

OCCURRENCE OF AN OVER-WINTERING CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER  
(*DENDROICA PENNSYLVANICA*) ON ST. MARTIN, LESSER ANTILLES

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*Abstract:*—We report the first record of Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*) for St. Martin, Lesser Antilles. On 12 February 2002 at Pic Paradis, the bird was trapped in a mist-net and banded. This species is rare in the Greater Antilles and few records exist from the Lesser Antilles.

*Key words:* Chestnut-sided Warbler, *Dendroica pensylvanica*, Lesser Antilles, mist-netting, record, St. Martin

*Resumen:*—PRESENCIA DE LA REINITA FLANQUICASTAÑA (*DENDROICA PENNSYLVANICA*) EN SAN MARTÍN, ANTILLAS MENORES, FUERA DE LA ÉPOCA DE INVIERNO. Reportamos el primer registro de *Dendroica pensylvanica* en San Martín, Antillas Menores. El 12 de febrero de 2002 el ave fue atrapada en una malla de niebla y anillada. Esta especie es rara en las Antillas Mayores y muy pocos registros existen para las Antillas Menores.

*Palabras clave:* Antillas Menores, captura en malla de niebla, *Dendroica pensylvanica*, registro, Reinita Flanquicastaña, San Martín

ON 12 FEBRUARY 2002, while running a mist-netting station for Environmental Protection in the Caribbean (EPIC) at Pic Paradis, St. Martin, we trapped a second-year female Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*) in one of our nets. The bird was only observed while being banded and was not seen before or after this event. The bird was banded (USFWS band #2250-79431), measured, photographed, and then released. This is the first record of this species in St. Martin and is one of few records for the Lesser Antilles.

#### DESCRIPTION

Having the bird in the hand gave us ample opportunity to check all field marks. This warbler species was yellowish-green from the top of the head to the rump area. The feathers on the lower back and on the upper-tail coverts had indistinct black centers. The upper-wing was also yellowish-green with some darker green on the primaries. The wing showed two relatively distinct white wing-bars. The bird had a gray face with a distinct white eye-ring. The chin of the bird, the chest, and upper belly were a dull gray. The flanks were also gray with no hint of chestnut. The main center belly and lower parts were whiter than the chest region. The outer retrices and outer primaries of the bird were truncate. The bird's legs were ashen gray. There was little white on the outer retrices, indicating it as a second-year female. No call was heard from the bird. The relaxed wing chord of the bird measured 58 mm. The weight of the bird was 9.0 g and it had no apparent

fat stores. The bird had no significant body molt or flight feather molt. Flight feather wear was moderate.

#### DISCUSSION

The Chestnut-sided Warbler is a long-distance migrant that breeds in central-eastern North America and migrates either along the Gulf Coast of the United States or flies across the Gulf of Mexico to the Yucatan Peninsula. Over-wintering normally takes place in Panama, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. The species has been recorded over-wintering as far south as Ecuador, as east as Venezuela, and as far north as Mexico (Curson *et al.* 1994, Dunn and Garrett 1997). Additionally, the species has been recorded with increasing regularity in the Greater Antilles. Chestnut-sided Warbler is now considered an uncommon over-wintering resident in Cuba, and is recorded as rare, but regular in the Bahamas, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, and the Cayman Islands. Chestnut-sided Warbler is exceedingly rare in the Lesser Antilles, where it has been recorded on Antigua, Guadeloupe, Dominica, Barbados, and St. Vincent. The bird also is recorded regularly from Isla San Andrés in the southwestern Caribbean, where these birds are most likely straying from Central America and Venezuela (Curson *et al.* 1994, Dunn and Garrett 1997, Raffaele 1989, Raffaele *et al.* 1998, Bond 1985, Brudenell-Bruce 1975, Voous 1983, Evans 1990). West Indian records indicate this species in the region from as early as 3 September and as late as 11 May (Bond

1985).

The Chestnut-sided Warbler banded on St. Martin was trapped within a secondary dry forest, consisting mainly of breadfruit trees (*Artocarpus communis*), cocoa (*Theobroma casao*), mango (*Mangifera indica*), and royal palm (*Roystonea regia*) (Seddon and Lennox 1980). Additionally, a seasonal stream and a year-round spring are found within this forest. On over-wintering grounds in Central America, the Chestnut-sided Warbler prefers second-growth forest and is often found in second-growth habitat margins, within shrubs or cleared areas. They are usually found singly on over-wintering habitat (Curson *et al.* 1994, Dunn and Garrett 1997). Within the West Indies, the species is usually found in well-forested areas (Raffaele 1989).

In North America, the Chestnut-sided Warbler has experienced a steady decline in abundance on its breeding grounds (Curson *et al.* 1994). The decline of long-distance migrants because of fragmented habitat, less abundance of food sources than in the past, and rampant pesticide use has been well documented (Terborgh 1989, 1992; Hagen and Johnston 1992; Finch and Stangel 1993).

#### CONCLUSIONS

Research into the status of long-distance migrants that over-winter in the West Indies should be a priority. Banding studies coupled with regular standardized point counts should be conducted within the region. Regional island officials should be made increasingly aware of the role each island, and the region as a whole, plays in the over-wintering requirements of Neotropical-Nearctic species, such as the Chestnut-sided Warbler. Increased study on over-wintering migrant passerines in St. Martin has indicated a greater abundance than was previously recorded for many warbler species, including Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*), Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*), Northern Parula (*Parula americana*), Cape May Warbler (*Dendroica tigrina*), Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens*), Myrtle Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*), Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*), Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*), Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*), Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*), and American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*) (EPIC, unpub. data). The abundance of these species might have been overlooked in the past, or it might be due to an increased presence of these birds in the region during the winter. As more research programs begin within the West Indies, we will not only gain knowledge about

the populations of over-wintering birds in the region, but will also begin to better manage their rapidly disappearing habitat.

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