

---

# Status updates for selected bird species in Belize, including several species previously undocumented from the country

H. Lee Jones, Ellen McRae, Martin Meadows and Steve N. G. Howell

*Cotinga* 13 (2000): 17–31

---

Se revisa el estatus de 52 especies en Belize. Ocho especies (*Phalaropus lobatus*, *Streptopelia decaocto*, *Columbina inca*, *Asio flammeus*, *Lurocalis semitorquatus*, *Dendroica occidentalis*, *D.a nigrescens*, y *Spizella pallida*) y una subespecie (*Coereba flaveola caboti*) son reportadas por primera vez. Se provee además documentación que apoya otras 23 especies que, amén de haber sido incluidas en una o más publicaciones, se encontraban aún sin confirmación<sup>14</sup>. Se reporta un cambio aparente en el estatus de cuatro especies (*Plegadis falcinellus*, *Charadrius collaris*, *Tyrannus forficatus*, y *Pachyramphus polychopterus*), y el estatus de otras especies es aclarado. También se incluyen registros extralimitales para otras 12 especies.

## Introduction

Prior to the publication of Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup>, no comprehensive treatment of the birds of Belize had been published since Russell<sup>27</sup>. Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> published an annotated checklist of the birds of Belize but cited no sources for a number of listed species not previously known from the country. For many other species they missed the mark widely, e.g. Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* is rare, not common; Cliff Swallow *Hirundo pyrrhonota* is common, not rare; Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica* is a transient, not a winter visitor. Shortly after publication, Wood & Leberman<sup>33</sup> further reviewed the status of 111 species, yet many records remained undocumented or enigmatic. Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> commented on most unverified or inadequately documented records in the literature and added much new information in support of the occurrence of some others.

HLJ has visited Belize on 21 occasions during the period December 1992–August 1999, with a mean stay of 35 days and varying in length from one week to three months. Until summer 1996, his fieldwork was confined almost entirely to southern Toledo District, an area of Belize previously poorly known despite its rich avifauna. From August 1996 and continuing to the present, he has travelled throughout the country, with special effort devoted to other poorly-known regions and habitats such as Corozal District, higher elevations in the Maya Mountains, the southern cayes, and various shrimp farms with their rich aquatic habitats. EM has lived on Caye Caulker since 1982. In addition to regularly monitoring birds there over the past 18 years, she has travelled widely on the mainland, especially in coastal areas and to many other cayes. MM has lived in Belize for 25 years, initially as a forest officer with the Belize Estate and Produce Company, and since 1987 as a tour guide for International Expeditions. He lived at Hill Bank, Orange Walk District, in 1975–1985, in Belize City in 1985–1986 and since 1986 in Cayo District. During his tenure, he has travelled throughout the country, including to many remote areas seldom visited by ornithologists. SNGH has visited Belize on 15 occasions for a total of c.180 field days in 1984–1998, principally in January–April, but also in June and October. Most of his visits have been to the northern two-thirds of the country.

HLJ's original field journal and species accounts, including sketches and detailed descriptions of noteworthy species, are on file at the Louisiana State University (LSU) Museum of Natural Science in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA. Records from his field journal are also catalogued in the Belize Biodiversity Information System (BBIS) Data Base under the management of Bruce and Carolyn Miller<sup>23</sup>, Gallon Jug, Orange Walk District, Belize.

## Species accounts

### White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> listed only one confirmed record from Caribbean Mexico and northern Central America—near Cozumel Island. One seen by Peter Craig<sup>2</sup> on 21 April 1976 near Gallows Point Reef, c.18–19 km east of Belize City, establishes the species as a vagrant to Belize. It was described as having 'the heavy black band on wing, the short black eyeline and the stout, slightly decurved yellow bill.' Although inadvertently omitted from the published account, Craig (pers. comm.) distinctly recalls the long tail streamers which first drew his attention to the bird. A previously unpublished record from Quintana Roo, Mexico, lends support to this species' occasional occurrence in the western Caribbean: EM observed an adult at the edge of the reef c.12 km north of Bahia de la Ascension (200 km north of the Belize border) on 1 May 1986. It was studied closely as it circled the boat three times before departing.

### Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> included offshore Belize within the species' pelagic range. This assertion is supported by two published records: two adults east of Belize City on 15 February 1955<sup>27</sup>, and one (presumably an adult) off San Pedro on 13 May 1992 following a storm front<sup>21</sup>. One additional record: an adult on a beach in San Pedro on 8 August 1987 (Fig. 1).

### American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*

Morton Peck<sup>27</sup> noted two *erythrorhynchos* near the mouth of the Manatee River, on 1 April 1901. As Peck's field notes provided no details, Russell<sup>27</sup> excluded this species from the Belize list. Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> indicated no records of this

species closer to Belize than the north coast of the Yucatán Peninsula, in the Caribbean, and the Guatemala coast, in the Pacific. The species was next reported in Belize City on 10 March 1981 (W. Haas). It has been recorded with increasing frequency since; although, until recently, few if any records of this conspicuous species were adequately documented. It is now annual and has been seen almost throughout the year at Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary (hereafter CTWS) where as many as 300 occurred in 1998 (S. Tillett). Peak numbers appear in the late dry season (April–May), and birds are occasionally reported through July (S. Tillett, G. Crawford). All dated records have been from 19 October until 10 June, with most from the Belize City area north, usually near the coast, but at least twice as far inland as Blue Creek and Laguna Seca, western Orange Walk District. A flock of 14 was photographed at CTWS on 27 January 1995 (Fig. 2).

#### **Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus***

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> indicated only one confirmed record for Belize. It is indisputable that *Plegadis* ibises appear periodically in Belize, but White-faced Ibis *P. chihi* cannot be eliminated solely on geographic grounds. SNGH closely observed a *falcinellus* at CTWS on 30–31 January 1993 and found three there on 27 January 1995. HLJ closely studied 1–4 *falcinellus* on six occasions. Additional *Plegadis* ibises have been reported with increasing frequency in recent years, especially at CTWS. These have been presumed to be *falcinellus*, but most have not been documented. All dated records of *Plegadis* to date have been on 19 September–13 April, with a maximum of 12 on 20 December 1998 (P. Balderamos). Although *chihi* may occur, it is clear that *falcinellus* is the expected *Plegadis* in Belize.

#### **American Wigeon *Anas americana***

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> stated that it is uncommon south to Honduras, but indicated few documented records in Belize. Jones has seen *americana* on five occasions, all in northern Belize, with a maximum of 40–50 at Crooked Tree on 1 February 1997. Others have also reported this species with some regularity in northern Belize, with all dated records on 15 October–7 April. It is best considered an uncommon winter visitor.

#### **Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera***

Howell and Webb<sup>14</sup> did not include any verified records from Belize, but commented that it is rare and irregular in north-west Honduras. Six records, all males, are as follows: 13–15 March 1986, Big Falls Farm, north-east Cayo District<sup>6</sup>; 2 March 1996, Blue Creek ricefields<sup>29</sup>; 23 February and 3 March 1997, Blue Creek ricefields (A. Valley unpubl.); 1 February 1998, Blue Creek ricefields (MM); 21 September 1996, Nova Shrimp Farm (HLJ); and 14 April 1999, Nova Shrimp Farm (HLJ). These records suggest this species is an occasional winter visitor to Belize.

#### **Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> considered it rare in Belize. HLJ has seen 1–12 *clypeata* on eight occasions, once as far south as Indian Creek Village, central Toledo District. It has also been reported on four Belize City Christmas Bird Counts (max. 10 on 22 December 1996). There are at least six other records, including that published by Barlow *et al.*<sup>3</sup>. Dates of occurrence are 24 September–30 March. It is best considered an uncommon winter visitor in small numbers.

#### **Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris***

Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> listed one record for Belize, and Garcia *et al.*<sup>10</sup> listed it as rare in coastal areas, including the cayes; however, Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> did not include any records for Belize. This species is a regular winter visitor to CTWS, with records dated 28 October–1 April and a maximum of 80 on 29 January 1994 (SNGH). Flocks of 25 or more are not unusual. SNGH recorded one at Indian Creek Village on 18 December 1997 and four at Blue Creek ricefields on 1 January 1998. We know of no other records of *collaris* away from Crooked Tree, *contra* Garcia *et al.*<sup>10</sup>

#### **Masked Duck *Nomonyx dominicus***

Howell *et al.*<sup>13</sup> published the only previously documented occurrence of this species in Belize, a male seen between Cristo Rey and San Antonio, Cayo District, on 18 March 1990. One, reported without comment on 22 December 1985 Belize City Christmas Bird Count, must be considered tentative. On 1 February 1997, HLJ observed 8–12 on Northern Lagoon, CTWS. Since then, local guides at Crooked Tree have seen the species on other occasions in the same area of the lagoon but believe it a seasonal visitor, not resident.

#### **Solitary Eagle *Harpyhaliaetus solitarius***

Reported on numerous occasions from Belize. Weyer & Young<sup>32</sup> regarded it as uncommon; Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> and Garcia *et al.*<sup>10</sup> considered it rare. Hartshorn *et al.*<sup>11</sup>, Weyer<sup>31</sup> and Clinton-Eitniece<sup>4</sup> all cited one or more records. Clinton-Eitniece<sup>5</sup> specifically cited seven occurrences and, in his earlier paper, speculated that the species is likely only a transient in Belize from ‘a more westerly centered population’ in Guatemala. Other anecdotal reports, both unpublished and from the grey literature, add to the list of records. However, to the best of our knowledge, none of these reports is sufficiently documented. While some, perhaps most, may be valid, some are most unlikely (e.g. a bird perched on a fencepost along the highway near Belize City). On 29 January 1997, Howell closely observed a pair of adults at Hidden Valley Falls, Cayo District. A synopsis of his field notes follows:

Very large size, one white tail band; overall slate-grey plumage distinct from dark blackish-slate of black-hawks,

with contrasting broad dark trailing edge to remiges; tail short with single white median band, broad black band distally; tail above appeared grey at base. Obvious yellow cere/bill base. Legs massive; feet projected past white tail band, almost to tip of short tail, unlike in Common Black-hawk *B. anthracinus*. Flight silhouette unique: massive bill; tail short and spread wide while soaring; wings long and broad, parallel-edged like Great Black-hawk *Buteogallus urubitinga*, without bulge at rear of secondaries as in Common Black-hawk. In soaring flight, wings held flattish to slightly dihedral; prominent fingers formed by well-spread primary tips, slightly raised above plane of wing (creating King Vulture *Sarcoramphus papa* jizz). Wings proportionately longer than both Common Black-hawk (especially) and Great Black-hawk, with relatively long outermost primary seen clearly. Overall wing and tail shape more like Great Black-hawk, but the manner in which wings held is different, and is especially apparent in head-on views.

MM has seen this species on five occasions in western and southern Cayo District, most recently, an adult in the upper Raspaculo River watershed c.3 km south of Blue Hole Camp on 14 May 1999. Noted were the following features. 'Went up soaring from a low level. In sunlight, upperparts plumbeous-grey with dark primary/secondary edgings. One broad, white tail band. Huge. Joined by a King Vulture; it seemed the same size.' He also closely observed an adult pair on 18 June 1994 at Augustine in the Mountain Pine Ridge, and an adult on 29 August 1989 near Belize's unnamed highest peak (1,124 m), known locally as Doyle's Delight, which straddles the Cayo-Toledo district border. He also saw the species near the confluence of the Mollejon and Macal rivers in the 1981 dry season, and at Hidden Valley Falls in the Mountain Pine Ridge. Unfortunately, his field notes for these earlier sightings have been lost, and more detailed information is unavailable.

#### **Crested Eagle** *Morphnus guianensis*

The first confirmed records from Belize were a two- to three-year-old bird photographed by Jeffrey Hall near Chan Chich Lodge, western Orange Walk District, on 19 March 1990, and an adult 27 km north of Gallon Jug in November 1991 and 14–15 April 1992<sup>21</sup>. On 8 April 1995, Michael Flieg, Titos Cal and HLJ observed an immature *M. guianensis* in primary forest in the karst limestone hills south of Pueblo Viejo, Toledo District. Flieg obtained excellent close-range video of the bird (copy on file at the LSU Museum of Natural Science).

#### **Harpy Eagle** *Harpia harpyja*

With *Morphnus guianensis* documented from Belize and Guatemala, older reports of *Harpia harpyja* have been brought into question. Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> indicated the species' presence based on Wood & Leberman<sup>33</sup>, but SNGH now believes the record inadequately documented. Russell<sup>27</sup> described a bird observed by D. A. Lancaster on 11 March 1958 at Gallon Jug; however, in the absence of a description, this record must be considered tentative. An intriguing, if less than definitive, recent report comes from the southern Maya Mountains at Esperanza Camp, Toledo District, where an adult was briefly described by Robert Murray and Brian Hahn<sup>7</sup> on 25 April 1994. They had a 40-minute view, from 20 m, of a bird with a 'bicolored crest, grey head, black collar, white breast...the talons and legs were massive.' In October 1994, HLJ learned of a supposed *H. harpyja* that had been shot near Aguacate Village, Toledo District, approximately four years earlier. He was able to borrow and photograph a primary feather, two secondary feathers and a few breast feathers (Figs. 3–4) that one of the villagers had saved. K. Garrett, who examined the photographs, concluded that it was 'almost certainly *H. harpyja* based on the length of the primary feather alone, compared with the museum's one specimen.' Additional reports with which we are familiar lack adequate documentation.

#### **Yellow-breasted Crake** *Porzana flaviventer*

On 12 January 1999, HLJ, with S. Tillett, and Robert & Ruben Crawford, observed a Yellow-breasted Crake on a small (150 m<sup>2</sup>) patch of floating marsh vegetation in Spanish Creek just south of its confluence with Northern Lagoon, CTWS. Ro. Crawford had first seen it about a month previously and re-found it in the same patch of vegetation two weeks later with several tourists. On the above date, we saw the bird immediately upon our arrival. Over a 45-minute period, in which the bird was in partial or full view for c.8–10 minutes, we were able to study virtually every detail of its plumage and habits. It continued to be seen and photographed (Fig. 5) by others through early March 1999. A report from Big Falls Farm, on 24 May 1984<sup>12</sup>, while perhaps correct, is not definitive. Hecker and others saw a rail briefly in flight, which they described as follows. 'Its feeble, fledgling-like flight and yellowish straw-colour made it easy to identify, even at a glimpse.' Later that morning, Hecker<sup>12</sup> saw another *P. flaviventer* on the shallow grassy edge of a canal but gave no description.

#### **Collared Plover** *Charadrius collaris*

Russell<sup>27</sup> cited a total of 12 birds seen on three dates in February, March, and April. Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> stated that 'reports from Belize (Feb–Apr) may be of migrants from Caribbean populations.' Recent records extend the period of occurrence and document the first breeding record in Belize. HLJ has seen *collaris* on several occasions throughout the year at three shrimp farms, and on 15 May 1999 discovered a pair with a nest containing one egg and a recently hatched fledgling (Figs. 6–7) at Nova Shrimp Farm. The nest, which consisted of nothing more than a small scrape, was in an unvegetated area on the broad, flat top of a 2 m-high mound of dry, compacted sandy dredge spoils from an adjacent shrimp pond.

#### **Snowy Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> indicated this species as wintering along coasts throughout southern Mexico and northern Central

America. Both Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> and Garcia *et al.*<sup>10</sup> considered it accidental in Belize, apparently based on one record from mainland northern Belize. We have been unsuccessful in locating this record and cannot vouch for its authenticity. On 19 October 1997, HLJ found a single *C. alexandrinus* within a large mixed flock of shorebirds at Nova Shrimp Farm. This may represent the first confirmed report from Belize.

#### **American Avocet** *Recurvirostra americana*

Russell<sup>27</sup> reported two observations by Peck in 1901, the first near the mouth of the Manatee River in late March ('a few birds'), and the other in Belize City on 18 April 1901 (two birds). It was not reported again until 17 December 1978 (one by MM at Potts Creek, Belize District). HLJ has seen it on six occasions: one in Punta Gorda on 9 October 1996; one at Nova Shrimp Farm on 2 November 1996, six there on 1 February 1997 and five there on 7 April 1997 (all probably pertaining to a small overwintering group); one at Aqua Mar Shrimp Farm, north-east Toledo District, on 16 October 1997; and two at Nova Shrimp Farm on 19 October 1997. As there have been few previous reports of this conspicuous species in Belize, either the winters of 1996–1997 and 1997–1998 were exceptional or it has been overlooked in the past because shrimp farms were not visited regularly by birders until recently.

#### **Long-billed Curlew** *Numenius americanus*

Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> and Garcia *et al.*<sup>10</sup> listed this species as rare, and Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> represented its occurrence in Belize with one star. EM has seen *N. americanus* on Caye Caulker on 5 December 1987, 11 November 1988, 6 March 1989 and mid-May 1998. Triggs (unpubl.) saw one in Dangriga on 17 November 1985. One was at Paradise Shrimp Farm, Stann Creek District for several weeks in December 1998–January 1999 (D. Stevens pers. comm.). Given other published records<sup>13,33</sup>, it is obvious that the species is an occasional winter visitor from at least November–May.

#### **Hudsonian Godwit** *Limosa haemastica*

Triggs (unpubl.) closely observed an individual in alternate plumage at CTWS on 4 May 1986, representing the first record for Belize. He described it as follows.

'White uppertail-coverts and black tail, along with the dark wing and white wing-stripe, bringing thoughts of Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* to mind. However, certain other features dispelled this; the chestnut summer plumage was darker and covered the entire underparts, the white wing-stripe was considerably narrower than that of the Black-tailed Godwit, the long bill was distinctly upturned. Seen as close as 10 yards.'

On 16 May 1999, HLJ photographed four *L. haemastica* at Aqua Mar Shrimp Farm (Fig. 8). These two records establish it as a late spring vagrant in Belize. While Belize should lie within its normal spring migration route, much is yet to be learned of the migratory patterns of *L. haemastica*. It is thought to fly non-stop over long distances, making few stops between its South American wintering grounds and its breeding areas in Arctic Canada.

#### **Marbled Godwit** *Limosa fedoa*

Russell<sup>27</sup> cited only one definite record: one in Belize City on 22 August 1961. Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> stated that it is rare in northern Honduras and indicated at least one record from Belize. HLJ saw one at Nova Shrimp Farm on 26 September 1997. These records establish it as an autumn vagrant in Belize.

#### **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*

HLJ closely observed one with Western Sandpipers *Calidris mauri* at Aqua Mar Shrimp Farm on 6 January 1999. Three were at Commerce Bight near Dangriga on 21 March 1990<sup>33</sup>, and there is an unconfirmed report of one on the 29 December 1973 Belize City Christmas Bird Count.

#### **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> indicated that it is rare in Belize, and Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> stated that it occurs south 'possibly to Belize.' Observations by HLJ, SNGH, EM and a number of others in the last five years have established this species as a locally common winter visitor, with records on 19 October–30 March. It is regularly seen at Nova Shrimp Farm and Blue Creek ricefields. Of note is a flock of c.350 *L. scolopaceus* (identified by voice and habitat) at the Blue Creek ricefields on 31 December 1998 (HLJ). *L. griseus* is rare or absent at interior locations in winter throughout most or all of its range. HLJ also closely studied 85–90 at Nova Shrimp Farm on 9 March 1999, with 20 still present on 30 March. Reports of *L. scolopaceus* in Belize are likely to increase as more observers become familiar with the subtle differences between *L. scolopaceus* and *L. griseus*. However, this recent dramatic increase in occurrences and numbers of *L. scolopaceus* may be the result of more than heightened observer skills and awareness. Manufactured freshwater marsh habitats have increased dramatically in Belize with the advent and spread of mechanised rice farming, introduced by the Mennonites, in the last 20–30 years.

#### **Wilson's Phalarope** *Phalaropus tricolor*

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> included all of Mexico and Central America within its range as a transient. However, neither Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> nor Garcia *et al.*<sup>10</sup> nor any other publication with which we are familiar indicates any records of this species in Belize. MacKinnon<sup>18</sup> stated that it is a rare transient in Yucatán. On 20 September 1997, HLJ observed one in basic plumage with other shorebirds in a recently drained pond at Cherax Shrimp Farm, north-east Toledo District. This represents the first specific report of *P. tricolor* in Belize. On 30 April 1999, HLJ, along with S. Tillett and M. England,

observed three *P. tricolor* in alternate plumage with other shorebirds near the south end of Northern Lagoon, CTWS; and on 14 May 1999, MM saw a female in alternate plumage at the sewage treatment facility in San Pedro. The species is to be expected occasionally in spring and autumn.

#### **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*

One was observed at 20–30 m from a boat just offshore of Caye Rosario during winter 1993–1994. EM first saw the bird in November and again on 4 January. Initially identified as a phalarope, based on its habit of swimming in tight circles, she concluded it was *P. lobatus* due to its moderately short, thin bill that she noted as thinner than Red Phalarope *P. fulicaria*. Other than observing its head pattern (to eliminate Wilson's), other plumage characters, such as the tone and pattern of feathering on the back that may have further distinguished it from *P. fulicaria* went unnoted. However, bill structure, when well observed, is an important character in separating *P. lobatus* from *P. fulicaria* in any plumage. While perhaps less than definitive, this observation is significant as a confirmed report of one of the two pelagic phalaropes, almost certainly *P. lobatus*.

#### **Franklin's Gull** *Larus pipixcan*

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> indicated this species as rare on the Caribbean slope south and east of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. We are aware of at least five dated records. One in first basic plumage was collected near Manatee Lagoon on 2 December 1905<sup>27</sup> (Pomona College #510, examined and confirmed by HLJ). MM saw an adult in alternate plumage near Belize City on 26 April 1988. HLJ closely studied a bird in first basic plumage with Laughing Gulls *Larus atricilla* at Nova Shrimp Farm on 19 October 1997. MM saw six adults flying north along the east shore of Ambergris Caye on 22 March 1998. MM & HLJ observed a first-summer bird and an adult in alternate plumage with several *atricilla* on a sand spit near Harvest Caye, 4 km south-south-west of Placencia, on 30 May 1998. This species is probably an occasional to very uncommon transient in Belize.

#### **Bonaparte's Gull** *Larus philadelphia*

MM saw this species once at Hill Bank, Orange Walk District, in the mid-1970s, and on several occasions in Belize City in the mid-1980s. In an undated letter to the Belize Audubon Society, written in the mid-1980s, he described an immature he saw in Belize City on 11–14 January (year unknown):

‘...a light gull smaller than a Laughing Gull with light white underparts, a neat black bill and a conspicuous black spot behind the eye, pinkish legs and feet, a well demarcated black terminal band to the white tail, white to the primaries giving a distinctive field characteristic, and a blackish border to the outer leading edge of the wing going round to a dark border on the outer primaries and the trailing edge of the wing (e.g., the tips of the primaries and secondaries). The upperwings also had a distinct transverse brownish band from the ‘shoulder’ to the body. The rest of the wing and upperbody were pale grey (except for the aforementioned points). It had rapid wing beats as it half hovered before swoops. This neat, small gull is an irregular uncommon visitor, which is seen nearly every year around Belize City, and I have seen an adult at Hill Bank flying around the jetty....’

More recently, an adult in basic plumage was photographed at Northern Lagoon CTWS on 4 March 1996 (Fig. 9), providing the first photographic record from Belize.

#### **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri*

Despite the fact that Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> listed it as a common winter resident in coastal areas, uncommon on the cayes and rare in the southern interior of the country, Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> stated that there may be no verified records from Belize. The basis for the Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> account is puzzling. No *forsteri*-size *Sterna* terns are common in Belize, with the possible exception of Roseate Tern *S. dougallii*, which is locally common off a few southern cayes in summer. Common Tern *S. hirundo* is uncommon in Belize and is unrecorded inland. Although locally fairly common to common in north-coastal Yucatán, *S. forsteri* is a rare winter visitor on the southern Yucatán coast<sup>18</sup> where it is at the southern limit of its normal winter range<sup>14</sup>. HLJ has seen *S. forsteri* three times in Belize. Two in basic plumage were closely studied at Northern Lagoon, CTWS, on 13 April 1997; one in basic plumage was well seen at Nova Shrimp Farm on 30 August 1998; and one in first basic plumage was well studied in Sarteneja on 8–10 January 1999. In addition, Miller & Miller<sup>22</sup> mentioned a 1994 record from Ambergris Caye as the only credible record. MM has seen *S. forsteri* once in Belize City in the mid-1980s and once at Hill Bank earlier but no longer possesses his field notes from that period. We are aware of no other records from Belize.

#### **Black Noddy** *Anous minutus*

According to Russell<sup>27</sup> not definitely recorded in Belize since April 1907 when it was reported nesting in ‘considerable numbers’ on Glovers Reef. It may have been nesting on Tom Owens Caye in c.1950, but this is unconfirmed<sup>27</sup>. In recent years, it has been reported once each by EM (near Hol Chan Marine Reserve) and MM (Goff's Caye, c.1980), but specific information for these two records is lacking. On 31 October 1998, a few days after the passage of Tropical Storm Mitch, Balderamos and others observed a juvenile on Belize City waterfront, which he described, in part, as follows:

‘Fairly small, *full black tern*, appeared smaller than Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* and larger than Least Tern *S. antillarum*. Bird was observed from various angles as it moved around and picked at items on the water...close to shore. All plumage appeared full black with no contrast except small *sharply defined white cap* that was observed

when bird turned toward observers with head held down in feeding position. [Balderamos] had made a detailed description of a Brown Noddy [he saw] less than a year earlier in Toledo, at Joe Taylor Creek...and was carefully checking this bird in order to distinguish which noddy it was. Brown Noddy *A. tenuirostris*...was eliminated by lack of contrast between flight feathers and upperparts. Brown Noddy is also larger.' [Bill proportions were not noted.]

#### **Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

In September 1996, S. Lala, a resident of San Pedro, described to HLJ a bird she had seen the previous spring and identified as a Collared Dove. Her field notes for 20 April 1996 describe and depict a dove with a 'dark neck band bordered with white; white-tipped tail; light belly; red feet; golden-brown back.' While less than definitive, her notes strongly suggest this species. On 28 February 1999, B. Zimmer, V. Emanuel and B. & A. Rathman carefully observed two *S. decaocto* within a large flock of White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica* in San Pedro. The first bird was seen only in flight but the second was well described by Zimmer as follows.

'Overall body coloration was a pale brownish grey, the primaries were distinctly darker (almost blackish) and contrasted strongly with the rest of the wing, the bend of the wing (the outer wing-coverts) was contrastingly grey (lacking any brown tones), there was a bold black hind collar that was bordered quite noticeably in white...., the underparts were the same even grey-brown as the rest of the body, not paling at all on the undertail-coverts. ...[T]he tail was quite long with a slightly rounded tip. The birds did not call.... Ringed Turtle Dove *Streptopelia risoria* is usually smaller, generally much paler (creamier whitish-looking), lacks the strongly contrasting primaries, and usually lacks the white border to the black hind collar.'

While these records may pertain to escaped domesticated birds, it is more likely that they are of wild origin, perhaps the first of many, as this species continues to colonise the New World from a population inadvertently introduced in the Bahamas in 1974 from European stock<sup>28</sup>.

#### **Inca Dove** *Columbina inca*

On 8 September 1996, HLJ observed an individual of this species in Punta Gorda. He first observed it feeding in the dirt road by his house at 05h55 and immediately recognised it as this species by its long tail (noticeably longer than in other ground-doves) and scaly appearance throughout. Over the next 15 minutes he studied it carefully as it was periodically flushed by passing pedestrians, each time immediately returning to the road, where it continued to feed. When flushed, its distinctive tail pattern was evident: grey central rectrices and black outer rectrices, with a white lateral edge created by the graduated, white-tipped outer rectrices. It eventually flew into a small tree where it remained until HLJ left at 06h15. From there it uttered its characteristic hollow, tinny *noah hope* call. This species, which is highly adapted to suburban living, may colonise southern Belize from Guatemala, most likely along the 'Maya Highway' from Jalacte village on the Guatemalan border through the series of other villages to Punta Gorda on the coast.

#### **Ruddy Quail-dove** *Geotrygon montana*

On 27 May 1998, MM and HLJ closely observed a female, probably an immature, at very close range on tiny West Tom Owens Caye, 36 km east of Punta Ycacos, Toledo District, the nearest mainland point. This represents the first report of this species on the caye; however, *G. montana* is resident on many islands throughout the West Indies, testament to the dispersal and colonising capabilities of this usually resident forest species.

#### **Burrowing Owl** *Athene cunicularia*

Russell<sup>27</sup> discussed two individuals collected by Morton Peck at the mouth of the Manatee River in January 1901. The specimens were apparently lost (or never prepared?), and all recent authors have ignored the record. One was closely studied and well documented by Jan Meerman at an active gravel pit in Indian Creek Village on 8–9 April 1998. Meerman's description follows.

'The owl was sitting in a pit filled with large stones. When approached, it flew up and landed 10 m farther away on top of a stone. It bobbed up and down excitedly upon landing. The erect posture, long legs and short tail were very distinctive. No vocalisation was heard. Its chest was heavily spotted brown except for a median stripe over the sternum. The white eyebrows were very distinctive, but also the white chin band stood out clearly and was bordered black toward the chest. The eyes were bright yellow. The bill had a less distinctive colour and at some moments it appeared almost greenish. I had never seen this species before, but its identity was immediately clear to me. Also, the resemblance to the European species, Little Owl *Athene noctua*, was striking.'

#### **Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus*

On 4 March 1999, HLJ found the partial remains of an owl at Aqua Mar Shrimp Farm. The carcass lacked a head but was clearly an owl based on its fully feathered tarsi. He tentatively identified it as a Striped Owl *Pseudoscops clamator*, but subsequent comparison with specimens in the Los Angeles County Museum revealed it to be the first record of *Asio flammeus* for Belize. The pattern of the underside of the primaries is distinctively different in the two species (Fig. 10) and was the key factor in its identification. The chord measured 30.5 cm.

#### **Short-tailed Nighthawk** *Lurocalis semitorquatus*

MM and G. Sho closely observed this species for c.7 minutes at dusk at the confluence of the Mexican and Cockscomb

branches of South Stann Creek in Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary on 10 May 1998. The bird appeared to be hawking insects over the river. This observation represents the first record for Belize. The following field marks were noted.

Foraged primarily at 3–8 m over the river and side shrubs, and had a distinctive shape of straight wings with a short tail and a broad head jutting out from the long, dark wings. Overall dark plumage. Flew much like a bat. In flight, it gave rapid beats followed by a glide, but on capturing a flying insect, it almost hovered with a series of quick fluttering beats. It lacked the bent wings and white wing-spots of nighthawks and had a distinctively different shape. The bird was about the size of a male Bat Falcon *Falco ruficularis*. It was silent.

#### **Chuck-will's-widow** *Caprimulgus carolinensis*

The first record of this species in Belize was a tower-killed bird discovered at Cahal Pech, San Ignacio, Cayo District, on 13 October 1991 by Meadows<sup>22</sup>. Parker *et al.*<sup>24</sup> tape-recorded at least three singing birds at 730 m at Union Camp, Columbia River Forest Reserve, Toledo District, in early April 1992. At dawn on 26 March 1994, SNGH tape-recorded one 6.5 km south of Benque Viejo del Carmen, western Cayo District. On 17 September 1998, HLJ closely observed three birds, both in flight and perched, on Nicholas Caye, and a fourth bird on nearby Lime Caye, in the Sapodilla group, 38 km east-south-east of Punta Ycacos. England<sup>9</sup> observed three while spotlighting night birds on New River Lagoon, Orange Walk District, on 9 September 1998, and heard a minimum of four along Irish Creek, Orange Walk District, two days later. Haas (pers. comm.) closely observed one perched in an orange tree south of Belmopan, Cayo District, on 27 December 1998, confirming its presence in winter. This species probably occurs much more frequently in Belize than the few records indicate. It should be looked for in spring when it is most likely to be vocalising, and on migration on small, sparsely vegetated cayes where it is less likely to be overlooked.

#### **Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser** *Sclerurus mexicanus*

This highland species was first reported on 10 December 1993 by S. J. Baird, C. Conway and Meadows<sup>20</sup> on 'Doyle's Delight' (Toledo and Cayo Districts). On 11–13 February 1997, Jones & Gardner<sup>16</sup>, participating in a Conservation International Rapid Assessment Program (RAP) expedition to nearby Little Quartz Ridge (940–1,035 m), Toledo District, found several of this species. HLJ tape-recorded its loud *piat* vocalisation and Gardner made a rough field sketch of one bird. This was the only *Sclerurus* recorded on Little Quartz Ridge; however, at 700–750 m just below and to the west, south, and south-east of Little Quartz Ridge, the only *Sclerurus* was *guatemalensis* (Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser), which was common there as it is at lower elevations in Belize. On 22–24 April, HLJ visited the 940 m-high Mt. Margaret in the northern Maya Mountains, eastern Cayo District. On 23 April he heard and observed two *mexicanus* at Mt. Margaret's highest point. Again, no *S. guatemalensis* were observed, supporting the inference that *S. mexicanus* replaces its congener on the highest ridges of the Maya Mountains.

#### **Slaty Antwren** *Myrmotherula schisticolor*

Belize is not included in this species' range by Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup>, although they show its range extending to Belize's southern border. Parker *et al.*<sup>24</sup> were the first to report *M. schisticolor* in Belize in the Columbia River Forest Reserve, south-west of Little Quartz Ridge, it being fairly common at Union Camp (730 m) and uncommon at Gloria Camp (750 m) on 3–13 April 1992. Subsequently Baird, Conway and Meadows<sup>20</sup> found it one of the most common species on 'Doyle's Delight' on 3–13 December 1993. In February 1997, Jones & Gardner<sup>16</sup> found it uncommon at 700–750 m south and west of (but not on) Little Quartz Ridge, where one to several individuals were seen on three dates during the 14-day expedition.

#### **Paltry Tyrannulet** *Zimmerius vilissimus*

Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> listed it as rare in southern Belize, and Garcia *et al.*<sup>10</sup> concurred. Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup>, on the other hand, stated that reports from Belize require verification. HLJ has observed this species on at least seven occasions since 1993 in coffee plantations, second-growth scrub and old second-growth broadleaf forest throughout south-west Toledo District and once near Punta Gorda. Additionally, Parker *et al.*<sup>24</sup> reported it as rare at Union and Gloria Camps in the Columbia River Forest Reserve in April 1992. Reports from farther north (see Miller & Miller<sup>22</sup>) are unsubstantiated and likely erroneous. Paltry Tyrannulet appears to be an uncommon resident restricted, in Belize, to southern Toledo District.

#### **Western Wood-pewee** *Contopus sordidulus*

The only cited record for Belize, a specimen collected by George F. Gaumer and identified as *C. sordidulus*<sup>27</sup>, must be considered of uncertain origin, as Gaumer's specimens are notorious for their inaccurate data<sup>25</sup>. SNGH observed two birds in Mountain Pine Ridge on 25 October 1998. The first, by the road to Hidden Valley Inn, had plumage characteristics well within the range of this species, but was silent, and its identification is best considered tentative at this time. SNGH's field notes describe this bird as follows.

'Typical small *Contopus*, obviously smaller than nearby Greater Pewee *C. pertinax* and lacking tufted crest, bright mandible, etc. Long primary projection  $\geq$  tertials; from below, tips of primaries equalled undertail-coverts tips; sallying, returning to perch, silent. Peaked nape, slightly notched tail. Head and upperparts cold olive greyish brown with  $\pm$  no green tones, two narrow dirty pale greyish wingbars, paler tertial edgings. Throat dirty whitish, chest and sides smoky grey, no paler than upperparts, with creamy median ventral stripe, off-white undertail-coverts. Bill

blackish above, below dark/blackish with pale flesh-orange restricted to base.’

The second bird, observed 1.5 hours later along the main road through the Mountain Pine Ridge, was similar in appearance to the first but with distinct dark centres to the undertail-coverts and a diffuse streaked effect on its sides. This bird, however, called on several occasions, uttering the species’ characteristic *peeihrr* and *wh’eeehrr* notes with a distinct burriness, especially in the *eeei* section. In both instances, numerous Eastern Wood-pewees *C. virens* were seen and heard nearby for comparison.

#### **Grey Kingbird** *Tyrannus dominicensis*

Howell *et al.*<sup>13</sup> and Walters<sup>30</sup> were the first to report *T. dominicensis* in Belize, and Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> included north-east Belize within its normal range of occurrence as a transient. Our observations and those of others confirm this assessment (see Fig. 11). Most records have been from the northern cayes and the nearby mainland coast in and near Belize City. Individuals have been reported from inland sites on five occasions: near San Ignacio on 22 March 1960 and at Middlesex, Stann Creek District, on 26 March 1963<sup>30</sup>, Southern Highway (26.5 km south of Hummingbird Highway) on 5 September 1998 (Balderamos), La Milpa Field Station, west Orange Walk District, on 20 April 1999 (J. Baird), and St. Matthews Village Farm Road, Cayo District, on 26 June 1999 (Balderamos). All records of which we are aware have been in the period 16 March–11 May, with three exceptions: 14 July 1991 (Caye Caulker, EM), 24 September 1996 (Ambergris Caye, HLJ), and 26 June 1999 (see above).

#### **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** *Tyrannus forficatus*

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> considered Belize as outside the normal winter range of this species. Russell<sup>27</sup>, Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> and Garcia *et al.*<sup>10</sup> all indicated that it is a rare transient and winter visitor. It has been reported with increasing frequency in recent years and is now a fairly common transient and local winter visitor. Twelve to 16 birds have spent the past three winters at the Voice of America facility (Fig. 12) in Punta Gorda (unvisited prior to autumn 1996). HLJ has seen migrating groups of up to 10 individuals regularly in October in southern coastal Belize. We have seen other individuals and small groups periodically in winter throughout Belize, as have others. For example, it is seen routinely in winter in Belize City, a frequently birded area, and it has been recorded on four of the last 13 Belize City Christmas Bird Counts. T. Rodriguez reports that it has become progressively more common at the National Stadium in Belize City over the past several winters, with 30 present in 1998–1999. EM has seen it three times on Caye Caulker, and it is reported periodically from Ambergris Caye, establishing its presence as an occasional transient and winter visitor on the cayes. Extreme dates of occurrence are 8 October–7 May, with a late individual present on Long Loco Caye 26 km east of Rum Point, Stann Creek District, on 29 May 1998 (MM & HLJ).

#### **White-winged Becard** *Pachyramphus polychopterus*

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> considered this species to occur only in Toledo District, with an isolated record from western Orange Walk District on 24 January 1991 at Gallon Jug<sup>13</sup>. This species was unrecorded in Belize prior to 26 April 1970 when one was in the Columbia River Forest Reserve<sup>33</sup>. Since 1970, it has been recorded with increasing frequency in Toledo District and more recently from areas progressively farther north. There are now multiple records from all districts except the northernmost, Corozal, where it is unrecorded, and Belize, with only one record. The chronology and pattern of records suggest that this forest edge and open scrubland species is expanding its range northward, probably in response to deforestation.

#### **Grey-breasted Martin** *Progne chalybea*

Most authors<sup>1,27</sup> consider Grey-breasted Martin as largely resident in Belize. Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup>, however, treated it as a summer visitor to north-west Belize, a year-round resident in the south-east, and uncommon to rare in winter on the Atlantic slope from Belize south. Triggs (unpubl.) commented in 1986: ‘I strongly suggest that the majority of the Belize population are summer residents.’ Yet, in marked contrast to Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> and Triggs, *chalybea* has been reported on 19 of 25 Belize City Christmas Bird Counts (max. 350, mean 57.4), 15 of 22 Belmopan counts (max. 55, mean 8.0), and two of seven Gallon Jug counts, with three birds seen on each. Clearly, there is a wide disparity between these data and the assessments of Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> and Triggs. We suspect that most martins reported on Christmas Bird Counts are misidentified Tree Swallows *Tachycineta bicolor* and *Stelgidopteryx* swallows seen at a distance. HLJ has recorded *chalybea* in Belize only in the period 24 December–24 September, with few present before the second week of January. Although it is possible that this species is present in some winters and absent in others, it is more than likely rare or sporadic at best. Phillips<sup>26</sup> stated:

‘Winters in Pacific lowlands...and (apparently very locally in N) on Caribbean slope, mostly in arid parts...including Belize (2 males 20 Dec. 1906, lost?); Peck (*vide* Russell<sup>27</sup>) wrote “never entirely disappears, its movements being apparently quite irregular”, and it is reported regularly in late December. Surely, however, most birds leave the Caribbean slope NW of about Costa Rica, except (apparently) in Belize, by late September.’

Based on the pattern of occurrence that is emerging, the 20 December record could easily have been an early migrant. The fact that the first birds of spring occasionally arrive in late December (making this species easily Belize’s earliest spring migrant) has undoubtedly contributed to the mistaken assumption that it is present year-round.

#### **Cave Swallow** *Hirundo fulva*

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> accepted no records for Belize. Both Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> and Garcia *et al.*<sup>10</sup> indicated that it is accidental in



Belize but cite no specific records. On 21 September 1985 at Airport Camp, Ladyville, Belize District, Triggs closely observed four [probable?] *H. fulva* with other swallows for 15–20 minutes, often feeding at ground level at very close range. He described these birds as follows: ‘Tail square without any noticeable sign of a fork. Brownish wings and tail with brown/blue sheen on back and shoulders, brown/blue crown with cinnamon forehead, throat, and rump. Lack of darkish throat and buffish forehead led me to conclude that it was this species.’ Triggs’ statement that they had ‘cinnamon forehead, throat, and rump’ is ambiguous, as they should have had dark cinnamon or chestnut foreheads, much paler cinnamon-buff throats, and either dark cinnamon to chestnut or pale cinnamon-buff rumps, depending on which subspecies he saw. In fact, Triggs’ description may not convincingly eliminate juvenile Cliff Swallow *H. pyrrhonota*.

HLJ has seen it on at least two occasions: 25 September 1996 (a bird closely studied while perched and in flight at Ambergris Caye), and 30 March 1999 (another well-seen individual, both perched and flying, at Blue Creek ricefields). Additionally, on 12 September 1996 he saw two probable *H. fulva* migrating south along the coast at Punta Gorda, but his view of these was less than adequate to confirm the record. The Ambergris Caye bird appeared to be the highly migratory, pale-rumped *H. f. pelodoma* from northern Mexico and adjacent USA, as it clearly had a pale cinnamon-buff rump. The Blue Creek bird, however, did have a dark rump and was clearly not *pelodoma*. It was likely either the dark chestnut-rumped *citata*, a nomadic, presumed resident of the nearby Yucatán Peninsula, or the similarly dark-rumped *cavicola* from Cuba and the Isle of Pines, which is at least partially migratory<sup>26</sup>. It is also possible that it came from the Chiapas population. These birds, which have dark flanks and rump colour similar to *citata*, undergo poorly known (local?) migrations<sup>14</sup>. *P. f. pelodoma* is rapidly expanding its breeding range with the proliferation of artificial nest sites in the south-west USA (bridges, highway culverts), and Chiapas birds may be doing likewise. We expect reports of *H. fulva* in Belize to increase as birders become aware of its potential occurrence and begin to more closely scrutinise ‘cliff swallows.

#### **Nashville Warbler** *Vermivora ruficapilla*

EM has seen this species on Caye Caulker during two winter seasons: mid-November and 9 December 1990 (perhaps the same individual) and 10 November 1993–4 February 1994, with up to four present on 28 December. We are aware of 4–5 additional sight records: singles at Gallon Jug on 5 and 8 February 1958<sup>27</sup>, Bermudian Landing, west Belize District, on 31 March 1996<sup>29</sup>, on the Belize City Christmas Bird Count on 21 December 1997 (Balderamos unpubl.) and on the 27 December 1998 Belmopan Christmas Bird Count (O. Figueroa unpubl.). Additionally, one was reported, apparently without comment, on the 18 December 1983 Belize City Christmas Bird Count.

#### **Virginia’s Warbler** *Vermivora virginiae*

An immature was reported by D. James from Baker’s Ranch, near Sand Hill, on the 18 December 1988 Belize City Christmas Bird Count, and another was reported in Dangriga on 16 March 1989<sup>13</sup>. EM has recorded this species on at least three occasions on Caye Caulker (but see below): 9 February 1993 (a dull female), 30 December 1993 and 4 January 1994 (probably the same bird), and 6 May 1995 (a male with its red crown patch visible). M. England closely observed one near Lamanai Outpost Lodge, Orange Walk District, on 15 February 1999, described to HLJ as follows.

‘At first I was thinking Nashville Warbler, but I noticed the obvious difference in coloration between this bird and Nashville (Nashvilles are common migrants where I come from). The bird was very pale (grey on the back), had a very bold white eye-ring, and a yellow wash to the chest and undertail-coverts. I did not see the olive rump, or crown patch—at our angle it would have been impossible. The bird did occasionally bob its tail while feeding.’

Although adult males of this species are rather distinctive, we advise caution in identifying females and immature males, especially on the coast and cayes, as immature female Mangrove Warbler *Dendroica petechia erithachorides* in Belize shares many plumage characters with *V. virginiae*<sup>15</sup>. Although confident in her observations, EM’s original field notes concerning her two earlier observations do not eliminate *erithachorides*. Nor have we seen written descriptions of either the Baker’s Ranch or the Dangriga bird that convincingly eliminate *erithachorides*; however, the former was at an inland location where *erithachorides* is unlikely to occur.

#### **Tropical Parula** *Parula pitiayumi*

This species was listed by Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> (two records) and Garcia *et al.*<sup>10</sup> as accidental. Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> requested verification of reports from Belize. Parker *et al.*<sup>24</sup> recorded it as uncommon at Union and Gloria Camps in Columbia River Forest Reserve during their 3–13 April 1992 expedition. Miller & Miller<sup>22</sup> mist-netted one at Caracol, Cayo District (date unknown to us). Howell noted a singing bird between Augustine and Guacamallo Bridge in Mountain Pine Ridge, Cayo District, on 25 March 1996. In February 1997, Jones & Gardner<sup>16</sup> found it fairly common in the vicinity of Little Quartz Ridge at 700–750 m but not at higher elevations (940–1,035 m) on the ridge itself (its absence there may be related to habitat, not elevation). They recorded 1–5 singing almost daily on 15–24 February at all camps below and to the west, south, and south-east of Little Quartz Ridge. Others working in the Chiquibul region, southern Cayo District, have also encountered this species on several occasions<sup>19</sup> (A. Vallely unpubl.). This species appears to be a fairly common resident at moderately high elevations in the Maya Mountains and less common, perhaps seasonal, at lower elevations in southern Cayo District.

#### **Hermit Warbler** *Dendroica occidentalis*

D. James and J. Withgott saw a male *D. occidentalis* in Bermudian Landing on 28 December 1991. This represents the

first record of this species from Belize. A full description is available in the BBIS<sup>23</sup>. Miller & Miller<sup>22</sup> mentioned this record but did not elaborate.

#### **Black-throated Grey Warbler** *Dendroica nigrescens*

EM observed a male at very close range c.3 km south of San Pedro, Ambergris Caye, on 1 April 1990. It had a black head (including throat) broken by two white stripes, one behind the eye and one below the eye, a grey back and white underparts with streaked sides. This represents the first record of this species for the country. It normally winters only as far south as the Isthmus of Tehuantepec<sup>14</sup>.

#### **Blackpoll Warbler** *Dendroica striata*

Listed as accidental on the cayes by both Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> and Garcia *et al.*<sup>10</sup>, but not admitted for Belize by Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> based on a lack of supporting documentation. On Caye Caulker, EM observed a male on 13 May 1997 and five males in separate areas of the island on 25 April 1998. She has seen this species at least once in spring prior to 1994 but does not have adequate supporting documentation. Two autumn sight records may also be credible. MM carefully examined an exhausted bird at very close range on northern Ambergris Caye in mid-October 1994 but failed to record any specific details. Even though he was aware of its rarity at the time and is confident in his identification, the record must be considered tentative. More recently, J. Baird, who is thoroughly familiar with both *D. striata* and the similar Bay-breasted Warbler *D. castanea* in autumn, carefully observed one at Hill Bank on 6 October 1998. We dismiss all other autumn and winter records (of which there are several), as *D. striata* is more likely to appear in Belize in spring than autumn, its spring migration route being significantly farther west than its autumn route over the Atlantic Ocean<sup>8</sup>.

#### **Canada Warbler** *Wilsonia canadensis*

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> and most other references have correctly stated that *W. canadensis* is a passage migrant in Central America, wintering no farther north than South America. It is also one of the latest migrants in spring, typically not arriving in Central America until early to mid-April and in Mexico and the United States until mid- to late April. Yet Russell<sup>27</sup> mentioned no fewer than five sight records (of seven birds in all) by reputable observers on 22 January–26 March, the other two being a specimen and a sight record, both in late April. The bird on 26 March was found dead (but unfortunately discarded) on Half Moon Caye, the morning following a phenomenal early spring wave of migrating passerines numbering thousands (J. Verner unpubl.). While this may be an exceptionally early spring migrant, the other four defy explanation and are best disregarded in the absence of supporting specimens or photographic evidence. If one were to consult only Russell<sup>27</sup>, *W. canadensis* would appear to be principally a winter and early spring visitor in Belize. This is certainly not the case: it appears to be an occasional transient, primarily in the cayes. HLJ has seen it once on the mainland near Punta Gorda, once on Ambergris Caye, and twice on Caye Caulker, all in late September and early October. MM saw one on 11 October 1988 in Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary.

#### **Bananaquit** *Coereba flaveola*

Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup> indicated that it is found only on mainland Belize, roughly south of a line from Belize City west to the junction of Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico. It was not included in their list of birds on the Belize cayes. Two distinct subspecies are found in northern Central America and Mexico, the grey-throated *mexicana* on the mainland and white-throated *caboti*, which is restricted to Cozumel Island and adjacent coastal Quintana Roo<sup>14</sup>. MacKinnon<sup>18</sup> also indicated that it is rare in southern coastal Quintana Roo. Previously unreported from Belize, *caboti* is now one of the most common birds on Caye Caulker. EM first became aware of the unique nature of this population in 1988 and brought this to HLJ's attention when he first visited the caye in autumn 1996. On Ambergris Caye, it is less common and largely restricted to the northern two-thirds of the peninsula (north of San Pedro). It is unrecorded elsewhere in Belize.

#### **Flame-coloured Tanager** *Piranga bidentata*

MM observed three singing males at the summit of Mt. Margaret on 29–30 June 1994. Intrigued with this most unprecedented report, HLJ climbed Mt. Margaret on 22 April 1997. Virtually the first bird he saw on arriving at the peak was a female *P. bidentata*. In all, he recorded 5–7 birds, both males and females, daily on 22–24 April, all at the peak. Details of these observations are in his field notes. These observations, along with the earlier report by MM, represent the first occurrence of this species in Belize. It almost certainly breeds on Mt. Margaret and perhaps on the nearby, ornithologically unexplored Mt. Mossy.

#### **Clay-coloured Sparrow** *Spizella pallida*

HLJ observed two on Ambergris Caye in autumn 1996: one on 25 September c.8 km north of San Pedro, and one on 21–22 October south of San Pedro. Both were carefully studied: brown rump and uppertail-coverts, grey nape, buffy-brown breast, distinct malar stripe and well-defined auricular patch, and the whitish central crown stripe all being noted. These field characters eliminate all other *Spizella* species, including Chipping Sparrow *S. passerina*, which is a common resident of pine woodland on the adjacent mainland. In light of these two records, and as we have never seen *S. passerina* away from its breeding areas in Belize, all out-of-range reports of *S. passerina* in Belize should be carefully documented.

### Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus*

This species was considered accidental by Wood *et al.*<sup>34</sup> and Garcia *et al.*<sup>10</sup>, but not included by Howell & Webb<sup>14</sup>, although the latter authors present multiple extralimital records for all surrounding countries. HLJ observed two individuals in autumn 1996, one on 23–24 September in San Pedro and one on 13 October in Punta Gorda. Zimmer, Emanuel and others closely observed one at CTWS on 27 February 1998. We suspect that this species will prove to be a rare migrant and winter visitor.

### Acknowledgements

We are especially grateful to James Baird, Philip Balderamos, Peter Craig, Glenn Crawford, Marcus England, Omar Figueroa, Alan Foreman, William Haas, Doug James, Jan Meerman, Sam Tillett, Andrew Valley, Bret Whitney and Barry Zimmer for allowing us to publish noteworthy records from their field notes or photographs. Mick Craig and Bruce & Carolyn Miller were instrumental in helping us find several of the more obscure bird records and literature. We are grateful to Paul Triggs for providing the Belize Audubon Society with a copy of his detailed and informative field notes made during his stay in Belize in 1985–1986. Kimball Garrett and William Wirtz allowed HLJ unlimited access to the bird collections at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History and Pomona College.

### References

1. American Ornithologists' Union (1998) *Check-list of North American Birds*. Seventh edition. Washington DC: American Ornithologists' Union.
2. Anon. (1976) A new sight record for Belize. *Belize Audubon Soc. Newsletter* 8: 2.
3. Barlow, J. C., Dick, J. A., Weyer, D. & Young, W. F. (1972) New records of birds from British Honduras (Belize), including a skua. *Condor* 74: 486–487.
4. Clinton-Eitnienar, J. (1986) Status of the large forest eagles of Belize. *Birds of Prey Bull.* 3: 107–110.
5. Clinton-Eitnienar, J. (1991) The Solitary Eagle (*Harpyhaliaetus solitarius*), a new threatened species. *Birds of Prey Bull.* 4: 81–85.
6. Counsell, D. J. R. (1986) The RAFOS expedition to Belize 1986. *RAFOS J.* 18: 17–63.
7. Dunham, P. (1994) Harpy Eagle sighted. *Belize Audubon Soc. Newsletter* 26 (2): 15.
8. Dunn, J. L. & Garrett, K. L. (1997) *A field guide to the warblers of North America*. Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin.
9. England, M. C. (1999) An apparent influx of Chuck-will's-widow *Caprimulgus carolinensis* along the New River Lagoon, Orange Walk District, Belize. *Cotinga* 11: 97.
10. Garcia, J., Matola, S., Meadows, M. & Wright, C. (1994) *A checklist of the birds of Belize*. Belize City: World Wildlife Fund.
11. Hartshorn, G., Nicolait, L., Hartshorn, L., Bevier, G., Brightman, R., Cal, J., Cawich, A., Davidson, W., Dubois, R., Dyer, C., Gibson, J., Hawley, W., Leonard, J., Nicolait, R., Weyer, D., White, H. & Wright, C. (1984) *Belize country profile*. Belize City: Robert Nicolait & Associates.
12. Hecker, S. (1984) An invitation to look for rails at Big Falls Ranch. *Belize Audubon Soc. Newsletter* 16 (4): 1–2.
13. Howell, S. N. G., Dowell, B. A., James, D. A., Behrstock, R. A. & Robbins, C. S. (1992) New and noteworthy bird records from Belize. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 112: 235–244.
14. Howell, S. N. G. & Webb, S. (1995) *A guide to the birds of Mexico and northern Central America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
15. Jones, H. L. (in prep.) *A field guide to the birds of Belize*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
16. Jones, H. L. & Gardner, D. (in press) *The Columbia River Forest Reserve, Belize. The Little Quartz Ridge expedition, a biological assessment*. Columbia Press.
17. Land, H. C. (1970) *Birds of Guatemala*. Wynnewood, Penn: Livingston Publishing Company.
18. MacKinnon, H. B. (1992) *Check-list of the birds of the Yucatan Peninsula*. Amigos de Sian Ka'an.
19. Mallory, E. P. & Brokaw, V. L. (1997) *Impacts of silvicultural trials on birds and tree regeneration in the Chiquibul Forest Reserve, Belize*. Consultancy Report 20. Belmopan: Forest Planning and Management Project, Ministry of Natural Resources, Belize.
20. Matola, S. (ed.) (1995) *Expedition to Doyle's Delight, southern Maya Mountains, Belize*. Belmopan: Forest Planning and Management Project, Ministry of Natural Resources (Occasional Series 5).
21. Miller, B. W. & Miller, C. M. (1992) Distributional notes and new species records for birds in Belize. *Occas. Papers Belize Nat. Hist. Soc.* 1: 6–25.
22. Miller, B. W. & Miller, C. M. (1998) Ornithology in Belize since 1960. *Wilson Bull.* 110: 544–558.
23. Miller, B. W. & Miller, C. M. (1999) Database administrators, Belize Biodiversity Information Systems, (CEDS), Wildlife Conservation Society, Gallon Jug, Belize. Web page at <http://fwie.fw.vt.edu/wcs/>.
24. Parker, T. A., Holst, B. K., Emmons, L. H. & Meyer, J. R. (1993) *A biological assessment of the Columbia River Forest Reserve, Toledo District, Belize*. Washington DC: Conservation International (RAP Working Papers 3).
25. Parkes, K. C. (1970) On the validity of some supposed 'first state records' from Yucatán. *Wilson Bull.* 82: 92–95.
26. Phillips, A. R. (1986) *The known birds of North and Middle America*, 1. Denver: Phillips.
27. Russell, S. M. (1964) *A distributional survey of the birds of British Honduras*. Orn. Monogr. 1.
28. Smith, P. W. (1987) The Eurasian Collared-Dove arrives in the Americas. *Amer. Birds* 41: 1371–1397.
29. Valley, A. C. & Aversa, T. (1997) New and noteworthy bird records from Belize including the first record of

- Chestnut-collared Swift *Cypseloides rutilus*. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 117: 272–274.
30. Walters, R. (1993) Some records of birds from Belize, Central America, including three first records. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 113: 145–147.
  31. Weyer, D. (1984) Diurnal birds of prey of Belize. *The Hawk Trust Ann. Rep.* 14: 22–39.
  32. Weyer, D. & Young, W. F. (1983) *A checklist of the birds of Belize*. Birmingham, Alabama: International Expeditions.
  33. Wood, D. S. & Leberman, R. C. (1987) Results of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History expedition to Belize, 3. *Annals Carnegie Mus.* 56: 137–160.
  34. Wood, D. S., Leberman, R. C. & Weyer, D. (1986) *Checklist of the birds of Belize*. Carnegie Mus. Nat. Hist. (Special Publication 12).

**H. Lee Jones**

6108 Wildwood Road, Lake Isabella, California 93240, USA.

**Ellen McRae**

P. O. Box 47, SIWA-BAN Foundation, Caye Caulker, Belize.

**Martin Meadows**

P. O. Box 228, Belmopan, Belize.

**Steve N. G. Howell**

Point Reyes Bird Observatory, 4990 Shoreline Highway, Stinson Beach, California 94970, USA.