

NOTES ON TAMAULIPAN BIRDS

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A few bird observations made by Marian Zimmerman and me in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, April 7 to 12, 1955; April 7 and 8 and June 22, 1956, seem worthy of record. During these periods we enjoyed the hospitality of our friend, Mr. Everts Storms at Rancho Pano Ayuctle on the Río Sabinas, approximately five miles north-northwest of Gómez Farías, and some 45 airline miles (60 miles by road) south of Ciudad Victoria. Unless otherwise stated, the following observations were made at or near Pano Ayuctle.

Rather low temperatures and cloudy skies prevailed during our visit in 1955. No rain fell, however, and we understood that the previous months had been abnormally dry. Mr. Storms told us that he could not remember a more severe drought. Certainly everywhere but in the immediate vicinity of the river the countryside seemed parched, and we wondered if the aridity had resulted in a "late" season insofar as breeding birds were concerned. There were many birds about but none appeared to be nesting. We failed to find the Coppery-tailed Trogon (*Trogon elegans*) and the Crimson-collared Grosbeak (*Rhodothraupis celaeno*), species which were "seen daily" along the Sabinas in March and April, 1941, by Sutton and Pettingill (1942). *Rhodothraupis*, at least, nests at Pano Ayuctle (Sutton, Lea, and Edwards, 1950: 57-58), and is not considered migratory (Sutton, 1950:155). We did not encounter *Crotophaga sulcirostris* or *Vireo olivaceus flavoviridis*, which are known to be migratory. In 1941, Sutton and Pettingill (*op. cit.*) first recorded anis on April 7, and Yellow-green Vireos on April 9.

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In the following list an asterisk indicates a species seen by us in the Gómez Farías region and which has not been previously recorded there by Sutton and Pettingill (1942), Eaton and Edwards (1948), Sutton, Lea, and Edwards (1950), or Robins and Heed (1951).

* *Podiceps dominicus*. Least Grebe.—One seen on a relatively quiet portion of the Río Sabinas on April 11, 1955.

* *Spizastur melanoleucus*. Black and White Hawk-eagle.—Although this species has not yet been collected in Tamaulipas there are three independent sight records—all from the vicinity of Pano Ayuctle: Amadon and Eckelberry (1955:70) reported one on April 17, 1952, and Byron Harrell (personal communication) and Paul S. Martin saw the species across the river from the Rancho on or about February 8, 1953. Mrs. Zimmerman and I observed one circling over a patch of forest across the river on April 10, 1955.

Our bird was not seen perched. When first sighted it was within 100 feet of the ground and near enough so that the red or orange-red cere was noticeable through $8 \times$ binoculars. We could not tell if the iris was dark or light. The bird, seen against both the forested mountainside and the hazy, bluish sky in excellent light, was decidedly *Buteo*-like in proportions and manner of flight. It soared in wide circles, occasionally flapping, with its wings horizontal, its tail fanned. Its identity was not known immediately, for I had not pictured *Spizastur* as this type of bird. Furthermore, not once during the two or three minutes we watched did we see the black crest. The back and upper wing-surfaces were brownish black, but the bird did not bank fully enough to show us the top of the head. From our angle of observation it appeared white-headed (we could see the forehead, supra-orbital region and much of the nape), with immaculate white underparts and wing linings, reminding us somewhat of a White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*) in this respect. The black lores were conspicuous, and gave the bird a "masked" appearance. The tail from below appeared grayish white, with three sharply contrasting, narrow black bars, the terminal broadest. Sutton (1951:197) says of this species: "tail black, crossed by several gray bars," but the reverse is true in all adult specimens I have examined.

Unaware at that time of previous records of *Spizastur* from the area, and knowing that the Ornate Hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus ornatus*) occurred there, I was careful to note that our bird definitely lacked all barring on flanks, thighs, and wing linings. There were faint bars on the outer primaries. The gray flight feathers were noticeably darker than the rest of the underparts. The Gray-headed Kite (*Leptodon cayanensis*) was briefly considered as a possibility, but that species is gray-faced, has dark wing linings and darkly barred flight feathers, and does not have a red or orange-red cere.

Although *Buteo*-like, the hawk-eagle seemed long-winged and was proportioned more like a Rough-legged (*Buteo lagopus*) or Swainson Hawk (*B. swainsoni*) than a Red-tail (*B. jamaicensis*). Its general appearance was not particularly aquiline, for the bill was rather small.

Since the above observation, I have had several excellent views of *Spizaetus ornatus* in flight. It bears very little resemblance to *Spizastur melanoleucus*.

Circus cyaneus. Marsh Hawk.—Thirteen scattered birds were seen flying in a northerly direction between Ciudad Victoria and Matamoros on April 7, 1955. We saw no adult males.

Falco sparverius. Sparrow Hawk.—Forty-six were counted between Matamoros and Victoria, April 7, 1955; 14 were in sight at one time near San Fernando.

Columbigallina talpacoti. Ruddy Ground Dove.—One seen feeding along a trail at the foot of the mountain across the river from Pano Ayuctle, April 10. The only other record for the region is of one seen "at about 1,000 feet elevation," August 7, 1946, by Eaton (Eaton and Edwards, 1948:112).

Claravis pretiosa. Blue Ground Dove.—A pair seen April 8 along a road leading from the Rancho to the main highway. There are a few other sight records for the region but the species seems rare there.

Amazona autumnalis. Yellow-cheeked Parrot.—Sutton, Lea, and Edwards (1950:47) recorded this species near Pano Ayuctle in late May, 1947. We saw it there daily, April 8 to 12, 1955, and April 7 and 8, 1956, though it was far less common than the Red-crowned Parrot (*A. viridigenalis*). Ordinarily we saw *A. autumnalis* in pairs, and the Red-crowns in flocks of from 15 to 75 individuals. Not once did we identify both species in the same flock. The yellow cheek spot of *A. autumnalis* is a good field mark, and that bird's flight seemed slower and more labored than that of *A. viridigenalis*. The notes of the two species are noticeably different.

Campylopterus curvipennis. Wedge-tailed Sabre-wing.—Several times on April 9 and 10 we saw individuals feeding in dense vegetation along the Río Sabinas. They were easily approached, and we watched one singing and preening for several minutes at a distance of about six feet. Sutton and Pettingill (1942:17) found it “only in tangles of vines on mountainside . . . at from 1000 to 1500 feet.”

* *Amazilia tzacatl*. Rufous-tailed Hummingbird.—The Mexican Check-List (Friedmann, Griscom and Moore, 1950:173) records this species from southern Tamaulipas but recent workers fail to mention it. One April 8, 9, and 11, I studied at close range several of these hummingbirds. They were definitely gray-bellied, and were darker, especially on the breast, than the common Buff-bellied Hummingbirds (*A. yucatanensis*) that sometimes fed with them. Their tails had a noticeable violet cast which was indistinct or lacking in *A. yucatanensis*. The latter species was abundant wherever we went. *A. tzacatl* seemed less common and more restricted to the immediate vicinity of the river. However, the two species were so similar that our attempts to determine relative numbers were futile; in the thickets along the river only a few Amazilias were seen well enough to be identified with certainty.

* *Sphyrapicus varius*. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.—A male at Pano Ayuctle on April 9 spent most of its time on large trees near the river.

* *Pachyramphus major*. Gray-collared or Black-capped Becard.—Several times on April 9 and 10 we saw a male in low trees near the banks of the Río Sabinas. A female was seen accompanying a male on April 10. Martin, Robins, and Heed (1954:48) noted the species in June in the Sierra de Tamaulipas (in pine-oak and oak-hickory woodlands).

Muscivora forficata. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher.—A total of 87 presumed migrants were counted along the highway between Matamoros and Ciudad Victoria, April 7, 1955. One flock contained 12 birds. We saw three Scissor-tails 25 miles south of Matamoros on June 22, 1956, and I saw them as far south as San Fernando on June 17 and August 13, 1949. Davis (1950) recorded this flycatcher in mid-July at Las Norias and at Tres Patos (= Tres Palos), points 19 and 24 miles, respectively, south of San Fernando.

Corvus imparatus. Mexican Crow.—Scattered flocks of from 10 to 250 birds were seen along the highway between Ciudad Victoria and San Fernando on April 7, 1955. The northernmost we noted in Tamaulipas were six, about 60 miles south of Matamoros. (We saw several at China, Nuevo Leon, about 48 miles from the Río Grande on April 7, 1956.) In cultivated portions of the arid land 20 to 30 miles north of Victoria the species is abundant. There we noted a flock estimated at 350 birds (adults and immatures) on June 22, 1956.

Hylocichla ustulata. Olive-backed Thrush.—One seen at close range near Pano Ayuctle on April 10, 1955.

Regulus calendula. Ruby-crowned Kinglet.—Several seen April 9, 1955. Sutton and Pettingill (1942:26) recorded this species no later than March 14 in 1941.

Cyclarhis gujanensis. Rufous-browed Pepper-shrike.—We saw two birds (probably not a pair) along the Río Sabinas on April 9 and 10, 1955. One was singing in a roadside thicket two miles south of El Limon on June 22, 1956. There seem to be very few records of *Cyclarhis* from Tamaulipas.

Dendroica magnolia. Magnolia Warbler.—Small numbers of both sexes seen daily, April 8 to 11, 1955, along the Río Sabinas. Sutton and Pettingill list but one record (April 2, 1941) from the area.

Dendroica coronata. Myrtle Warbler.—Two males seen on April 8 and 10, 1955.

Dendroica dominica. Yellow-throated Warbler.—Male seen at Pano Ayuctle on April 8, 1956. Sutton and Pettingill (1942: 28) list two sight records for March.

Euphagus cyanocephalus. Brewer Blackbird.—Sutton and Pettingill (1942:29) recorded this species on March 12 and 13, 1941, in El Mante. We saw several of both sexes feeding with House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) on the streets of that town and in El Limon on April 11, 1955, and near El Mante on April 8, 1956.

* *Dives dives*. Melodious Blackbird.—Two of these birds spent the morning of April 9, 1955, about the ranch buildings at Pano Ayuctle, feeding with Red-eyed Cowbirds (*Tangavius aeneus*). Examination of the cowbird flock the following morning revealed no *Dives*, and we did not see the species there again.

* *Icterus fuertesi*. Fuertes Oriole.—This species has been known to breed (or at least occur during spring and summer) along the Gulf coasts of southern Tamaulipas and Veracruz. The Grabers (1954:274-275) pointed out that it is concentrated in "the narrow belt of dune vegetation along the coast." They found "the population considerably less dense around Altamira (only six to eight miles inland) . . ." On June 22, 1956, I collected the male of a pair of Fuertes Orioles just west of the Pan-American Highway, two miles south of El Limon, at a point about 85 air-line miles west of the Gulf coast. This is considerably farther inland than any previous records known to me. (The westernmost specimens were the type series, taken 35 air-line miles northwest of Tampico.) It does not seem very likely that the species could have been present along the Pan-American Highway for many years without attracting the attention of some ornithologist, and its presence there may be further evidence of an inland spread as has been suggested by the Grabers (*loc. cit.*).

We found the orioles in a "hedge row" separating cultivated fields from a roadside canal and drainage ditch. The strip of woody vegetation was about 15 feet wide and was composed of large shrubs and trees 10 to 35 feet in height. Other birds living in the thicket included *Columba flavirostris*, *Crotophaga sulcirostris*, *Pitangus sulphuratus*, *Turdus grayi*, *Cyclarhis gujanensis*, *Icterus gularis*, and *Saltator coerulescens*. The orioles frequented the edge of the thicket, usually feeding between 15 and 25 feet above the ground. The female once perched quietly on a shaded branch near the top of a 30-foot tree for over five minutes, but otherwise both sexes were active—feeding, preening, and flying about. On one occasion they flew from the hedge row to an isolated sapling on "my" side of the canal. There the *male*, perched a few inches below the female, raised his bill and rapidly fluttered his wings before the female, in the manner of a fledgling begging for food. The performance was interrupted by an approaching farmer and I hastily collected the male before he could disappear across the canal after the female. The bird weighed 18.4 grams; the testes measured 7 x 10 and 7 x 9 mm.; the wing (arc), 74 mm.

Apparently this was not an isolated pair of birds, for 10 minutes after I collected the above bird we saw what we presumed was the same female perched close beside another adult male at the edge of the thicket.

The song, to quote from my notes, "definitely reminded me of that of *Icterus spurius*, but was very much softer and harsher—less musical and spirited." Chapman (1911:2) and the Grabers (1954:278) noted the same differences between the songs of *fuertesi* and *spurius*.

Icterus gularis. Black-throated or Alta Mira Oriole.—Common and in full song at Pano Ayuctle between April 7 and 12, 1955, but apparently not yet nesting. In 1956, we found several nearly completed nests on April 8.

Agelaius phoeniceus. Red-winged Blackbird.—Several northward-moving flocks, totaling 1,500 to 2,000 birds, seen south of Matamoros on April 7, 1955.

Thraupis abbas. Yellow-winged Tanager.—We saw flocks of six to eight Yellow-winged

Tanagers on April 9 and 10, 1955, in cypress trees along the Río Sabinas. Sutton, Lea, and Edwards (1950:56) found the species there in late May and early June, 1947.

Saltator coerulescens. Grayish Saltator.—The species was reported in May, 1947, by Sutton, Lea, and Edwards (1950:57), but apparently it is not common in the region. In 1955 we saw two in heavy brush near the Río Sabinas on April 10. In 1956 we noted one there and two near El Limon on June 22.

Melospiza lincolnii. Lincoln Sparrow.—In 1955, at Pano Ayuctle, we found Lincoln Sparrows familiar door-yard birds that were easily studied at close range as they fed on the lawn and about the buildings. Two individuals that frequented a much-used path leading from the house, seldom moved more than a few feet out of the way when people walked by. They were as fearless as House Sparrows of city parks. The contrast between this behavior and that of the species during migration, and particularly on its breeding grounds, was striking. Wetmore (1943:339) has also remarked on the confiding nature of wintering Lincoln Sparrows in southern Veracruz. We did not record the species in 1956.

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