

NOTES ON SPRING MIGRANTS IN PANAMA (AVES)

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ABSTRACT: This paper is a sequel to an earlier report on autumn migrants in Panama (Loftin, 1963, *Carib. J. Sci.*, 3: 63-68). Observations are presented on 48 species of North American migratory birds in Panama during spring 1962 and 1963, including records of numerous migrants captured in a large-scale mist-netting program operated by the Gorgas Memorial Laboratory near the Costa Rican border.

INTRODUCTION

LOFTIN (1963) REPORTED his observations on North American migrant birds in Panama in autumn of 1961 and 1962, noting at the time the scarcity in the literature of continuous series of observations on Neotropical migration. This paper is intended as a sequel to that report and covers the authors' field observations in Panama during spring 1962 and 1963.

Loftin was present in Panama during both seasons. Olson spent spring of 1963 in Panama when he was afield almost every day. Our work included usual bird-watching techniques, capture with mist nets, and collecting with shotguns. Through the generous cooperation of the Gorgas Memorial Laboratory of Panama, Olson spent 10 days in April banding and collecting migrants caught in a large number of mist nets operated by Gorgas personnel at

Almirante, Bocas del Toro Province (see Loftin, *op. cit.*, for a description of the Gorgas mist-netting operation).

Our own observations have been greatly enhanced by reports from other local bird students which, with their kind permission, are included in this paper. We are especially grateful to Dr. Pedro Galindo and Mr. Eustorgio Mendez of the Gorgas Memorial Laboratory who generously allowed us to publish the results of their banding of many migrants in spring 1963 at Almirante. Dr. Nathan Gale, Mr. Marvin Keenan and Mr. Edwin Tyson contributed significantly to this report. We wish to thank Mr. Norman Pease, scientific officer of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Research Vessel *Pelican*, for making it possible for Loftin to spend a week aboard ship in the Bocas del Toro area during May 1963.

Generally, place names used without further identification refer to localities in the Canal

Zone or Panama City. An exception is Almirante, Bocas del Toro Province, which appears so often that the province is omitted. Other localities are identified by mention of the province in which they occur. Occasionally we refer to the whole Panama City-Balboa-Curundu-Ft. Clayton area simply as the "Pacific terminus". For purposes of this paper, "spring" comprises the period from about 1 March through the first week in June, when migratory activity is most obvious.

FIELD NOTES

Cathartidae

Cathartes aura (Turkey Vulture). Among the most impressive sights of autumn in Panama are the tremendous flights of migratory Turkey Vultures which appear like veritable rivers of birds over the Pacific terminus (Loftin, op. cit.). Thus we were surprised to see no such large flights of vultures over this region in spring. Loftin observed no migrating vultures in spring of 1962. In 1963, we first noted "a few" Turkey Vultures with a small flight of migrating hawks on 22 March near Paraiso, somewhat inland from the usual autumn path. On 30 March, about 50 were seen in migration near Gamboa, which is just over the Continental Divide on the Atlantic slope. On 1 April, we saw about 500 Turkey Vultures over the Pacific Terminus in scattered groups and generally moving east to west (toward Costa Rica); this flight lasted only about 10 minutes before all the birds had moved away.

Eisenmann (1952), writing of Turkey Vultures on Barro Colorado, reported "large flocks of migrating birds... have been noted: February 25-April 5". On the other hand, he did not mention autumn migrants over Barro Colorado, nor have we heard any reliable reports from local persons to indicate large autumn vulture migrations over the Atlantic slope of the Canal Zone region. Thus it appears that the Turkey Vulture probably follows essentially different pathways through the narrow waist of the Isthmus in autumn and spring: preponderantly via the Pacific slope in autumn and the Atlantic slope on the return flight. (It seems unlikely that there is a significant long flight over water on the spring

flight.) It would be of interest to learn something of the possible causes of this difference in routing, e. g., is there a different pattern of wind currents over the Isthmus in autumn and spring to account for their movements?

ACCIPITRIDAE

Though every bit as spectacular as the vulture migration, the hawk migration over Panama brings frustration to the bird student. For while they may fly overhead by the thousands, rarely are they low enough to be identified with any certainty (Loftin, op. cit.). Thus, most of our observations pertain to "unidentified hawks". However, when identifications were possible, the species involved in the large flights have always been *Buteo platypterus* (Broad-winged Hawk) and *B. swainsoni* (Swainson's Hawk); and undoubtedly these two species make up the greater portion of the migrants seen.

The hawk migration through the Canal Zone is similar to that noted above for the Turkey Vulture: fantastic numbers over the Pacific terminus in autumn (Loftin, op. cit.), and relatively few to be seen there in spring. In 1962, Loftin noted only one flock of about 50 hawks over Fort Clayton in "mid-March". However, at about this same time, Mr. Edwin Tyson saw "great numbers" of migrant hawks near El Volcan, Chiriqui Province, only a few miles from the Costa Rican border. In 1963, Mr. Marvin Keenan noted about 500 hawks over Fort Clayton on 19 March; and we saw a band of about 200 near Paraiso on 22 March. During the period 17-21 April, Loftin noted small flights of migrant hawks near Almirante and Chiriquicito, Bocas del Toro Province.

Circus cyaneus (Marsh Hawk). One was seen on 8 March 1963 near Penonome, Coclé Province.

RALLIDAE

Porphyryla martinica (Purple Gallinule). One exhausted specimen flew aboard the M/V *Pelican*, anchored in Bocas del Drago Bay, Bocas del Toro Province, at about 2100 hrs, 20 May

1963. The bird rested on deck for about 30 minutes, refusing to fly when approached, before finally taking off again.

CHARADRIIDAE

Charadrius semipalmatus (Semipalmated Plover). About 50 were seen at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March and 5 there on 12 April 1963.

Charadrius wilsonia (Wilson's Plover). A single bird was observed at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March 1963.

Pluvialis dominica (American Golden Plover). Four were noted at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March 1963.

Squatarola squatarola (Black-bellied Plover). About 30 were observed at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March and 3 there on 12 April 1963. All were in basic (winter) plumage except one specimen on 12 April which was molting into alternate (summer) plumage.

Aphriza virgata (Surfbird). Six were seen at low tide on rocks of the beach near Panama Viejo, 3 March 1963.

Arenaria interpres (Ruddy Turnstone). Thirty were noted at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March, and 2 were seen there on 12 April 1963. Five were seen along the shore from the Fort Amador Causeway on 5 March 1962.

SCOLOPACIDAE

Numenius phaeopus (Whimbrel). Fifteen were seen at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March and 3 there on 12 April 1963.

Actitis macularia (Spotted Sandpiper). Five were seen at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March 1963; and one was seen from the Fort Amador Causeway on 5 March 1962. We have no later spring records for this abundant winter resident except for one specimen still in basic plumage seen along a river near Ailigandi, one of the San Blas Islands, on 5 May 1963.

Catoptrophorus semipalmatus (Willet). Twenty were seen at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March and 10 there on 12 April 1963.

Totanus melanoleucus (Greater Yellowlegs). Ten were seen at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March 1963.

Erolia minutilla (Least Sandpiper). We noted 85 at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March 1963.

Ereunetes pusillus (Semipalmated Sandpiper). Ten were seen at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March 1963.

Ereunetes mauri (Western Sandpiper). Five were seen at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March and they were "fairly numerous" there on 12 April 1963.

PHALAROPIDAE

A flock of about 30 unidentified phalaropes were observed sitting on the calm surface of the Bay of Panama between Flamenco Island and Taboga Island on 13 April 1963. Mr. Eugene Eisenmann informs us that only two phalaropes have been reported from Panama: *Steganopus tricolor* (Wilson's Phalarope) in autumn on the Caribbean coast; and *Lobipes lobatus* (Northern Phalarope) sighted in the Bay of Panama on migration.

LARIDAE

Larus atricilla (Laughing Gull). These gulls were present throughout spring around the Pacific terminus, though we made few records of their presence or activities. On 12 April 1963, however, we noted a striking congregation of Laughing Gulls on the rocks off Panama Viejo beach; these birds were in all varieties of plumages and molts, from fully basic to completely alternate.

Thalasseus maximus (Royal Tern). Ten were seen at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March 1963. One was seen in Bocas del Drago Bay, Bocas del Toro Province, on 20 May 1963, from the M/V *Pelican*.

Thalasseus sandvicensis (Sandwich Tern). One was seen at Panama Viejo beach on 3 March 1963. A banded specimen was picked up by Dr. Nathan Gale on Albrook Air Force Base on 25 May 1963; this individual was banded as a "young" bird, 15 July 1962, on Chandleur Island, La.

TYRANNIDAE

Tyrannus tyrannus (Eastern Kingbird). A few were first noted near Gamboa on 12 March

1963. Olson saw a flock of about 75 feeding on berries in a jungle area behind Curundu on 27 March. On 30 March we saw several flocks near Gamboa, and one was seen there on 2 May 1963. A flock of about 20 birds was seen at Fort Clayton on 3 May; 10 others were observed there on 11 May. Dr. Nathan Gale caught and banded three specimens in the woods behind Corozal on 11 May.

Myiarchus crinitus (Great Crested Flycatcher). Olson banded one specimen and heard others at Almirante on 7 April 1963. Mr. Eustorgio Mendez of the Gorgas Laboratory banded 15 of this species in the period 20-25 April 1963 at Almirante.

Empidonax virens (Acadian Flycatcher). Specimens were taken (one each day) on 25 April and 11 May 1963 in jungle behind Curundu. Their identity was verified by Mr. Eugene Eisenmann of the American Museum of Natural History, for which, along with many other courtesies, we are deeply indebted to him. Both birds were "fat" and with undeveloped gonads.

Contopus virens (Eastern Wood Pewee). One bird was banded and another collected from the Gorgas nets at Almirante by Olson on 11 April 1963; the specimen was "medium fat".

HIRUNDINIDAE

There are several species of North American swallows present in Panama as migrants. There are also a number of local species plus migrants from South America in this small country. Thus, without birds in the hand, their identification is often quite problematic; and so we are reluctant to publish many of our "records" at this time. However, we do have several unquestionable records of interest of the Barn Swallow which follow.

Hirundo rustica (Barn Swallow). Several were seen flying in the Almirante area by Olson on 12 April 1963. At least one bird of this species was identified among a large flock of swallows at Fort Clayton on 12 May 1963. Loftin observed large numbers flying over the bay near Bocas del Toro and Bocas del Drago every morning and evening, 18-21 May 1963, from the M/V *Pelican*; these birds were

invariably flying low across the water toward nearby Costa Rica. On 2 June 1963, a flock of Barn Swallows was seen hawking over the Gatun Dam area.

MIMIDAE

Dumetella carolinensis (Catbird). In the period 6-11 April 1963, Olson took 37 Catbirds in the Gorgas nets at Almirante. One specimen which died in the net was so excessively fat that a study skin could not be made from it. Gorgas personnel later captured a number of Catbirds in the Almirante area; they will publish these data elsewhere. Though considered a "rare winter visitor" in the Canal Zone area (Eisenmann, 1952), it is one of the most abundant winter residents about Almirante. We banded one specimen in the jungle area near Curundu on 20 March 1963.

VIREONIDAE

Vireo olivaceus (Red-eyed Vireo). Between bandings by Olson (8-11 April) and Gorgas Laboratory personnel (17 April-13 May), we have records for the Red-eyed Vireo at Almirante over a good portion of the 1963 spring migratory period, with 108 specimens banded. These records show two rather distinct migratory highs during this time. From 8-17 April, no more than 5 and usually fewer birds were caught per day in the Gorgas nets; but on 18-19 April, 10 birds per day were taken. Thereafter through 27 April, specimens taken fluctuated from 1 to 6 daily. Then 18 Red-eyed Vireos were netted on 28 April, 16 on 29 April, and 10 on 30 April. After this date through 13 May, when vireos were last recorded, no more than 2 specimens daily were netted.

PARULIDAE

Helmitheros vermivorus (Worm-eating Warbler). Olson took one specimen at Almirante on 8 April 1963. Gorgas personnel banded one at Almirante on 23 April 1963.

Vermivora chrysoptera (Golden-winged

Warbler). Gorgas personnel banded 2 at Almirante on 18 April 1963.

Vermivora peregrina (Tennessee Warbler). Gorgas personnel banded 6 at Almirante, 18-24 April 1963.

Dendroica petechia (Yellow Warbler). One male was banded in jungle behind Curundu on 3 March 1963.

Dendroica coronata (Myrtle Warbler). We have rather numerous records of this species for February, which is not considered "spring" for the purposes of this paper. However, we suspect that returning migrants are probably gathering here during this month of their apparent greatest abundance in Panama. Mr. Eugene Eisenmann informs us that they are recorded in Panama from November to March. On 8 March 1963 we observed a single specimen at Tonosi, Los Santos Province, our only record for that month.

Dendroica castanea (Bay-breasted Warbler). One was banded in woods behind Albrook Field on 5 March 1963. This bird was in basic (winter) plumage.

Seiurus aurocapillus (Ovenbird). Five were banded by Gorgas personnel at Almirante, 15-25 April 1963.

Seiurus noveboracensis (Northern Waterthrush). One was seen feeding among the rocks of the Flamenco Island beach on 5 March 1962. Ten were banded by Olson and Gorgas personnel, 8-20 April 1963, at Almirante.

Oporornis formosus (Kentucky Warbler). Six were banded by Gorgas personnel at Almirante, 16-24 April 1963.

Oporornis philadelphia (Mourning Warbler). One was banded in jungle near Gamboa on 30 March 1963. Olson captured three in the Gorgas nets at Almirante on 10 April 1963. Gorgas personnel banded 12 at Almirante, 17-24 April 1963.

Icteria virens (Yellow-breasted Chat). Three were banded by Gorgas personnel at Almirante, 17-22 April 1963.

Wilsonia canadensis (Canada Warbler). Olson took one specimen at Almirante on 10 April 1963. Six were banded by Gorgas personnel at Almirante, 22-25 April 1963.

Setophaga ruticilla (American Redstart).

One was banded by Gorgas personnel at Almirante on 16 April 1963.

ICTERIDAE

Icterus galbula (Baltimore Oriole). Numerous birds were seen at the edge of woods near Gamboa, 30 March 1963. One was banded by Gorgas personnel at Almirante on 23 April 1963.

THRAUPIDAE

Piranga rubra (Summer Tanager). Olson and Gorgas personnel banded 17 specimens at Almirante, 7-22 April 1963.

FRINGILLIDAE

Phaeucticus ludovicianus (Rose-breasted Grosbeak). Two were banded by Gorgas personnel at Almirante, 20-22 April 1963.

Passerina cyanea (Indigo Bunting). Olson and Gorgas personnel banded 9 specimens at Almirante, 8-22 April 1963. Olson took an adult male in woods near Albrook Field on 18 May 1963.

Passerina ciris (Painted Bunting). Olson took a female at Almirante on 9 April 1963. Gorgas personnel banded 2 specimens at Almirante, 21-23 April 1963.

Spiza americana (Dickcissel). Numerous large flocks of Dickcissels in alternate (summer) plumage were seen along the highway near Chepo, Panama Province, on 12 April 1962; a single discharge from a 12-gauge shotgun brought down more than a score of birds from one such flock. One bird was banded by Gorgas personnel at Almirante on 21 April 1963.

REFERENCES

- EISENMANN, EUGENE. 1952. Annotated list of birds of Barro Colorado Island, Panama Canal Zone. *Smithson. Misc. Coll.*, 117: 1-62.
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