

FIRST REPORT OF VIRGINIA'S WARBLER FROM THE BAHAMA ISLANDS, WITH  
COMMENTS ON OTHER RECORDS FROM THE WEST INDIES AND EASTERN NORTH  
AMERICA

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The Virginia's Warbler (*Vermivora virginiae*) breeds in the mainly arid mountainous region of the interior western United States, usually above 2,000 m, and normally migrates down the spine of the North American continent to winter in the highlands of western Mexico north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (American Ornithologists' Union 1983). We report the first observation of this species from the Bahama Islands and relate our sighting to the relatively few other records east of its normal range.

On 8 March 1993, we took a mid-day break from studying birds in the Grand Bahama Island pinelands and visited Dover Sound Observation Hill (26°36'N, 78°38'W), a spoil mound at the northeastern end of the man-made Grand Lucayan Waterway. Topping out about 25 m above its surroundings and with a small adjacent artificial park and access road, the hill lies within an extensive region of mostly small red mangroves (*Rhizophora mangle*) on the northern coast of Grand Bahama. The hill is thickly vegetated along its slopes with shrubs and small trees, especially seagrape (*Coccoloba uvifera*) and poisonwood (*Metopium toxiferum*). When we "pished" from the top of the hill, several birds popped into view from among the vegetation along the northwestern slope, including Yellow Warblers (*Dendroica petechia*) and Palm Warblers (*Dendroica palmarum*). Among these was a different warbler which scolded repeatedly with an unfamiliar, loud and liquid "chip" note. It remained nearby for as long as we were present (at least 15 minutes) and repeatedly was attracted to the 4-m focus distance of our 10x40 binoculars. All observers had leisurely views, and PWS took field notes.

The warbler, about 11 cm in length, was clearly a *Vermivora* based on its overall size and shape, and its sharp, rather wedge-shaped bill with slightly decurved culmen. It was mostly gray above and dull grayish white below, except for a prominent pure yellow patch on the middle of the breast. It also had a bright, deep yellow rump and undertail coverts, the yellow essentially forming a band around the base of the body. The flight feathers and retrices were darker brownish gray than the rest of the body. The eye-ring was prominently white, and a small chestnut patch was evident in the center of the crown whenever the bird showed agitation. Its legs and bill were mostly dark horn, the lower mandible slightly paler than the upper. We identified this bird as a Virginia's Warbler based on our experience with the species in western North America and from the National Geographic Society (1987) field guide, later also from Ridgway (1902). The

individual we saw looked much like the color photograph of a Virginia's Warbler in Farrand (1983).

No records apparently have been published of Virginia's Warbler in Central America south or east of their normal wintering range, which extends to the vicinity of Nejapa, Oaxaca, Mexico (16°37'N, 96°01'W), at an elevation of ca. 1,000 m (Binford 1989). However, another recent sighting of a Virginia's Warbler in the West Indies is surprisingly similar to ours: one well-described from coastal mangroves about 60 km sw of Havana, Cuba, on 2 March 1989 (Wunderle et al. 1992). Virginia's Warblers are rare but regular visitors, especially in autumn, along the Pacific coast of California (Roberson 1980), but they are seldom reported in continental North America east of the Rocky Mountain foothills. There nevertheless are at least four substantiated records of this species more than 1,000 km east of its normal range: a male collected near Lake Erie at Pt. Pelee, Ontario, on 16 May 1958 (Dow 1962); a female photographed in the hand near Dearborn, Michigan, ca. 80 km northwest of Pt. Pelee, on 13 May 1993 (M. Harhold in Kaufman 1993); one photographed in the hand along the mid-Atlantic seaboard at Island Beach, New Jersey, on 6 October 1962 (F. Homick in French 1963, Adams 1968); and one collected near the Gulf of Mexico northwest of Cameron, Louisiana, on 17 December 1988 (S.W. Cardiff in Muth 1989). At least seven sight reports of Virginia's Warblers near the ca. 200-km arc of the Gulf of Mexico between Galveston, Texas, and Cameron, Louisiana, were also published in *American Birds* between 1979 and 1990, both for autumn (September to November) and spring (April), as was another photographic report from Island Beach, New Jersey, on 24 September 1966 (Scott and Cutler 1967) which we were unable to verify. This pattern overall seems insufficient to assess whether the March reports of Virginia's Warblers from the West Indies might represent displaced winter residents or migrants. Birds at the southern end of this species' normal wintering range in Oaxaca have been noted only through mid February (Binford 1989), but the Mexican data are few.

Because it is a relatively little-visited region, either historically by collecting ornithologists or more recently by modern birders, the northern West Indies may harbor many little-suspected avian phenomena. Patterns are only likely to emerge as more data become available. Townsend's Warblers (*Dendroica townsendi*), for example, normally also found mainly in the mountains of Western North America, have been photographed on Grand Bahama Island, 28 April

1984 (A. Edwards in Norton 1984), and on Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos Islands, 19 January 1986 (G. Rosenberg in Pashley 1988). There also are at least seven records of reports of Townsend's Warblers in nearby Florida, but none of Virginia's Warblers (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992). Although we did not find this individual to be so, Virginia's Warblers have a reputation for being shy and retiring (Bent 1953). The few reports east of this species' normal range may simply reflect those characters, in contrast to the greater number of eastern records of less furtive western species like Townsend's Warblers.

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### FIRST RECORD OF THE RUFF (*PHILOMACHUS PUGNAX*) FOR ANTIGUA-BARBUDA

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On 23 September 1993 at 18:00 hr, Kevel Lindsay and I were watching a Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) in the wet cow-meadows to the east of the Jolly Harbour construction area on Antigua's west coast, when a large wader flew in with several Pectoral Sandpipers (*Calidris melanotos*) and alighted in deep grass in an open storm drain. Almost immediately, the larger bird took flight, going north with the sandpipers. I observed that the larger bird had no wing bars, but had distinct white outer upper-tail coverts. I re-located the bird, with little or none of the standing bird's body visible

behind long grass, but again it flushed from a considerable distance and I was unable to closely examine it.

At 06:00 the following morning, I found the bird at the same site as the previous day, but now it was less wary and allowed a close approach. I determined the bird to be a juvenile male Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*). The Ruff made occasional short flights, "hanging" in the air on landing, and thereby clearly displaying the white axillaries and underwing feathers, with the characteristic "horseshoe" upper tail pattern. It fed among a Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mex-*