

Neotropical Notebook



Neotropical Notebook contains three sections. The first consists of short papers documenting records. Photos and descriptions are published where appropriate. The second section summarises records published elsewhere, following the format established in previous issues of *Cotinga*, and the third lists unpublished and undocumented records. Please indicate, with submissions, in which section you wish your records to appear.

SHORT NOTES

Interesting gull records from north-east Tamaulipas, Mexico

On 25 November 1998 on a Gulf of Mexico beach in extreme north-east Tamaulipas, we observed and photographed an adult Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* (Fig. 1, see p.68), a first-winter Thayer's Gull *L. thayeri* (Fig. 2) and several Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L. fuscus* in various plumages. Seen, but not photographed, were Franklin's *L. pipixcan* and California Gulls *L. californicus*. The following day we photographed a gull that we have not, as yet, been able to identify. In some respects it is similar to an immature Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus*, which has not yet been recorded in Mexico (although it is long overdue)¹. However, it may be a hybrid. Constructive comments and opinions on our photographs (Figs. 3-4 on p.68) would be greatly appreciated by the authors. On 21 March 1999, at the same locality, we photographed a first-winter Glaucous Gull *L. hyperboreus*, which we believe is the first Mexican record away from Baja California and the Gulf of California (Fig. 5).

All of these were within a huge concentration of gulls c. 3 km south of a public bathing beach,

called Playa Bagdad, at a place where local fishing boats pull up on the beach to unload and clean their catch. Playa Bagdad is 38 km east of the centre of Matamoros at the eastern terminus of Mexico Highway 2. Fishing activity usually peaks in mid- to late afternoon, therefore the concentration of gulls is usually greatest at that time. When the fishermen are inactive, as during days with high winds, the gulls disperse from the area. We speculate that many regularly visit the Brownsville, Texas, USA, city landfill, which is less than 24 km to the north, especially on days when the fishing boats are inactive. The interesting gulls of Playa Bagdad deserve further study. We hope this note encourages other observers to visit the area.

Reference

1. Howell, S. N. G. & Webb, S. (1995) *A guide to the birds of Mexico and northern Central America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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First summer record of Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris* in Belize

Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris* is a widespread migrant throughout Central America¹. Some extreme dates of occurrence during spring migration are 18 April for Honduras² and 10 April for Guatemala². In Belize the latest spring record is a female mist-netted on 22 April 1999 in Lamanai Archaeological Reserve (L. Jones pers. comm.). On 6 July 1999, I mist-netted a female of this species in the southern part

of the same reserve. Several measurements and photographs were taken before the bird was released. A female, probably the same individual, was seen in the same area the next day. No similar species occur in this area. The photos are on file at Lamanai Field Research Center.

References

1. Howell, S. N. G. & Webb, S. (1995) *A guide to the birds of Mexico and northern Central America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Land, H. C. (1970) *Birds of Guatemala*. Wynnewood, PA: Livingstone.
3. Monroe, B. L. (1968) *A distributional survey of the birds of Honduras*. Orn. Monogr. 7.

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Two new species for Nicaragua

On the basis of information in Stiles & Skutch³, I report two new species for Nicaragua: Olive-backed Quail-dove *Geotrygon veraguensis* and Yellow-margined Flycatcher *Tolmomyias assimilis*. Both are recorded from the Caribbean lowlands of north-east Costa Rica south to South America, but neither has apparently been reported north of the río San Juan which separates south-east Nicaragua from Costa Rica. Both species were observed at Refugio Bartola, adjacent to the Gran Reserva Río Indio-Maiz, at the confluence of the río Bartola and río San Juan, Río San Juan province, south-east Nicaragua.

An Olive-backed Quail-dove was watched through 8x10 binoculars for c.30 minutes, on 6 May 1999, at a distance of 3-8 m while it foraged on the forest floor

in front of me. The startlingly conspicuous silvery-white facial stripe was noted, and the forehead was creamy white, tinged buffy, rather than pure white.

A single Yellow-margined Flycatcher was observed, on 3 May 1999, at 5–8 m in open secondary scrubland for several minutes while foraging 3–4 m above ground and calling noisily. The vocalisations are well described in Stiles & Skutch². At this range the grey cap and white eye-ring were prominent, and the underparts were seen to be pale grey above and pale yellow below. The latter two field marks, along with the quite different vocalisations, distinguished this species from its relative *T. sulphureus*.

The observation site is near-pristine lowland Caribbean rain forest, at 30 m elevation (10°97'N 84°16'W); the climate is wet tropical, with c.4 m of annual precipitation, and a drier season in February–April during which c.15% of the annual rainfall is recorded. The density and diversity of the vertebrate fauna at this site is impressive, even by Neotropical standards. The University of California's Field Biology Program has visited the site on two occasions, 1994 and 1999. The (combined) bird list is now 255 species; this total can be taken as that of an area of little more than 1 km². Comparisons between years permit an estimate for the site of 298 bird species. The list includes many species typically rare or absent at disturbed sites, e.g. the larger cracids (four species) and *Ara* macaws (two species). Many groups (tinamous, hawks, tanagers, flycatchers) are well represented, and the 19 species of antbird include Wing-banded Antbird *Myrmornis torquata* (not yet recorded in Costa Rica). The wide range of habitats, from riverine edge and gaps to primary forest, contributes to the overall bird diversity. Refugio Bartola is an ideal locale for Neotropical birding—superb habitats, isolated

but not difficult to reach—and the local facilities are excellent and reasonable. For accommodation at Refugio Bartola, contact its director, Daniel Querol, at gme@tmx.com.ni; for further information on the area's avifauna or travel arrangements, contact myself.

References

1. Ridgely, R. S. (1976) *A guide to the birds of Panama*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
2. Stiles, F. G. & Skutch, A. F. (1989) *A guide to the birds of Costa Rica*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

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Recent observations of threatened birds in eastern Cuba

During a field trip in eastern Cuba (provinces of Granma, Santiago de Cuba and Holguín), we made a number of interesting observations.

On 4 February 1999, we observed a Gundlach's Hawk *Accipiter gundlachi* over the forest canopy near an isolated village called La Platica (c.800 m), on the north side of the Sierra Maestra, Granma province. The species is known from the Pico Turquino region of the Sierra Maestra, although sightings are scarce¹.

On 8 February 1999, we found a Bicknell's Thrush *Catharus bicknelli* on a short visit to Pico Cuba, at 1,825 m. The bird was close to the summit on the south side of the mountain, in alpine vegetation (canopy height 1.5 m). This record is the first from eastern Cuba and the third island record (singles were captured in the Jardín Botánico, Havana, in October 1965 and on 26 October 1968²). Bicknell's Thrush is considered by Garrido & García Montaña² to be a rare vagrant

during autumn migration in Cuba. We consider that this observation may signify the presence of a small wintering population in Cuba.

On 10 February 1999, we observed a single Giant Kingbird *Tyrannus cubensis* in the mountains south-east of Moa, Holguín province. The site (c.400 m) is close to a small village known as La Melba (20°27'N 74°49'W), c.25 km south of the main road to Moa. The habitat was low altitudinal cloud forest on serpentine soils. There are only two records from this area, both undated ('mountains south of Moa' and Ojito de Agua¹). Both are apparently from the early 1920s (O. H. Garrido pers. comm.). Few records (the most recent one in June 1986) are available from other parts of this province.

References

1. Collar, N. J., Gonzaga, L. P., Krabbe, N., Madroño Nieto, A., Naranjo, C. G., Parker, T. A. & Wege, D. C. (1992) *Threatened birds of the Americas: the ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book*. Cambridge, UK: International Council for Bird Preservation.
2. Garrido, O. H. & García Montaña, F. (1975) *Catálogo de las aves de Cuba*. La Habana: Academia de Ciencias de Cuba.

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