

NEW YORK STATE BIRDS IN COLOMBIA

MARGARET RUSK

PART II — LAND BIRDS

Records of New York State land birds wintering in Colombia are in a way more fascinating than those of shore and water birds. The latter are for the most part larger and of powerful flight, so that the sea is no barrier to them and one expects more to see them in widely separated regions on migration. But when small warblers, orioles or finches appear thousands of miles overseas from their summer localities, and in habitat strikingly different in vegetation besides, one is impressed with the strength of the migration urge. A beach is a beach, anywhere, but a northern wooded swamp has few elements in common with a tropical thorn locust thicket of the dry savannah, lashed by the northeast trade wind from November to May, and overgrown by coarse vines which leaf out with the rainy season the other half of the year.

In October Yellow-billed Cuckoos literally dropped out of the locust trees of Barranquilla's suburbs and "monte" (the scrub jungle of the Caribbean coast) — Barranquilla is situated 18 miles up the Magdalena River from its mouth on the Caribbean at Puerto Colombia. Average September count of Yellow-billed Cuckoos was three per trip (a trip was about a two-hour three-mile circuit on foot of monte and suburban gardens) with a high count of 20 on Oct 13. My only other records are for Nov: one seen several times in the nispero tree (the fruit is like a delicious winey sickel pear) outside my downtown apartment window, and a slingshot-wounded one brought to me for care.

Flycatchers can be difficult to sight-identify even in the eastern U. S. with only three or four Empidonax possibilities; in Colombia, for which there is no Peterson Guide, they are impossible. There were Empidonaces in Barranquilla in fall migration, but whether from eastern or western U. S. or of tropical origin I could not determine. Wood Pewees were identified by their characteristic call at El Recuerdo, at 3000 feet in the Santa Marta mountains southeast of Barranquilla on the other side of the Magdalena River valley, on Apr 15-17 and 27-28 (more numerous the latter dates). How many times did they silently lose themselves among the other Tyrannidae in Barranquilla?

Eastern Kingbirds appeared around Barranquilla from Sep 18, and as many as 20 were seen at Bocas de Cenizas (the "Mouths of Ashes" of the Magdalena at the Caribbean Sea). on Sep 30. Oct counts were higher, averaging 18 per trip in the monte, with a high of 50-100 at the Barranquilla Country Club Oct 13, perched in the mataraton locusts from which they swooped down to feed over the lawns among the Pectoral Sandpipers and with the tropical Gray Kingbirds. Also in Oct about 50 Eastern Kingbirds came to roost each evening in the mataratones which lined the avenue near the city apartment building. In Nov the numbers roosting there were reduced, but I saw them by the mangrove- and locust-bordered canal near Barranquilla which connects the Magdalena with Cienaga Grande, the large salt-water lake behind Santa Marta's barrier beach. Apparently the Kingbirds proceed inland for the winter at a leisurely pace as the oncoming dry season on the coast cuts the supply of flies except in places close to

bodies of water. My only other Eastern Kingbird record is Apr 15-17 at El Recuerdo when they were probably on their way north.

Barn Swallows were seen on about one-third of trips in Sep and two-thirds of Oct trips, in the Barranquilla suburbs and monte and at Puerto Colombia. They usually appeared immediately after rain — downpours of an hour's duration occur about twice a week in Sep and Oct, with lessening frequency later in Oct — hunting insects over the cut grass stubble. My last fall record is of ten at Puerto Colombia Nov 15. Probably during Barranquilla's complete dry season (December to April) they are forced to migrate inland to find water-frequenting flies. However, I have records of an average of three per trip for April and early May around Barranquilla, this before the first rains.

The only North American thrush noted by me in Colombia is the Swainson's, and only on visits to the interior. They were everywhere in the underbrush at El Recuerdo Apr 27-28, doubtless a pre-migration flocking-up; none had been noted there Apr 15-17 the same year. I also saw them in the shrubbery of the town-square park at Popayan (altitude 5700 ft., at the head of the Cauca River valley between the western and central Andean ranges in southern Colombia) in mid-Jan.

Vireos are nearly as numerous and hard to distinguish in Colombia as flycatchers. The only species seen that I can be sure was a New York one is the Red-eyed, observed several times, all in Oct, in the scrub locusts and vines of the Barranquilla monte, and also in the downtown nispero tree. It would therefore seem to be chiefly a fall migrant on the Caribbean coast.

Among the warblers are some interesting notes: I saw in Colombia most of the North American ones listed in Griscom's "Warblers of America" as common there, either in migration on the coast or wintering in the interior. The commonest coastal warbler is the Yellow, seen year-round. But since there is a local non-migratory subspecies, as well as several western and the eastern North American migrant subspecies which winter in Colombia, it is impossible to determine what proportion of my sight records are of New York birds. Yellow Warblers were heard singing in Oct and Apr.

The next-to-commonest New York State warbler on the Colombian coast is the elusive Prothonotary of North American wooded swamps. It appears around Barranquilla in the dry thorn jungle, so different from its moist summer habitat, as well as in dooryard palms. The earliest fall record, Sep 15, was reported by a friend. She also purchased on Sep 16 a caged Prothonotary from a peddler who assured her the bird was recently captured locally. My earliest view of them in the field was of two on Sep 23. The peak numbers come in Oct, with the maximum noted by me ten on Oct 14. Also I have several Nov, Dec, Jan, and Mar records from the Barranquilla monte and also in the heart of the city in the all-attracting nispero, which indicate that Prothonotaries winter along the coast.

The one record of the Northern Waterthrush is one in a swampy spot along the village road at Puerto Colombia Oct 9, only a few rods from the Caribbean Sea. I have no records of Redstarts wintering on the coast. An alleged recent capture, an immature male which did not live long in captivity, was bought by my friend at Barranquilla on Sep 16. I saw two Redstarts in the nispero the second week of Oct. They were at El Recuerdo in

the tall forest trees Apr 17. At Boliver's cottage at Bogota (at 8000 feet, its small garden, wedged between high Montserrate and the city of Bogota, is an oasis for birds) and in Popayan I saw Redstarts in Jan.

Blackburnians, common in Colombia's mountainous interior, were at Bolivar's cottage in Jan, at Popayan in Jan and Mar, and in Manizales (on a 7000-foot ridge of the central Andean range) also in Mar. Finally, the Black and White was at Bolivar's cottage in Jan, and the Mourning Warbler at El Recuerdo Apr 16 and 28. I have no records for the last three in coastal areas.

Among the icterids, I saw a small flock of Bobolinks, which do not winter in Colombia, on Oct 14 and one bird on Oct 27, feeding in weedy stubble-hay fields near Barranquilla. Both Orchard and Baltimore Orioles appeared in the downtown nispero tree in Oct, the former from the 7th, the latter from the 15th, and remained in small numbers (a pair or three birds) into Nov. Last date for Orchard Oriole is Nov 25, but a pair of Baltimore Orioles was still seen in the nispero Dec 15, then not again until one male Feb 23 and 28. I saw them there several times in Mar, and a friend in the suburbs had "a tree full" during that month. An indication of the probable numbers and migration dates of Baltimore Orioles around Barranquilla is that they were being sold as cage birds in the market in Feb, Mar, and Apr, but not in May.

In May it was Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Dickcissels in migration which were caught in large numbers to sell in the market. I never saw a free individual of either of these species in the environs of Barranquilla, but they were probably brought as cage birds from the nearby river- and hill-country. I saw the Rose-breasted Grosbeak at El Recuerdo in Apr, and Dickcissels I had seen by the several thousands sweeping over the Santa Marta airport which lies right on the Caribbean shore, on Apr 20. On Jan 1 on the Magdalena not far below Puerto Wilches I had seen tens of thousands of what Dr. Carriker of Popayan indicated must have been Dickcissels, rising like smoke on the horizon over the savannah. Because of its stupendous numbers there, this species may best typify the migration of northern birds in Colombia.

Conclusion

As with the water birds, so too with the land birds it appears that the majority of species which pass through the Barranquilla region winter inland at higher altitudes where more regular rainfall and better water-holding quality of the soil insure a more regular food supply, insect and plant. Therefore the numbers observed on the coast are in general higher during the two migration seasons, though it is more difficult to generalize about this with the land birds than with the water birds, because of the smaller numbers involved in sight records of the former, due to the effect of wind and heavy vegetation in decreasing audibility and visibility. The chief exceptions — landbirds which winter near the coast in some numbers — are the Prothonotary and probably Yellow Warblers, and the Baltimore Oriole.

In the fall, the oncoming dry season seems to be the chief factor which forces the migrants southward and inland at a slow but steady pace. But, in the spring, the effect of the season on the birds' physiology impels them north at a given time, even though in April they must pass through the coastal

region before the rainy season has started. Due to this factor they would pass over the dry strip as rapidly as possible, so the time during which one sees numbers of migrants (in the immediate vicinity of Barranquilla as opposed to El Recuerdo which is moister even before the rains start) would be shorter than in fall, as is in fact the case; pre-migrational concentrations (though of only a few days' duration) were noticeable at El Recuerdo but scarcely so in Barranquilla (or so brief as to go un-noted).

In summary: one can hypothesize on the basis of limited observations that in the fall the oncoming dry season forces the birds inland only slowly, whereas in spring the lingering coastal drought pushes the already-started migration on through to Central America or out over the sea quite rapidly.

Bibliography for Parts I and II

- American Ornithologists' Union, **Check-list of North American Birds**, 5th ed, 1957.
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Griscom, Ludlow, et al, **Warblers of America**, Devin-Adair, 1957.
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EXCHANGE OF LOCAL BULLETINS AMONG MEMBER CLUBS OF THE FEDERATION OF NYSBC

As of November 25, 1959, the following clubs have indicated a desire to exchange bulletins. Bulletins should be sent to the names and addresses given below.

- Alan Devoe Bird Club — Mrs. Fred Smilow, East Chatham, N. Y.
Buffalo Audubon Society — Mrs. E. D. Csont, Beach Avenue, Athol Springs, N. Y.
Buffalo Ornithological Society — Miss Marie A. Wendling, 87 Garrison Road, Williamsville 21, N. Y.
Burroughs Audubon Nature Club — Mrs. Goodwin E. Lehrer, 105 Snider Drive, Buffalo 17, N. Y.
Genesee Ornithological Society — Mr. Al Starling, 34 Pinnacle Rd., Rochester, N. Y.
John Burroughs Natural History Society — Mrs. H. F. Dunbar, R. D. 3, Box 194, Kingston, N. Y.
Keuka Park Conservation Club — Miss Mae H. Baker, Box 75, Keuka Park, N. Y.
The Linnaean Society of New York — The Linnaean Society of New York, The American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th St., New York 24, N. Y.
Ralph T. Waterman Bird Club (formerly Dutchess County B. C.) — Ralph T. Waterman Bird Club, Box 1414, Arlington Branch, Poughkeepsie, N. Y.
Rockland Audubon Society — The Rockland Audubon Society, Inc., West Nyack, N. Y.
Sassafras Bird Club — Miss Dorothy G. Niles, Pres., 81 Minaville St., Amsterdam, N. Y.
Sawmill River Audubon Society — William G. Fennell, 16 Halsey Place, Valhalla, N. Y.
Schenectady Bird Club Inc. — Nelle G. VanVorst, 67 Snowden Ave., Schenectady, N. Y.
Sullivan County Audubon Society — Edward McBride, Cooper's Corners, Star Route, Monticello, N. Y.
Triple Cities Naturalists Club — Mrs. Newell R. Washburn, Editor, 2204 E. Main Street, Endicott, N. Y.