably overlooked in Honduras and the Caribbean coast of Guatemala. Elsewhere, in Panama, a male at Changuinola 4 Sep (JAC) was the first recorded in *Bocas del Toro* and the Atlantic slope away from the Canal Area. What appears to be a juv. Caribbean Dove was on Caye Caulker 11 Nov (ph. J&DB). There is only one previous record from Caye Caulker. Eight Scarlet Macaws at Coyoilto, Valle 5 Nov (TJ) were the first reported from the Pacific slope of Honduras in a number of years. Five Yellow-billed Cuckoos at the El Porvenir coffee plantation, Sonsonate 8 Sep (JRS) were noteworthy, as this species is seldom observed in El Salvador, and a Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo at 900 m elevation in the San Ramón Alberto Manuel Brenes Reserve on the Caribbean slope of Costa Rica 19 Sep (WA) was at a locality where it had not previously been recorded.

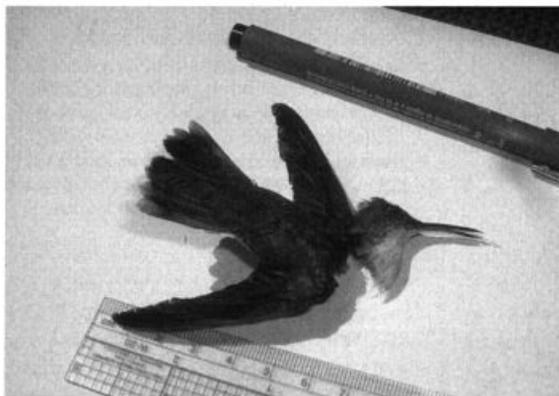
Chuck-will's-widow is rarely reported in El Salvador, so 2 at El Imposible N.P., *Ahuachapán* 2 Oct (OK, JF) were noteworthy. An Oilbird perched in a tree at Cerro Azul in Chagres N.P. e. of Panama City 27

Aug (ph. RM, JT et al.) was the first reported from this locality. Since all but one of the Panama records have been from the Panama Canal area, this record may indicate an undiscovered nesting cave somewhere in the region. A Chimney Swift at Caye Caulker 7 Sep (J&DB) established the second-earliest fall record for Belize.

HUMMINGBIRDS THROUGH JAYS

A window-killed White-bellied Emerald recovered in downtown San Salvador 3 Nov (ph. OK) became the first record for El Salvador. The specimen shows characters of the expected subspecies *pacifica* from s. Guatemala. A female Ruby-throated Hummingbird at La Selva Biological Station 17 Aug (RA, JA) was an extraordinarily early migrant. This species normally arrives in Costa Rica in mid-Oct. Tody Motmot is known in El Salvador only from El Imposible N.P., where it apparently had not been recorded in eight years prior to 3 Oct, when one was heard vocalizing there (OK, JF). A Belted Kingfisher at Caye Caulker 30 Jul (J&DB) was an early migrant. The 5th record of Amazon Kingfisher in El Salvador since 1975, and the first recorded in *La Unión*, was obtained 3 Sep when a male was recorded at Bahía de La Unión (NH, RIP, MS). Golden-fronted Woodpecker is resident on several Belize cayes but may have been overlooked in the past at Lighthouse Reef, where several nest cavities and one bird were noted on Long Caye 17 Oct (LJ).

A pair of Sepia-capped Flycatchers at



This White-bellied Emerald flew into a window in downtown San Salvador, El Salvador 3 November 2004. Its identification was confirmed by several hummingbird experts who agreed that the bird appears to be of the race resident in southern Guatemala—nonetheless an unexpected country first. Photograph by Oliver Komar.

1100 m at Río Negro de Coto Brus 4 Sep (JRZ) was in a part of Costa Rica where the species is seldom seen. Likewise, in El Salvador, a Northern Bentbill in San Diego y La Barra N.P. 3 Oct (NH) established the first record for *Santa Ana* and may represent either a range extension or a vagrant. Rarely reported in El Salvador, an Eastern Wood-pewee was found singing in Santa Rita for-

est, San Francisco Menéndez, *Ahuachapán* 2 Oct (OK, JF). Early Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were on Caye Caulker 15 Aug (J&DB) and Rocjá Pomtila, *Alta Verapaz* 22 Aug (RC). A Great Kiskadee seen and heard on Southwest Caye, Glover's Reef 2 Nov (JS, LJ) was most unexpected, as the nearest resident population is on the mainland 44 km away. The species is a regular winter visitor on Caye Caulker, but this caye is only 8.5 km s. of Ambergris Caye, where the species is resident.

A Piratic Flycatcher at Rocjá Pomtila 17 Sep (RC) may represent the latest fall date for n. Central America. On the other hand, an Eastern Kingbird on Caye Caulker 8 Aug (J&DB) may have been the earliest yet recorded in Belize in fall, and a White-eyed Vireo on Caye Caulker 27 Sep (J&DB) matches the earliest record of this species in fall in Belize. Two Red-eyed Vireos were at El Imposible N.P. 3 Oct (JF); this species is a rarely reported transient in El Salvador. A flock of 4 Black-chested Jays in with Brown Jays at Cañas Gordas on the Panama border 2 Aug (JRZ, VR) established the 5th record of this species from the Pacific slope of Costa Rica and the 2nd from this location. The Brown Jays were also noteworthy this close to the Panama border. Five Black-chested Jays at nearby Río Negro de Sabalito 7 Oct (DM, PM, HF) represented only the 2nd report from this location. Seven Black-throated Jays at Montecristo N.P., *Santa Ana* 2 Oct (NH, FE, RIP, IV) were noteworthy, as the species is very rare in El Salvador.

SWALLOWS THROUGH WARBLERS

Two Purple Martins, a rare migrant on the Pacific slope of Panama, were seen at San Miguelito, a suburb of Panama City, 14 Sep (JAC), and 9 Brown-chested Martins, a rare austral migrant n. of Panama, were at Esquinas Rain Forest Lodge near Golfito, Costa Rica 8 Oct (PM, HF). Three or more Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were at El Imposible N.P. 2–3 Oct (NH); this species is rarely reported in El Salvador in fall, perhaps due more to lack of coverage at this season than to true scarcity. A Wood Thrush at

Caye Caulker 27 Sep (LJ, J&DB) established the earliest fall record for Belize. A pair of Tropical Mockingbirds at the cane processing mill in Peñas Blancas de San Isidro 26 Sep (JRZ) established the 2nd record from this locality. Single birds were seen in the area over the following ten days. This species has only recently become established in Costa Rica. A Cedar Waxwing at Hidden

Valley Inn in the Mountain Pine Ridge 25 Nov (CB) established by about three weeks the earliest record for this species in Belize.

A Blue-winged Warbler found 2 Oct (NH) was the first reported from Montecristo N.P., and a Tennessee Warbler at Caye Caulker 29 Aug (J&DB) matched the earliest arrival date for Belize. Two Nashville Warblers were reported in Belize this fall, one on Caye Caulker 5–6 Oct and another on Half Moon Caye 16 Oct (both LJ). Two Tropical Parulas in a cypress plantation at Los Volcanes N.P., *Santa Ana* 23 Aug (JRS) were the first recorded from the *Santa Ana* Volcano and represented only the 5th record for El Salvador. Four Golden-cheeked Warblers at Montecristo N.P. 2 Oct (MR, LP) established the earliest fall arrival date yet for this rare species in El Salvador. A Blackburnian Warbler on Caye Caulker 14 Aug (J&DB) was early, and one at El Imposible N.P. 3 Oct was noteworthy as a rarely reported transient. A Prairie Warbler at Caye Caulker 18 Aug (J&DB) established the earliest fall arrival date yet for Belize.

A surprising 5 Blackpoll Warblers were at Río Frio de Guápiles 9 Sep (RT). Could this unprecedented number in Costa Rica have been hurricane-related? Three Prothonotary Warblers at El Jicarito Lagoon 3 Nov (ph. TJ) may have been the first ever recorded on the Pacific slope of Honduras. El Salvador recorded its first Swainson's Warbler 11 Oct when one was mist-netted in Los Volcanes N.P., *Santa Ana* (ph. JRS). Northern Waterthrush and Kentucky Warbler on Caye Caulker 19 Aug and 6 Aug, respectively (J&DB), were early, as were Wilson's Warblers at Rocjá Pomtila, *Alta Verapaz* (EC) and in the Sacranix Mts., *Sierra de Chamá* 13 Sep (EPC, VXP). An impressive 22 Canada Warblers were at El Imposible N.P. 3 Oct (OK, JF), and 8 were at El Porvenir coffee plantation, *Sonsonate* 8 Sep (JRS). One was observed on Caye Caulker 1 Sep (J&DB). Red-faced Warbler is a rare winter visitor in El Salvador. One at Los Volcanes N.P. 3 Sep (JRS) established the earliest arrival date yet. A Yellow-breasted Chat at Rocjá Pomtila 13 Sep (EC) was early.

TANAGERS THROUGH FINCHES

Now rare in El Salvador, a Red-throated Ant-Tanager in the *Santa Rita* forest, San Francisco Menéndez, *Ahuachapán* 2 Oct (OK) was noteworthy, and a Summer Tanager at Caye Caulker 2 Sep (J&DB) was earlier than expected. An impressive 4 Scarlet Tanagers at El Imposible N.P. 3 Oct (OK, JF) corresponded with a large wave of this species in Belize during the first week of Oct. These represent the 4th record for El Salvador, all



Following close on the heels of Panama's first Swainson's Warbler in March 2004 was this bird, El Salvador's first, captured 11 October 2004 in the cloud forest at Los Volcanes National Park. Photograph by Jennifer Smith.

but one coming in fall. Records of the highly nomadic Slate-colored Seedeater are always worth reporting. This fall, a male was heard singing between Esterillos Oeste and Parrita (Central Pacific area) 25 Nov (JRZ, AD), about as far n. as it occurs on the Pacific slope of Costa Rica. The Blue Seedeater has been reported regularly in El Salvador recently between Oct and Feb. This fall, the only report was on 3 Oct, when a male and 2 females were found at El Imposible N.P. (JF, OK). Noteworthy this year was that an abundant bamboo species known locally as "chimichaca" began flowering for the first time in 15 years. This suddenly plentiful food source could spark a boom in the local Blue Seedeater population.

A Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer that



This Prothonotary Warbler, along with two others, in mangroves at El Jicarito in the *Lagunas Invierno*, just south of Choluteca, provided the first records for the Pacific Slope of Honduras. Photograph by Tom Jenner.

fledged on 7 Nov at Cerro El Pital, *Chalatenango* (ph. EnC, *vide* AM) represented a rare breeding record for El Salvador. Fledging has been previously reported in Jan from the

same location. A migrant Grasshopper Sparrow was on Half Moon Caye, Lighthouse Reef 18 Oct (LJ), and a Lincoln's Sparrow was on Northeast Caye, Glover's Reef 31 Oct–3 Nov (LJ, JS). An Indigo Bunting on Caye Caulker 12 Sep (J&DB) and a Painted Bunting there 6 Oct (LJ, J&DB) were both early. A Bobolink, seldom reported in Costa Rica, was at Volcán de Buenos Aires at 500 m elevation 26 Sep (JRZ).

Ten Eastern Meadowlarks in pastures 2 km s. of Comalapa International Airport, *La Paz* 5 Sep (TJ, OK) was an unusual concentration for that location; 2 ads. feeding 3 grown juvs. at La Palma, *Chalatenango* 2 Oct (ph. AM) provided confirmation that this species breeds in El Salvador. An Orange Oriole on Caye Caulker 3–27 Sep (J&DB) may have established the southernmost record for the species. An early migrant Baltimore Oriole was at Rocjá Pomtila 9 Sep (RC), and a Red Crossbill in La Palma 2 Oct (ph. AM) represents only the 5th record for El Salvador. A singing male Lesser Goldfinch near Playa Las Hojas, *La Paz* 5 Sep (OK) suggests late-summer breeding on El Salvador's coastal plain, where the species is rarely reported.

Corrigenda: The report of a possible Black-vented Shearwater off Costa Rica in Jul (N.A.B. 58: 611) has been withdrawn after observers were able to study light-morph Wedge-tailed Shearwaters in greater detail. The imm. raptor photographed in El Salvador 25 Oct 2003 and reported as a possible Solitary Eagle (N.A.B. 58: 155) has proven to be a Great Black-Hawk.

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