

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE (*ICTERUS BULLOCKII*) ON GRAND BAHAMA: A SECOND RECORD FOR THE WEST INDIES, WITH NOTES ON OTHER VAGRANTS FROM WESTERN AND CENTRAL NORTH AMERICA

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Abstract.— A trip to the Bahamas during late January and early February 2001 yielded six species that are typically associated with central or western North America, the rarest of which was Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*). A review of North American Birds and Christmas Bird Count data reveal that five of those species were present in above average numbers in Florida that same winter.

Key words: Bahama Islands, Bullock's Oriole, Christmas Bird Count, Clay-colored Sparrow, Grand Bahama Island, *Icterus bullockii*, Nashville Warbler, North Andros Island, Orange-crowned Warbler, *Spizella pallida*, *Tyrannus verticalis*, *Vermivora celata*, *Vermivora ruficapilla*, Western Kingbird, Wilson's Warbler

Resumen.—EL BOLSERO DE BULLOCK (*ICTERUS BULLOCKII*) EN GRAND BAHAMA: SEGUNDO REGISTRO PARA LAS INDIAS OCCIDENTALES. Un viaje a las Bahamas a finales de enero y principios de febrero de 2001 produjo seis especies que típicamente son asociadas con el centro u oeste de América del Norte, de las cuales la más rara fue el Bolsero de Bullock (*Icterus bullockii*). Una revisión de datos en North American Birds y Christmas Bird Count revela que cinco de esas especies estuvieron presentes en números por encima de lo común en la Florida ese mismo invierno.

Palabras clave: Bolsero de Bullock, Christmas Bird Count, Gorrión Pálido, *Icterus bullockii*, isla Grand Bahama, isla North Andros, islas Bahamas, Reinita Corona Naranja, Reinita de Nashville, Reinita de Wilson, *Spizella pallida*, Tirano Occidental, *Tyrannus verticalis*, *Vermivora celata*, *Vermivora ruficapilla*

FROM 20 JANUARY to 3 February 2001, I explored the avifauna of North Andros and Grand Bahama Islands. I was rewarded by encounters with a number of unusual species, including several that are normally associated with central or western North America: Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*), Orange-crowned Warbler (*Vermivora celata*), Nashville Warbler (*Vermivora ruficapilla*), Wilson's Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*), Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*), and Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*). The Bullock's Oriole was briefly videotaped and represented a first record for the Bahamas and second record for the West Indies. Below, I provide salient points regarding the oriole's identification and discuss each species' status-and-distribution in the Bahamas and nearby Florida. Several of the aforementioned species occurred in above average numbers in Florida during the winter of 2000–2001. Information on recent annual occurrence of these species was gleaned from *North American Birds/Field Notes* and from Christmas Bird Count (CBC) data. In the Bahamas, only the New Providence Island CBC was run annually. During 1996–1997 and 1997–1998, there were also two CBCs for Andros Island and the Grand Bahama Island CBC had its inaugural run during 2000–2001.

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE ON GRAND BAHAMA ISLAND

On the afternoon of 2 February 2001, I was fortunate enough to encounter a Bullock's Oriole at Grand Bahama Island's "West End." The bird approached as I was "pishing" at a large flock of passerines that included Blue-headed Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*), Wilson's Warbler, and Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) among more common species. I heard the oriole chattering before I was able to see it, and when visual contact was first made, I was surprised to see a bird that looked quite like a Bullock's Oriole. The bird was approximately 10–15 m away in good light. It eventually approached somewhat closer but was directly above me at that time. I was able to obtain brief and mediocre videotape that, nonetheless, helped corroborate the identification.

My initial suspicions were based on two obvious marks: a strong eyeline/supercilium and dull underparts. The eyeline was dark gray and extended through the eye, being broadest and darkest just before and after the eye itself. The supercilium was yellowish and quite distinct. The face was yellow as was the throat and chest, with the intensity of the face coloration being about equal to that of the throat and chest. The belly and undertail coverts were a dull whitish/grayish without any yellow or orange. One other useful mark was observed – the

median coverts possessed a wingbar with a distinctly serrated upper edge. Relating to separation from Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*), the face pattern, and colorless crissum are diagnostic for Bullock's Oriole (A. Jaramillo, pers. comm.), and the median wing-covert pattern is suggestive but not absolutely diagnostic (Lee 1998, Jaramillo 2001). Unfortunately, this bird's upperparts were not seen.

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE IN NORTH AMERICA

The Bullock's Oriole breeds across much of western North America, from southern British Columbia and Saskatchewan south to Baja California, Durango, and Coahuila. This species winters mostly from northern Mexico south to Guatemala (American Ornithologists' Union 1998), but small numbers are regular east to Louisiana. The precise status-and-distribution of Bullock's Orioles in eastern North America is poorly known, partly due to identification issues and partly due to its former conspecific status with Baltimore Oriole. The single prior West Indies record of Bullock's Oriole comes from Vieques, Puerto Rico, on 22 December 1993 (Jaramillo and Burke 1999).

In Florida, the Bullock's Oriole was first reported in 1950 and was later considered widespread, making up "a considerable portion of the wintering population [of Northern Orioles] in northwestern Florida" (Sprunt 1954, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992). Stevenson and Anderson (1994) listed six specimens and three identifiable photos from Florida, spanning 1 October to 4 February. Sight records extended from 31 August to 19 April (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). During 2000, however, the Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee (FOSRC) decided not to include Bullock's Oriole on the state list after finding that two of the aforementioned specimens were misidentified Baltimore Orioles, though their criteria for making these re-identifications were not published (Bowman 2000). The FOSRC later reviewed the remainder of the specimen and photographic record, finding that at least two specimens and two photographs were correctly identified and subsequently added Bullock's Oriole onto the state list (R. Bowman, pers. comm.). Additionally, since then, three more Bullock's Orioles were reported during the 2000–2001 winter, two of which were photographed (Anderson 2001, Cooley 2001).

Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melancephalus*) and Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*) have a similar or more restricted breed-

ing ranges when compared with that of Bullock's Oriole, and both of these species are regular vagrants to Florida. Thus, annual occurrence of Bullock's Oriole in Florida would not be surprising, but such is uncertain at this time. Georgia, just to the north, has only four accepted records (G. Beaton, pers. comm.). For a summary of this species' occurrence elsewhere in eastern North America, see Jaramillo and Burke (1999).

During the winter of 2000–2001, five Bullock's Orioles were reported east of that species' usual range (Anderson 2001, Cooley 2001, Dalzell 2001, Hunt 2001). Only seven total were reported for the preceding four winters combined (West 1997, Hunt 1999, Burgiel *et al.* 2000, Dalzell 2000, Hunt 2000).

OTHER VAGRANTS FROM WESTERN AND CENTRAL NORTH AMERICA

Western Kingbird.—On 23 January 2001, I located a Western Kingbird at the San Andros Airport, North Andros Island. This species is rare-but-regular in the Bahamas, though it occurs primarily during October and November (Brudenell-Bruce 1975, Raffaele *et al.* 1998), and none had been reported during the previous four winters, including CBCs. However, during the 2000–2001 winter, five were found on the New Providence CBC. Also during that winter, Western Kingbirds were considered "plentiful" in peninsular Florida, where this species is locally fairly common (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Anderson 2001).

Orange-crowned Warbler.—I found single Orange-crowned Warblers at two locations on Grand Bahama Island: Queen's Cove on 25 January and West End on 2 February. Another was found on the New Providence CBC on 17 December 2000 (*American Birds* 55:614). Orange-crowned Warblers are rare, but not annual, winter visitors to the Bahamas (Brudenell-Bruce 1975, Raffaele *et al.* 1998). Only two Orange-crowns had been reported from the Bahamas during the preceding four winters, with none on CBCs (Norton 1997, Norton 1999). This species is an uncommon to fairly common winter resident in Florida (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). I selected five southeastern Florida CBCs from the National Audubon Society CBC Database (<http://birds.cornell.edu/cbc/>): Dade County, Fort Lauderdale, Key Largo-Plantation Key, Royal Palm-Homestead, and West Palm Beach. The total number of Orange-crowns tallied on these counts, by year, is as follows: 2000–2001 (22); 1999–2000 (15); 1998–1999 (4); 1997–

1998 (7); 1996–1997 (14).

Nashville Warbler.—I encountered two Nashville Warblers at Taino Beach, Grand Bahama Island, from 28–31 January. Another had been found on the Grand Bahama Island CBC on 15 December 2000 (*American Birds* 55:613). Nashville Warblers are a rare-but-annual winter visitor to the Bahamas (Brudenell-Bruce 1975, Raffaele *et al.* 1998). Only two Nashville Warblers had been reported from the Bahamas during the preceding four winters, with none on CBCs (Norton 1997, Norton 1999). This species is considered very rare and irregular during winter in Florida (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992). Six Nashville Warblers were seen in peninsular Florida during the 2000–2001 winter (Anderson 2001), compared to eight total during the previous four winters (West 1998, West and Anderson 1999, Anderson and West 2000).

Wilson's Warbler.—I found five Wilson's Warbler during my visit. Single birds were at Small Hope Bay, North Andros Island, 25 January; Queens Cove, 26 January; and Taino Beach, 31 January. Two more birds were at West End, 2–3 February. During the 2000–2001 winter, at least two others were found on Grand Bahama Island, and four were at New Providence (Norton and White 2001; *American Birds* 55:613–614). None had been seen during the previous four winter's CBCs. Wilson's Warblers are considered casual during winter and very rare during migration on the Bahamas (Brudenell-Bruce 1975, Raffaele *et al.* 1998). Indeed, none were reported from these islands during the four preceding winters. In Florida, Wilson's Warblers are considered casual during winter (Stevenson and Anderson 1994), yet an astounding 61 were found in peninsular Florida during the winter of 2000–2001 (Anderson 2001). Contrast this with 16 during the winter of 1999–2000 (Anderson and West 2000), three during the winter of 1998–1999 (West and Anderson 1999), and none during the winter of 1997–1998 (West 1998).

Clay-colored Sparrow.—On 24 January, I found a Clay-colored Sparrow near Owen's Town, North Andros Island. This species is a rare-but-regular winter visitor to the Bahamas (Brudenell-Bruce 1975, Raffaele *et al.* 1998), but only three were reported from the Bahamas during the preceding four winters, one of which was found on a CBC (Norton 1997; *American Birds* 52:567). None were found in the Bahamas during the 2000–2001 CBC season. In Florida, this species is rare to uncommon. At least

14 were reported in peninsular Florida during the 2000–2001 winter (Anderson 2001), and a similar number was found during the 1999–2000 winter (Anderson and West 2000), but 48 were located during the 1998–1999 winter (West and Anderson 1999).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

During February 2001, a Bullock's Oriole was found at West End, Grand Bahama Island, representing a first record for the Bahamas. Perhaps equally interesting was the presence of five other species typically associated with central and western North America. Four of these are generally considered less-than-annual on the Bahamas during winter (Western Kingbird, Orange-crowned Warbler, Nashville Warbler, and Wilson's Warbler). All four were present in above average numbers in Florida, and all four were found for the first time in at least five years on Bahamian CBCs. The remaining species, Clay-colored Sparrow, appeared to be present in typical numbers that winter in Florida and was missed on the two Bahamian CBCs. An increase in vagrants can occur due to many factors including increased breeding success (Veit 2000) and anomalous weather (Patten and Marantz 1996, Mlodinow *et al.* 1999). Given the diversity of habitats used for breeding by these species, a simultaneous increase in breeding success seems unlikely. Rather, a change in weather conditions during the migratory period may be somewhat more plausible, though a careful examination of the entire fall's wind patterns would be necessary to assess this possibility.

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