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INTERESTING DISTRIBUTIONAL AND TEMPORAL RECORDS FROM CUBA, WINTER 2000–2001

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Abstract.—We present interesting ornithological observations of 12 species from Cuba, made during fieldwork in December 2000 and January 2001. Of principal interest are the following: the first January records of Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*), Chestnut-sided (*Dendroica pensylvanica*) and Blackpoll warblers (*D. striata*); the fourth and fifth records of Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*); the fifth record of Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*); the first records in the Oriente of White-cheeked Pintail (*Anas bahamensis*) and Spotted Rail (*Padirallus maculatus*); and the first winter record in the West Indies of Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*).

Resumen.—REGISTROS DE DISTRIBUCIÓN Y ESTACIONALIDAD DE INTERÉS EN CUBA, INVIERNO 2000–2001. Presentamos observaciones ornitológicas de interés para 12 especies, resultado de visitas a Cuba en diciembre 2000 y enero 2001, principalmente los primeros registros en enero de *Calidris himantopus*, *Dendroica pensylvanica* y *D. striata*; el quinto y seis registro de *Larus fuscus*; el quinto registro de *Limosa fedoa*; el primer registro para la zona oriental de *Anas bahamensis* y *Padirallus maculatus*; y el primer registro invernal de *Vireo gilvus* en las Antillas.

Key words: *Anas bahamensis*, *Anas platyrhynchos*, *Blackpoll Warbler*, *Calidris himantopus*, *Chestnut-sided Warbler*, *Cuba*, *Cyanerpes cyaneus*, *Dendroica pensylvanica*, *Dendroica striata*, *Larus fuscus*, *Lesser Black-backed Gull*, *Limosa fedoa*, *Mallard*, *Marbled Godwit*, *Padirallus maculatus*, *Red-legged Honeycreeper*, *Spotted Rail*, *Stilt Sandpiper*, *Thick-billed Vireo*, *Vireo crassirostris*, *Vireo gilvus*, *Warbling Vireo*, *White-cheeked Pintail*, *Wilsonia pusilla*, *Wilson's Warbler*, *winter records*

THE PUBLICATION OF Garrido and Kirkconnell (2000) has permitted ornithologists and birders working in Cuba ready access to information on the precise status and distribution of bird species occurring in the island. During winter 2000–2001, we were present in Cuba for varying periods (Kirwan from 31 December 2000 to 22 January 2001, and from 27 to 31 January 2001; Flieg from 4 to 22 January; LaBar from 14 to 22 January; and Hume from 29 November to 13 December), and made several observations that augment our knowledge of the status and distribution of Cuban birds, as presented below. All dates refer to 2001, unless otherwise noted. Nomenclature follows the American Ornithologists' Union (1998).

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*).—A drake was at the northwestern end of Embalse La Yaya, Guantánamo province, on 7 January, among a large, tight flock of Blue-winged Teal (*A. discors*). Few previous records exist for Cuba (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000).

White-cheeked Pintail (*Anas bahamensis*).—Kirwan and Flieg located 43 of these distinctive ducks at the northwestern end of Embalse La Yaya, Guantánamo province, on 7 January. The species is not mapped for the Oriente in Garrido and Kirkconnell (2000).

Spotted Rail (*Padirallus maculatus*).—An adult was observed, close to sunset, on a small marsh on the eastern side of Siboney village, Santiago de Cuba province, on 6 January. Other species available for

comparison included Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) and American Coot (*Fulica americana*). This is the first report in Cuba east of the Zapata region (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000).

Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*).—Hume located one, the fifth report in Cuba (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000), at Playa Santa Lucia, near Playa Los Cocos, on 9 December 2000, observing the principal identification features through both telescope and binoculars.

Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*).—A group of at least 15 was feeding, among a tight flock of Lesser (*Tringa flavipes*) and Greater yellowlegs (*T. solitaria*), and Short-billed Dowitchers (*Limnodromus griseus*), on salt pans close to Baitiquirí village, Guantánamo province, on 7 January. Garrido and Kirkconnell (2000) do not list any January reports for Cuba.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*).—Hume reported two as follows. The first was at Playa Santa Lucia, on the northern coast, on 1 December 2000. It was larger than nearby Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*), and approximately the size of a Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*). It was observed resting on the water, through a 30x telescope, at ca. 100 m in excellent light, and on the beach for a short time. Flight views were quite good but, in the windy conditions, details of its exact wingtip pattern proved difficult to ascertain. Its mid-gray upperparts appeared to be exactly the shade typical of a British Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus graellsii* (which is also the race most frequently reported on the eastern USA coast, including Florida; George Wallace, *in litt.* 2001). Its coloration was roughly equivalent to a Laughing Gull, or a shade darker, on the back and wings. Hume is familiar with various races of Herring Gull and the previous March had studied the Atlantic race of Yellow-legged Gull (*L. michahellis* [*cachinnans*] *atlantis*) on Madeira. This individual was darker than any West European Yellow-legged or Herring Gull and had a much less contrasted black wingtip. It also had a more heavily streaked head and neck than Yellow-legged Gulls.

The head and neck were dull white, extensively streaked grayish: the streaks were fine but obvious on the crown, broader on the cheeks and neck-sides, and broad but more diffuse on the chest-sides. There was a concentration of thin dark streaks around the eye (producing a slight masked effect in flight), a thick dark eyering, and a thin dark line behind the eye. The hindneck had a patch of denser, darker streaks in a diamond-shaped area. Apart from smudging on the chest, the underside, as well as the

rump and tail, was white. The back, scapulars, and upperwing were leaden gray. The scapulars had only tiny white tips. The tertials and secondaries had a much broader, obvious white area at the tips. The closed wingtips were black with white marks: apparently three large, fresh white spots on new feathers and old, unmolted feathers at the extreme tip, dull white edged narrowly with black (presumably a white “mirror” and worn feather tips). In flight it was clearly in molt with several new inner and middle primaries, and some missing or short outer ones, producing a ragged appearance; the tail also had gaps on each side where feathers were missing or short. This is late for such as state of molt, but not unusual.

The upperwing also possessed a feature exhibited by a small proportion of large gulls, most often on Lesser Black-backed Gull: some primary coverts were white. On the left wing two or three feathers formed a single broad white triangle, whereas on the right wing two white feathers were separated by a dark one. The underwing was typical of the species, with dark gray on the underside of the secondaries and primaries, and a black tip with white terminal spots (exact pattern not determined, but the black area was reduced by some missing or short primaries). The eyes appeared pale cream-colored with a blackish ring; the bill yellow with a paler yellow tip and a red patch around the gonys; the legs, seen well several times, were rich yellow. The combination of back color, streaked head, and leg color eliminate any other species.

Remarkably, at nearby Playa Los Cocos, on 9 December 2000, Hume discovered another adult Lesser Black-backed Gull at the edge of a freshwater lagoon close to the beach. It was different in minor detail when seen at rest but clearly different in flight, as it had no white on the primary coverts. It, too, was a typical winter adult, standing close to Laughing and first-winter Herring Gulls (intermediate in size, but closer to Herring). It was more slender than Herring Gull, with longer wings. The upperparts were typical *L. f. graellsii* slate- or lead-gray. The head was more uniformly marked than the first, without the dark diamond-shaped patch on the nape, but broad dark streaks on the lower neck; the neck-sides and chest were broadly streaked. The scapulars had a large white tip; the tertials two slightly separated white crescents above broad white secondary tips. The closed wingtips appeared all black except for a single white spot on the shortest exposed feather. Unfortunately, the wingtip pattern was again not seen well, because it flew off while Hume was taking notes: he looked up to see it flying away, revealing that it was obviously in molt with ragged outer primaries and an

uneven tail. The bill was yellow with a red spot; the eyes pale; the legs clearly rich, but slightly greenish, yellow.

These records are the fourth and fifth reports in Cuba, following one videotaped by Arturo Kirkconnell and Alvaro Jaramillo, on Cayo Romano, on 5 April 2000 until at least mid-month (Mazar Barnett and Kirwan 2000). Full details of this record, which was made after Garrido and Kirkconnell (2000) had gone to press, have not yet been published. There are also two earlier reports: Smith and Smith (2000) observed three near Playa Santa Lucia, on 11 November 1999, and mention an earlier report from the same location, by Paul Prior, on 14 November 1998. Given this, it has been deemed worthwhile to present full descriptions in support of these reports.

Thick-billed Vireo (*Vireo crassirostris cubensis*).—Kirwan and others heard the distinctive song of this recently described endemic subspecies (Kirkconnell and Garrido 2000) on Cayo Guillermo, Archipiélago de Sabana-Camagüey, on 20 January. Kirwan is familiar with the songs of this subspecies through regular visits to Cayo Paredón Grande and had, indeed, tape-recorded this taxon on the last-named day the same morning. Records away from Cayo Paredón Grande, the type locality, are few and principally come from one area on Cayo Coco (Wallace *et al.* 1999), which has recently been extensively degraded by continuing human development (A. Kirkconnell, pers. comm.). We are aware of only one previous report from Cayo Guillermo.

Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*).—The first winter report for Cuba and the West Indies (Raffaele *et al.* 1998, Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000) was of the nominate eastern race (which is sometimes treated as a species, Eastern Warbling-Vireo), observed by Kirwan in woodland at the northwestern end of Embalse La Yaya, Guantánamo province, on 7 January. Nominate *gilvus* typically winters in Oaxaca to Chiapas, Mexico, and south through Guatemala and El Salvador, more rarely Honduras and Nicaragua; it is accidental on Bermuda at this season (American Ornithologists' Union 1998).

Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*).—LaBar observed one on Cayo Coco, on 20 January; it had some yellow on the crown; the cheeks were grayish-white; there was some black in the malar streak; the chestnut coloration on the breast-sides was not extensive, starting around the "shoulder" and ending above the flanks; and it had whitish wingbars and some white in the tail. This is the first January report for Cuba (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000), and one of the few such reports from

the West Indies. It winters principally in southeastern Mexico, Central America, and northwestern South America (American Ornithologists' Union 1998).

Blackpoll Warbler (*Dendroica striata*).—A separate male and female of this distinctive warbler were observed in woodland at the northwestern end of Embalse La Yaya, Guantánamo province, on 7 January. This is the first January report for Cuba (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000), and one of the few such reports from the West Indies. It winters principally in northwestern South America (American Ornithologists' Union 1998).

Wilson's Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*).—Singles were closely watched in woodland at the northwestern end of Embalse La Yaya, Guantánamo province, on 7 January, and at Parque Nacional La Güira, Pinar del Río, on 22 January. These are the second and third January reports for Cuba (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000), and suggest that the species may be overlooked at this season. Interestingly, George Wallace (*in litt.* 2001) reported unprecedented numbers of this species present in Florida, where it is normally considered a rare transient in fall and a very rare winter resident, during autumn 2000 and winter 2000–2001. Care was taken during both observations to eliminate this species from Hooded Warbler (*W. citrina*); on both occasions the lack of white tail spots was clearly noted.

Red-legged Honeycreeper (*Cyanerpes cyaneus*).—On 13 January, Flieg and Kirwan, together with Arturo Kirkconnell, observed at least four or five, including juveniles, of this distinctive species in the grounds of the Hotel Kohly, Playa, within La Habana, constituting a minor range extension and perhaps the first report of this species in the city limits.

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THE SOCIETY OF CARIBBEAN ORNITHOLOGY TO CO-HOST THE THIRD NORTH AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONFERENCE IN NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

The Society of Caribbean Ornithology (SCO) has accepted an invitation to co-host the third North American Ornithological Conference, to be held 24–31 September 2002 in New Orleans. Although SCO will not hold a Society meeting at the conference (the next SCO meeting is scheduled for 2003), SCO will be sponsoring a symposium on the conservation and study of Caribbean birds. Rosemarie Gnam, Brandon Hay, and Carolyn Wardle will be organizing this effort. Please check the SCO website for further details.

SCO encourages its members, especially from the Caribbean region, to submit papers for the general paper sessions and for other symposia. Topics under consideration include: the impact of birds and bird biologists on conservation; an array of coffee-related topics, such as the bird–plant–insect interactions and economic and other issues that are related to efforts to increase the market share of shade-grown, organic, free-traded coffee; and the importance of fragmentation and edge effects in tropical habitats. Watch the North American Ornithological Conference (NAOC) website at <http://www.tulane.edu/~naoc-02/> for further details on the program and for information on registration.

SCO particularly encourages students to submit papers. Three of the co-hosts – the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU), the Cooper Ornithological Society (COS), and the Raptor Research Foundation (RRF) – offer student travel awards. Although each limits eligibility to members of the societies, student memberships are inexpensive – \$15/year for RRF, \$22/year for COS, and \$20/year for AOU. In fact, the AOU provides several hundred grants in the form of a three-year AOU membership to qualifying western hemisphere undergraduate or graduate students interested in pursuing a career in ornithology (see page 83 of this issue). Membership grants will provide full membership in the AOU (including subscription to *The Auk*) for three consecutive years, and are not renewable. See the AOU website at <http://www.aou.org/aou/Member.html> for details. Details for membership in COS and RRF can be found by visiting BIRDNET – the website of the Ornithological Council – at <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/index.html>.

SCO members interested in attending this meeting should begin to look for funding immediately. Although some funding may be available from the Ornithological Council, the conference organizers, or other sources, there is no certain source of funding at this time. Should funding be available, SCO will give preference to those who (a) have demonstrated a commitment to the study and/or conservation of Caribbean birds, (b) will participate in the symposium it is organizing or some other Conference-related event, (c) are current members of the SCO, and (d) have demonstrated an effort to raise funding. SCO will be reluctant to provide full funding to anyone.

This is a great opportunity for SCO members to meet and talk with their colleagues, who rarely have an opportunity to attend SCO meetings, and to show how much SCO's capacity and energy have grown over the years. It is also a very good opportunity for students to meet potential mentors and advisors.