

## TWO NEW BIRD SPECIES FOR ARUBA, WITH NOTES ON OTHER SIGNIFICANT SIGHTINGS

STEVEN G. MLODINOW

*Puget Sound Bird Observatory, 5501 17th Ave NE, Seattle, WA 98105, USA;  
email: sgmlod@aol.com*

**Abstract:** A visit to Aruba during late October and early November 2007 yielded two species previously unrecorded there: Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*) and Bay-breasted Warbler (*Dendroica castanea*). Three other species recorded only once before on Aruba were detected, and several other species considered rare to casual were noted. Aruba's potential for attracting highly unusual birds is demonstrated by the Cinnamon Teal, whereas the underlying low intensity of ornithological coverage is revealed by the fact that Bay-breasted Warbler was unrecorded there while being a fairly common non-breeding resident in nearby northern Venezuela. The island's potential for attracting exceptional rarities is reviewed. All photographs taken are on file at the University of Amsterdam, Department of Zoology.

**Key words:** *Anas cyanoptera*, Aruba, *Dendroica castanea*, new bird records

**Resumen:** DOS NUEVAS ESPECIES DE AVES PARA ARUBA, CON NOTAS SOBRE OTRAS OBSERVACIONES IMPORTANTES. Una visita a Aruba a fines de octubre y principios de noviembre de 2007 rindió dos especies no registradas anteriormente: *Anas cyanoptera* y *Dendroica castanea*. Se detectaron otras tres especies registradas una sola vez antes en Aruba, y varias otras especies consideradas entre raras y casuales. El potencial de Aruba para atraer aves altamente inusuales se demuestra por la Cerceta, mientras que la baja intensidad subyacente de la cobertura ornitológica es revelada por el hecho de que *D. castanea* no había sido registrada allí, mientras era un residente no reproductor bastante común en el cercano norte de Venezuela. El potencial de la isla para atraer rarezas excepcionales es revisado. Todas las fotografías están en los archivos de la Universidad de Amsterdam, Departamento de Zoología.

**Palabras clave:** *Anas cyanoptera*, Aruba, *Dendroica castanea*, nuevos registros de aves

**Résumé :** DEUX NOUVELLES ESPÈCES D'OISEAUX POUR ARUBA, AVEC DES NOTES SUR LES AUTRES OBSERVATIONS IMPORTANTES. Une visite à Aruba fin octobre début novembre 2007 a permis d'observer deux nouvelles espèces: la Sarcelle cannelle (*Anas cyanoptera*) et la Paruline à poitrine baie (*Dendroica castanea*). Trois autres espèces jusqu'alors observées une seule fois à Aruba, ont également été détectées. Plusieurs autres espèces considérées comme rares à occasionnelles ont été notées. Le potentiel d'Aruba à attirer des oiseaux tout à fait inhabituels est démontré par la Sarcelle cannelle. La faible pression d'observation est révélée par le fait que la Paruline à poitrine baie n'était pas encore notée alors que l'espèce est un résident non-nicheur assez commun non loin de là, au nord du Venezuela. Le potentiel de l'île pour attirer des raretés exceptionnelles est révisé. Toutes les photographies prises sont conservées à l'Université d'Amsterdam, Département de zoologie.

**Mots clés :** *Anas cyanoptera*, Aruba, *Dendroica castanea*, nouvelles données

I explored Aruba from 27 October to 2 November 2007, during which I encountered two species not previously recorded on Aruba and three species detected only once before. My efforts were concentrated at Bubali Bird Sanctuary, Tierra del Sol Golf Course, Spanish Lagoon, and the flooded saltflats and small marshes between Eagle Beach (near Bubali) and Malmok (near Tierra del Sol). Notably, October and November are two of the wettest months on Aruba, averaging 65 and 94 mm of rainfall per annum, respectively. This was evidenced by daily downpours which were often quite intense but typically relatively brief (< 30 min); sometimes these were accompanied by the apparent sudden appearance of migrant passerines, especially Black-

poll Warblers (*Dendroica striata*). The increased rainfall led to a more verdant landscape than I had encountered during prior spring visits plus more water in pans and depressions along the northwest coast (from Palm Beach to Malmok). An apparent consequence was that passerines migrants were scattered more widely across the thorn-scrub forest rather than concentrated at the perennially moist woodlands around Bubali and Spanish Lagoon.

The Bubali Bird Sanctuary and the lake at Tierra del Sol Golf Course provide the only significant permanent freshwater habitat on this arid island. Bubali was created in 1972 to handle sewage outflow from the island's resorts and hotels. The resultant marsh is about 1 km long and 0.5 km wide,

with most of the area covered by cattails (*Typha* spp.) and water lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*). On the marsh's west shore, there is a line of broadleaf trees with a canopy ranging mostly from 3-6 m in height. The golf course lake is Y-shaped and, when full, about 1 km long and 0.25 km wide. This lake provides muddy and grassy edges as well as a strip of *Typha* marsh. Presumably the level of the lake is dependent on run-off from the golf course and precipitation. Indeed, the water level was approximately 0.4 m higher than it was during our spring visits. Spanish Lagoon is a brackish 1 km cut into the island's interior and is the most prominent mangrove swamp on Aruba. Some of the flooded areas between Eagle Beach and Malmok sported *Typha* clumps (smaller than 1000 m<sup>2</sup>), which are apparently temporary (E. Biemans pers. comm.).

All photographs taken are on file at the University of Amsterdam, Department of Zoology.

#### FIRST RECORDS

##### CINNAMON TEAL (*ANAS CYANOPTERA*)

On 30 October 2007, I was studying approximately 50 Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) along the edge of the Tierra del Sol Golf Course pond. I noticed a teal that was warmer brown in color than the nearby female Blue-winged Teals and that also had a dull face pattern (faint post-ocular stripe, no whitish loreal spot, and no eye-ring), and a larger, more spatulate bill than the other teal. I then noted that the eye was bright red, fully eliminating Blue-winged Teal and confirming it as a Cinnamon Teal. I reached for my camera, and the bird immediately started swimming slowly towards the sun, resulting in photographs that were minimally revealing, but do demonstrate the bill shape and, perhaps, the weakness of the facial pattern and the red eye. Given the presence of nearby Blue-winged Teal, I was able to compare the above marks, perhaps most importantly the bill size and shape, directly with that of Blue-winged Teals. The plumage coloration combined with a bright red eye was most consistent with a first-year male, the eyes of which typically turn red by about eight weeks of age (Johnsgard 1975). Apparently the claim by Restall *et al.* (2006) that Cinnamon Teal is an occasional winter visitor on Bonaire is uncorroborated (Tineke Prins pers. comm.). Therefore, there were no prior documented records of Cinnamon Teal from the ABC Islands—Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (Prins *et al.* 2009).

There are five subspecies of Cinnamon Teal, the most numerous and migratory of which is the north-

ern race, *A. c. septentrionalium*, which breeds across much of western North America and migrates south into Central America, occasionally as far south as Panama (Madge and Burn 1986, Evarts 2005). Farther south, *septentrionalium* is considered a very rare visitor, October to April, in northern Colombia and has been recorded once in Venezuela (Hilty and Brown 1986, Hilty 2003). Of the four South American races, only one is migratory, *A. c. cyanoptera*, which migrates north to central Brazil and coastal Peru (Madge and Burn 1988). There are two resident races in the mountains of Colombia, neither of which has strayed even to Venezuela. There are no records of Cinnamon Teal for Trinidad and Tobago (Kenefick *et al.* 2007). In the West Indies, Cinnamon Teal is considered a vagrant, with records as far south as the Virgin Islands, Antigua, and Barbados (Raffaele *et al.* 1998). Females and immature *septentrionalium* and *cyanoptera* are seemingly inseparable in the field (Madge and Burn 1988, Evarts 2005).

##### BAY-BREADED WARBLER (*DENDROICA CASTANEA*)

On 2 November 2007, I was observing birds near the mouth of Spanish Lagoon, an area dominated more by thorn scrub than by mangroves. I noticed a warbler that superficially resembled a Blackpoll Warbler (*Dendroica striata*) but moved more sluggishly and seemed "huskier." Further inspection revealed that the breast was washed in dull yellow and lacked streaking. Additionally, the back was streaked and brighter green than that of the numerous Blackpoll Warblers seen during the preceding week. The legs and feet were all dark. The rear flanks were washed in orange-buff ("bay"), and the undertail coverts were pale yellow. The bill looked huskier than that of a Blackpoll.

In addition to the obvious bay on the flanks and yellowish vent, the dark legs, yellow-green (instead of olive-green) back, unstreaked chest, and heavier bill clearly identify this bird as a Bay-breasted rather than Blackpoll Warbler. Most of these key features can be discerned on several mediocre photographs that were taken.

There are no antecedent records from Aruba, but there are two October records from Curaçao and two October and one April records from Bonaire (Ligon 2006, Prins *et al.* 2009). This paucity of records from the ABC Islands is somewhat surprising as Bay-breasted Warblers are fairly common transients or winter residents in Venezuela from 29 October to 18 March (Hilty 2003).

## ADDITIONAL SIGNIFICANT RECORDS

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK (*DENDROCYGNA ATUMNALIS*)

One was photographed at Palm Beach on 3 November 2007. This constitutes the fourth Aruba record, with prior records occurring 8 July to 10 September (Prins *et al.* 2009). This species is common in northern Venezuela (Hilty 2003), a scarce breeder on Curaçao, and casual on Bonaire (Prins *et al.* 2009).

ROSEATE TERN (*STERNA DOUGALLII*)

Breeds on Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, with almost all records from April into August. I found one perched on the wreck at Malmok on 27 and 28 October 2007. The only other record after August is of a bird on Bonaire on 8 November 1951 (Voous 1983, Prins *et al.* 2009).

RED-EYED VIREO (*VIREO OLIVACEUS*)

One was seen closely at Spanish Lagoon on 28 October 2007, providing Aruba's second record. The first was also from Spanish Lagoon, on 13 March 2005 (Mlodinow 2006). There are ten records from Bonaire and Curaçao, eight of which are from October and November (Prins *et al.* 2009). This species is surprisingly rare on the ABC Islands as migrant Red-eyed Vireos (*V. o. olivaceus*) from North America are fairly common in Venezuela from early September to mid-April, and *V. o. vividior* is a common resident there (Hilty 2003).

PURPLE MARTIN / CUBAN MARTIN (*PROGNE SUBIS* / *P. CRYPTOLEUCA*)

Identification of *Progne* martins in the Caribbean is most challenging. Perhaps most difficult are male Purple and Cuban Martins, which can only be identified in the hand under most circumstances (Raffaele *et al.* 1998). An all dark martin flew over Bubali on 30 October 2007 with 5 other martins. The other martins had a white breast and dark chest and flanks, a pattern more suggestive of Cuban or Caribbean Martin (*P. dominicensis*) than Purple Martin. The dark martin was either a Purple or a Cuban Martin. Voous (1983) lists only one record of a Purple Martin from Aruba, an immature bird photographed at close range on 24 September 1978. Voous (1983) lists five additional records, all adult males, from Bonaire and Curaçao, but his discussion of taxonomy implies that he considered Purple and Cuban Martins to be conspecific. There have been no subsequent records of either Purple or Cu-

ban Martin from Aruba (Prins *et al.* 2009). The winter range of Purple Martin is imperfectly known but appears to lie within the Amazon Basin (American Ornithologists' Union 1998), and it is locally abundant during northbound and southbound migration in northern Venezuela (Hilty 2003). The wintering range of Cuban Martin is currently unknown but appears to be somewhere on the South American continent. There are three specimen records of Cuban Martin during September and October from Curaçao (Prins *et al.* 2009).

CLIFF SWALLOW (*PETROCHELIDON PYRRHONOTA*)

Apparently a rare fall (August through November) and very rare spring migrant on the ABC Islands, with perhaps as few as six records on Aruba since 1983 (Prins *et al.* 2009). I found six near Aruba's southern tip at Colorado Point on 28 October 2007 and two at Bubali on 29 October 2007. In Venezuela, this species is a common southbound migrant, but that country has only one record of a northbound bird (Hilty 2003). This species is likely more numerous during fall on the ABC Islands than currently suspected.

NORTHERN PARULA (*PARULA AMERICANA*)

Three were at Bubali on 27 October 2007 and a fourth on 1 November 2007. I observed a total of 26 Northern Parulas during three visits in March 2003-2005 (Mlodinow 2006). The Northern Parula appears to be an uncommon migrant or winter resident. This is rather surprising as Voous (1983) listed only ten records on the ABC Islands, and it has been recorded only three times in Venezuela (Hilty 2003). Similarly, there are but five records for Trinidad and Tobago (Hayes 2003). Its core wintering range is along the east coast of Mexico and Central America south to Guatemala and from central Florida and the Bahamas through the Greater Antilles and south to the northern Lesser Antilles (American Ornithologists' Union 1998, Raffaele *et al.* 1998).

MAGNOLIA WARBLER (*DENDROICA MAGNOLIA*)

A Magnolia Warbler photographed at Bubali on 27 October 2007 furnished the second record for the ABC Islands. The first was recorded by me at Spanish Lagoon from 28 March to 2 April 2004 (Prins *et al.* 2009). This species winters predominantly in Mexico and Central America south to Panama and in the Greater Antilles (American Ornithologists' Union 1998). There is only one Venezuelan record (Hilty 2003).

OVENBIRD (*SEIURUS AUROCAPILLUS*)

I observed an Ovenbird at Bubali on 27 October 2007, furnishing Aruba's ninth record (Mlodinow 2006). Additionally, Prins *et al.* (2009) lists at least 25 additional records from Bonaire and Curaçao. This species seems to be a regular migrant or winter resident on the ABC Islands. Though not as surprising as the abundance of Northern Parula here, the relative abundance of Ovenbird on these islands is still remarkable. Hilty (2003) lists only eight records from Venezuela. The core wintering range of Ovenbird is from Mexico to Panama and from the Bahamas and Greater Antilles south to the Virgin and Cayman Islands (American Ornithologists' Union 1998, Raffaele *et al.* 1998).

## DISCUSSION

The ABC Islands' current ornithological record contains some apparent contradictions. Some North American migrant passerines (e.g., Northern Parula, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat [*Geothlypis trichas*], and Indigo Bunting [*Passerina cyanea*]) seem far more regular on the ABC Islands than on nearby mainland Venezuela or on Trinidad and Tobago (see also Mlodinow 2006). Conversely, several species of North American migrant passerines (e.g., Red-eyed Vireo, Cliff Swallow, Tennessee Warbler [*Vermivora peregrina*], and Bay-breasted Warbler) that are fairly common or common in Venezuela are rather rare on the ABC Islands (see also Mlodinow 2004, 2006). The latter might be explained by the relatively low level of ornithological scrutiny these islands receive, but the first set of species shows an effect that is opposite of what one would expect from such low-intensity coverage.

Including this visit, I have spent approximately 23 days in the field in Aruba during four week-long trips. During these visits, I have detected 13 new species for Aruba, six of which were new for the ABC Islands (Mlodinow 2004, 2006). Some of these were of species that were actually expected and thus "overdue," such as Tennessee Warbler and Bay-breasted Warbler. Other firsts were of species that breed in North America but are exceptionally rare as far south as South America (Green-winged Teal [*Anas crecca*], Ring-necked Duck [*Aythya collaris*], Magnolia Warbler, and Indigo Bunting) and were true vagrants (Mlodinow 2004, 2006). Some first records were of South American species that had wandered north (e.g., Greater Ani [*Crotophaga major*] and Red-breasted Blackbird [*Sturnella militaris*]). Finally, Great Frigatebird (*Fregata minor*) furnished a first Caribbean record

(Mlodinow 2006) and Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) was a westward stray of a European species that has recently colonized the southeast Caribbean and extended that species "range" by 800 km west and southwest (Mlodinow 2004). This startling collection of "firsts" demonstrates that the ABC Islands are relatively poorly covered by field observers *and* that these islands concentrate stray birds, somewhat analogous to the way the Farallon Islands concentrate vagrants off the coast of California. Further evidence of these island's proclivity for attracting rather unexpected strays includes a Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) on Bonaire, 5 July 2001 (Wells and Childs Wells 2002), a bird that should have been no closer than western Texas at that date and no closer than Costa Rica at any date (American Ornithologists' Union 1998); a Guira Cuckoo (*Guira guira*) on Curaçao, 12 June 1954 (Voous 1983), a species that normally does not occur closer than eastern Brazil (Dunning 1987); records of Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) from Curaçao in November 1962 and Bonaire in December 1975, the most southwesterly ever in the Western Hemisphere (American Ornithologists' Union 1998); and two Chilean Swallows (*Tachycineta meyeni*) on Curaçao, 15 May 1977 (Prins *et al.* 2009), a species which typically does not occur north of Bolivia (Dunning 1987). Intense coverage of these islands might uncover an amazing potpourri of unexpected birds.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a great debt of thanks to Tineke Prins of the Zoological Museum at the University of Amsterdam for being my font of knowledge to the birds of the ABC Islands. I also thank Joe Morlan and Ruud van Halewijn for improving this manuscript with their insightful recommendations. Finally, thanks to Susan and Ewald Biemans and the staff of the Bucuti Beach Resort for making my visit a true joy.

## LITERATURE CITED

- AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION. 1998. Checklist of North American birds, 7th edn. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, DC.
- DUNNING, J. S. 1987. South American birds. Harwood Books, Newton Square, PA.
- EVARTS, S. 2005. Cinnamon Teal *Anas Cyanoptera*. Pp. 549-553 *in*: Ducks, geese, and swans, vol. 2. (J. Kear, ed.) Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- HAYES, F. E. 2003. First sight record of Northern Parula (*Parula americana*) for Trinidad and a

- fourth record for Tobago. *Journal of Caribbean Ornithology* 16:20-21.
- HILTY, S. L. 2003. *Birds of Venezuela*. 2nd edn. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- HILTY, S. L., AND W. L. BROWN. 1986. *A guide to the birds of Colombia*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- JOHNSGARD, P. A. 1975. *Waterfowl of North America*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.
- KENEFICK, M., R. RESTALL, AND F. HAYES. 2007. *Field guide to the birds of Trinidad and Tobago*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- LIGON, J. 2006. Annotated checklist of birds of Bonaire. [www.bonairediveandadventure.com/Nov%202006%20Annotated%20checklist.pdf](http://www.bonairediveandadventure.com/Nov%202006%20Annotated%20checklist.pdf)
- MADGE, S., AND H. BURN. 1988. *Waterfowl*. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, MA.
- MLODINOW, S. G. 2004. First records of Little Egret, Green-winged Teal, Swallow-tailed Kite, Tennessee Warbler, and Red-breasted Blackbird from Aruba. *North American Birds* 57:559-561.
- MLODINOW, S. G. 2006. Five new species of birds for Aruba, with notes on other significant sightings. *Journal of Caribbean Ornithology* 19:31-35.
- PRINS, T. G., J. H. REUTER, A. O. DEBROT, J. WATTEL, AND V. NIJMAN. 2009. Checklist of the birds of Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire, South Caribbean. *Ardea* 97(2):137-268.
- RAFFAELE, H., J. WILEY, O. GARRIDO, A. KEITH, AND J. RAFFAELE. 1998. *A guide to the birds of the West Indies*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- RESTALL, R., C. RODNER, AND M. LENTINO. 2006. *Birds of northern South America: an identification guide*. Christopher Helm, London.
- VOOUS, K. H. 1983. *Birds of the Netherlands Antilles*. De Walburg Pers, Utrecht, Netherlands.
- WELLS J. V., AND A. M. CHILDS WELLS. 2002. Extreme extralimital summer record of Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) from Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles. *Cotinga* 18:96-97.