

SECOND AND THIRD RECORDS OF WESTERN MARSH-HARRIER (*CIRCUS AERUGINOSUS*) FOR THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE IN PUERTO RICO

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Abstract: The Western Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) is an Eurasian species rarely recorded in the Western Hemisphere. We document a female at the Laguna Cartagena National Wildlife Refuge in Puerto Rico from 14 January to 30 March 2004 and an immature at the same locality from 11 January to 11 February 2006. These records represent the second and third for the Western Hemisphere and the first for Puerto Rico.

Key words: *Circus aeruginosus*, distributional records, Puerto Rico, Western Marsh-Harrier

Resumen: SEGUNDO Y TERCER REGISTRO DE AGUILUCHO LAGUNERO OCCIDENTAL (*CIRCUS AERUGINOSUS*) PARA EL HEMISFERIO OCCIDENTAL EN PUERTO RICO. El Aguilucho Lagunero Occidental (*Circus aeruginosus*) es una especie euroasiática raramente registrada en el hemisferio occidental. En este trabajo se documenta una hembra en el Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Laguna Cartagena en Puerto Rico entre el 14 de junio al 30 de marzo del 2004, y un inmaduro en esa misma localidad entre el 11 de enero y el 11 de febrero de 2006. Estos registros representan el segundo y tercero para el hemisferio occidental y el primero para Puerto Rico.

Palabras clave: Aguilucho Lagunero Occidental, *Circus aeruginosus*, Puerto Rico, registros de distribución

Résumé : DEUXIEME ET TROISIEME OBSERVATIONS DE BUSARD DES ROSEAUX (*CIRCUS AERUGINOSUS*) POUR L'HEMISPHERE OCCIDENTAL A PORTO RICO. Le Busard des roseaux (*Circus aeruginosus*) est une espèce européenne rarement observée dans l'hémisphère occidental. Nous fournissons des informations sur l'observation d'une femelle à Laguna Cartagena National Wildlife Refuge à Porto Rico du 14 janvier au 30 mars 2004 et d'un immature au même endroit du 11 janvier au 11 février 2006. Il s'agit des deuxième et troisième observations pour l'hémisphère occidental et les premières pour Porto Rico.

Mots-clés : Busard des roseaux, *Circus aeruginosus*, distribution, Porto Rico

THE WESTERN MARSH-HARRIER (*Circus aeruginosus*) is an Eurasian species rarely recorded in the Western Hemisphere. On 4 December 1994, a female Western Marsh-Harrier was reported from Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Virginia, USA (Shedd *et al.* 1998), but lack of photographic documentation led the American Ornithologists' Union to relegate *C. aeruginosus* to the Appendix of the Check-list of North American Birds (AOU 2000). On 11 November 2002, another female Western Marsh-Harrier was found and photographed at Grand Cul-de-Sac Marin on the island of Guadeloupe (Levesque and Malglaive 2004), providing the first fully documented record. The species has shown some propensity to stray, with records from several islands in the eastern Atlantic and the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001). In this note we report the second and third records for the Western Hemisphere, both from Puerto Rico.

OBSERVATIONS

On 14 January 2004, Chris Merkord, John

Faaborg, Wes Bailey, Courtney Kerns, and Kelly Gamble saw a female Western Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) at the Laguna Cartagena National Wildlife Refuge in Puerto Rico. We observed the bird flying over the open water and surrounding marsh. Although it kept the numerous ducks in constant flight it never gave chase. Twice the bird landed in woody vegetation on the edge of the lake, perching just above the ground. We observed the bird at midday for approximately 15 minutes using Swarovski EL 8.5×42 binoculars, Leica binoculars, and a Bushnell Spacemaster 60mm spotting scope with a 22× wide angle lens.

In flight the Western Marsh-Harrier gave the impression of a relatively long-winged, long-tailed raptor of uniform dark brown coloration. The bird's flight was buoyant as it glided, swooped, and hovered with legs extended below. The rump was a lighter shade of brown, contrasting slightly with the darker back and tail. Although we could not see any barring on either side of the squared, apparently uniformly brown tail, the photos do show 4 to 5 dark bars on the underside of the tail (Fig. 1). One



Fig. 1. Female Western Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) at Laguna Cartagena, Puerto Rico, 25 January 2004. Video stills by R. Rodríguez.

observer remarked on a pale area at the base of the primaries on the underside of the wing. Whitish spots were evident at the proximal leading edge of the wing when viewed head-on, although we did not note the entire leading edge of the wings to be pale, as characteristic of females of this species. Most striking was the cream-colored crown extending from the bill to the nape, passing just above the eyes. A slightly less striking but still noticeable cream-colored throat contrasted with the dark mask through the eyes.

Local birders reported a dark-rumped harrier in the area as early as 27 December 2003 (S. Colón pers. comm.). On 25 January 2004, Rafy Rodríguez observed a harrier matching our description at Laguna Cartagena and obtained video footage of the bird with a handheld digital video camera. Stills of that video are presented here (Fig. 1). Reports of a Western Marsh-Harrier at Laguna Cartagena conti-

nued to 30 March 2004 (S. Colón pers. comm.).

On 11 January 2006, John Faaborg and others saw a similarly-plumaged bird, again at Laguna Cartagena. Written descriptions and photographs by Rafy Rodríguez (Fig. 2), taken on 11 February 2006, show a darker overall coloration and lack of white on the leading edge of the wings, consistent with a juvenile Western Marsh-Harrier (Beaman and Madge 1998) and noticeably different than the adult female from the 2004 sightings. The 2006 sightings would thus appear to represent a separate individual from the 2004 sightings.

DISCUSSION

The 2004 and 2006 sightings represent the second and third documented records, respectively, of *C. aeruginosus* for the New World. Only two other species of Eurasian raptors have been reported from the Caribbean region. A specimen of a Eurasian



Fig. 2. Juvenile Western Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) at Laguna Cartagena, Puerto Rico, 11 February 2006. Photos by R. Rodríguez.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) was taken in Martinique on 9 December 1949 (Pinchon and Vaurie 1961), and one was photographed in Trinidad during 17 December 2003 to 1 January 2004 (Kenefick and Hayes 2006). A Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) was found in Dominica on 19 April 1999 (Norton *et al.* 2003), and a second was found in the British Virgin Islands in mid-October 1999 (Mazar Barnett and Kirwan 2002). See Ebels (2002) for a summary of sightings of 42 other Palearctic species in the Caribbean region.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Javier Mercado and Matthew Anderson for help with identification and Wayne Arendt, Christopher Conner, Stacy Small, Jennifer White, and an anonymous reviewer for reviewing this manuscript.

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