

The Journal of Caribbean Ornithology

RESEARCH NOTE

Vol. 31:34–37. 2018

Notable bird records from Hispaniola and associated
islands, including four new species

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Photo: Pedro Genaro Rodríguez

Notable bird records from Hispaniola and associated islands, including four new species

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Abstract Recent work on Hispaniola and associated islands has provided observations of four new species not previously formally recorded, including Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*), Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*), Philadelphia Vireo (*Vireo philadelphicus*), and Pin-tailed Whydah (*Vidua macroura*). In addition, six species considered vagrants to Hispaniola have been reported, including Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*), Bonaparte's Gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*), White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*), Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*), Nashville Warbler (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*), and Mourning Warbler (*Geothlypis philadelphia*), and the status of one additional species, Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) has been changed by evidence of nesting in the Dominican Republic.

Keywords Dominican Republic, Haiti, Hispaniola, Navassa Island

Resumen Registros importantes de aves en La Española e islas asociadas, incluyendo cuatro nuevas especies—Trabajos recientes en La Española e islas asociadas han proporcionado observaciones de cuatro nuevas especies no registradas previamente, incluyendo Zarapito Americano (*Numenius americanus*), Pardela Cenicienta (*Calonectris diomedea*), Vireo de Filadelfia (*Vireo philadelphicus*) y Vidua Colicinta (*Vidua macroura*). Además, se han reportado seis especies consideradas vagabundas a La Española, incluyendo Mergansa de Caperuza (*Lophodytes cucullatus*), Gaviota de Bonaparte (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*), Vireo de Ojo Blanco (*Vireo griseus*), Golondrina de Farallón (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*), Ciguíta de Nashville (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*), y Ciguíta Triste (*Geothlypis philadelphia*), y el estado de una especie adicional, Gaviota Pico Corto (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) ha sido cambiado por la evidencia de anidación en la República Dominicana.

Palabras clave Haití, Isla Navassa, La Española, República Dominicana

Résumé Mentions d'oiseaux remarquables sur Hispaniola et sur les îles associées, dont quatre nouvelles espèces—Des travaux récents sur Hispaniola et les îles associées ont permis d'observer quatre nouvelles espèces non répertoriées auparavant, notamment le Courlis à long bec (*Numenius americanus*), le Puffin cendré (*Calonectris diomedea*), le Viréo de Philadelphie (*Vireo philadelphicus*) et la Veuve dominicaine (*Vidua macroura*). En outre, six espèces considérées comme des vagabonds à Hispaniola ont été signalées, dont le Harle couronné (*Lophodytes cucullatus*), le Mouette de Bonaparte (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*), le Viréo aux yeux blancs (*Vireo griseus*), l'Hirondelle à front blanc (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*), la Paruline à joues grises (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*), et la Paruline triste (*Geothlypis philadelphia*), ainsi que le statut d'une autre espèce, la Sterne hansel (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) a été modifié en raison de preuves de nidification en République dominicaine.

Mots clés Haïti, Hispaniola, île de Navassa, République dominicaine

Since the publication of a field guide to the birds of the Dominican Republic and Haiti (Latta *et al.* 2006) and the creation of the national birding trail, the Ruta Barrancolí (Latta and Wallace 2012), birdwatchers have had access for the first time not only to identification guides, but also to a relatively up-to-date record of the status of birds known to occur on Hispaniola. One result

of this knowledge has been the relatively dramatic growth in the number of new and unusual birds formally reported from the island in recent years (Landestoy *et al.* 2007, Dhondt and Dhondt 2008, Rimmer *et al.* 2008, Mejía *et al.* 2009, Ortiz *et al.* 2012, Paulino *et al.* 2013, Curti *et al.* 2014, Townsend *et al.* 2015).

Here we provide details on four additional new species for Hispaniola, as well as observations of six species considered vagrants to Hispaniola, and a change in the status of one additional species.

Lophodytes cucullatus (Hooded Merganser)

On 4 December 2010, a British birding group with Kate Wal-

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lace's Tody Tours (Rabo de Gato, DR) visited the Cabo Rojo wetlands in southwestern Dominican Republic. Ann Salinsbury, Kay White, and David White watched four ducks swimming ~100 m away in a saline pool near the coast. Three were female Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*), but the fourth bird was not instantly recognized. This individual was slightly smaller than the scaup, buffy-brown in color, with a fine bill and a crest extending horizontally from the back of the head. Kay and David, experienced observers of "sawbills" and almost all other waterfowl in North America and Europe, quickly identified this duck as a female Hooded Merganser. A field sketch of this bird is available.

The Hooded Merganser is considered a vagrant on Hispaniola (Latta *et al.* 2006). Only one other record, of two individuals, has been recorded. Curiously, this earlier record is also from Cabo Rojo.

***Numenius americanus* (Long-billed Curlew)**

Roland Redmond of Missoula, Montana, USA alerted SCL of a band return record that somehow escaped attention and was not mentioned in either Keith *et al.* (2003) or Latta *et al.* (2006). In the Birds of North America account of the Long-billed Curlew (Dugger and Dugger 2002), mention is made of an individual which was banded by Redmond in Idaho that wintered in Haiti. Details provided by Redmond indicate that this bird was originally banded on 30 May 1979 (band number 0815-89628) ~15 km north of Caldwell, Idaho. The bird was seen subsequently that summer near to where it was banded, but never again in subsequent years. It was, however, shot during the "hunting season" of 1983 (exact date not specified) near Desdunes, Haiti, and the band was returned to the Bird Banding Lab by Gaetan Sergile of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. To Redmond's knowledge, "none of the other curlews that we banded (n = ~350) ever turned up in the Caribbean."

The Long-billed Curlew breeds in the prairies of central North America, and winters along the western and Gulf Coasts of North and Middle America. This species is considered a vagrant in the West Indies, with records only from Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, as well as Antigua (Raffaele *et al.* 1998). This band recovery constitutes the first record for this species from Hispaniola.

***Gelochelidon nilotica* (Gull-billed Tern)**

The Gull-billed Tern is considered a passage migrant and non-breeding visitor to Hispaniola (Keith *et al.* 2003, Latta *et al.* 2006). It is recorded as uncommon in the spring and fall, with transient birds presumably passing to and from nesting colonies in the Bahamas or along the Gulf Coast of North America. It is only occasionally recorded in the summer or the non-breeding season.

On 3 June 2016, Pedro Genaro Rodríguez was exploring Oviedo Lagoon, Pedernales Province, Dominican Republic. There he recorded many Gull-billed Terns flying overhead, identified by their diagnostic pure black, stout bill, while others appeared to be nesting on the ground (Fig. 1). These birds were found sitting on active nests, either incubating eggs or brooding very young chicks. Rodríguez photographed chicks associated with these terns on 11 June and estimated that as many as 20 other nests of this species were present. Rodríguez subsequently recorded



Fig. 1. Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) at Oviedo Lagoon, Pedernales Province, Dominican Republic on 3 June 2016. Active nests were observed for the first time for this species on Hispaniola. Photograph by Pedro Genaro Rodríguez.

this species nesting again at Oviedo in 2017, and at Las Salinas, Baní in 2018.

***Calonectris diomedea* (Cory's Shearwater)**

Navassa Island is a small (5.2 km²), U.S. possession lying 55 km due west of the westernmost point of Haiti. Navassa, which is seldom-visited, has been traditionally included in ornithological studies of Hispaniola because its zoogeographical affinities are primarily Hispaniolan (Keith *et al.* 2003). Cory's Shearwater, a species new to the Hispaniolan region, was reported on Navassa by Grace *et al.* (2000). Cory's Shearwater is uncommonly reported in the Caribbean and its status is unclear due to the bird's habit of ranging far out at sea. Raffaele *et al.* (1998) suggest that the species undoubtedly occurs more frequently than previously thought and likely transits the deep offshore waters of virtually all of the West Indian islands.

***Vireo philadelphicus* (Philadelphia Vireo)**

On 1 March 2010, Giff Beaton, an experienced birder from Georgia, was wandering around looking for birds in the residential section of the Metro Country Club, Juan Dolio, Dominican Republic, a resort complex near Santo Domingo. Giff found that by pishing every time he encountered a little patch of decent habitat he often attracted mixed-species flocks of warblers, vireos, and other species. Amongst the many Northern Parula (*Setophaga americana*), Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*), Black-crowned Palm-Tanager (*Phaenicophilus palmarum*), and Cape May Warbler (*Setophaga tigrina*), Giff found two Philadelphia Vireo, one in each of two flocks. Both were immediately recognized by their size, short tails, short and stubby bills, facial patterns, and yellow throats. Both birds were silent. Knowing that Philadelphia Vireo was an unusual species in the Dominican Republic, Giff took clear photos (Fig. 2) of each individual. Because these two birds were seen ~200 m apart, and because photos of the birds suggest individual differences, two different birds are suspected to have been present.

This is the first record of Philadelphia Vireo for Hispaniola.



Fig. 2. One of two Philadelphia Vireo (*Vireo philadelphicus*) observed and photographed by Giff Beaton on 1 March 2010 near Metro Country Club, Juan Dolio, Dominican Republic. This is the first record for this species on Hispaniola.

The species is considered a rare migrant in the Bahamas, Cuba, and Jamaica, with passage primarily in October, and is a vagrant on the Cayman Islands (Raffaele *et al.* 1998). In addition, Lewis (2007) reported this vireo as part of a large fallout event in western Puerto Rico on 12 October 2005. The species winters principally in Central America (AOU 1998).

***Vidua macroura* (Pin-tailed Whydah)**

A new, introduced species was reported for Hispaniola on 9 July 2013 by a visitor (pers. comm. with SCL). Just east of the White Sands Golf Club House, about 1.5 km from the Vik Hotel Arena Blanca, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, there is a small lake (about 250 m long) and a road named Calle Italia. While photographing Northern Mockingbirds (*Mimus polyglottos*) in this area, a bird with a very long tail suddenly flew along the road. The visitor was able to photograph the bird once while flying, and shot five more photos while the bird was perched momentarily in a little tree about 30 m away (Fig. 3). The bird then continued flying in a westerly direction. After consulting field guides and other birdwatchers, the bird was identified by its unmistakable plumage as an adult male Pin-tailed Whydah. Despite further searching, no other whydahs, either male or female, were seen. Subsequent searches have not been carried out.

The Pin-tailed Whydah is native to much of Africa, but was introduced to Puerto Rico in the 1960s as the result of cage birds escaping or being released. It is considered uncommon but occurs locally around the entire coast of Puerto Rico, and even well into the mountains (Raffaele *et al.* 1998). While this Pin-tailed Whydah may have been an escaped cage bird as well, the likelihood of birds invading from Puerto Rico should not be discounted, and evidence for reproduction of this species on Hispaniola should be sought.

Additional Observations of Vagrants

Grace *et al.* (2000) and Earsom *et al.* (2008) reported 18 new bird species for Navassa Island, including five species that are



Fig. 3. Pin-tailed Whydah (*Vidua macroura*) observed and photographed on 9 July 2013 near Punta Cana, Dominican Republic (pers. comm. with SCL). This is the first record for this species on Hispaniola.

considered vagrant on Hispaniola and associated islands (Latta *et al.* 2006). These included Bonaparte's Gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*), White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*), Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*), Nashville Warbler (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*; three individuals mist-netted), and Mourning Warbler (*Geothlypis philadelphia*; two individuals mist-netted).

Discussion

As bird watching grows in popularity in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and as more tourists are encouraged to visit, opportunities for observations of new and unusual species continue to grow. Here we provide details on observations by a number of bird watchers to document four new bird species for Hispaniola, as well as observations of six species considered vagrants to Hispaniola, and the change in status of Gull-billed Tern to breeding resident. We applaud the efforts of many groups that continue to promote bird watching through education, outreach, and field trips, and we appreciate the efforts of many birders who enthusiastically share their observations and photos.

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Cite this article as:

Latta, S.C., and P.G. Rodríguez. 2018. Notable bird records from Hispaniola and associated islands, including four new species. *Journal of Caribbean Ornithology* 31:34–37. [https:// doi. org/10.55431/jco.2018.31.34-37](https://doi.org/10.55431/jco.2018.31.34-37)