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FIRST RECORDS OF THE KELP GULL IN MEXICO

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The Kelp Gull (*Larus dominicanus*) has a circumpolar distribution in the southern hemisphere. In the Americas it has been recorded breeding north to Peru and southern Brazil (Harrison 1983). Here we report the recent occurrence of Kelp Gulls along the coast of Yucatan, Mexico.

**History of black-backed gulls in Yucatan**

The first record of any large black-backed gull in the Yucatan Peninsula was an advanced third-winter or adult Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*) seen at Las Coloradas, just east of Río Lagartos, on 14 November 1983 (Lasley 1987). Subsequently there have been three other records of Lesser Black-backed Gull from the northern coast of Yucatan: a second-winter bird at Las Colorada in February 1989 (Howell and Prairie 1989);
an adult photographed at Progreso on 10 April 1992 (Robert C. Self and Catherine Hoff, pers. comm.); and a third-winter bird photographed at Las Coloradas on 11 Feb. 1994 (Howell, Joe Keenan, and Barbara MacKinnon H.). All of these birds showed the characters of the race  *graellsii*, which occurs regularly in eastern North America.

In addition, we know of four records of unidentified, large, black-backed gulls seen in the vicinity of Río Lagartos and Las Coloradas: 11 and 13 November 1987 at Río Lagartos (Correa and Garcia); 17 February 1989 at Las Coloradas (Howell); 25 February 1990 at Las Coloradas (Stuart Tingley, pers. comm.); and 9 January 1991 at Las Coloradas (Richard G. Wilson, pers. comm.). These birds all had blackish backs, strikingly darker than *graellsii* Lesser Black-backed. Poor photos of the 1990 bird show a heavy bill, and the 1989 and 1991 birds were seen to have yellow legs. The 1989 bird was originally identified as a Lesser Black-backed Gull of the nominate race *fuscus* (Howell and Prairie 1989), but Howell now questions this identification and believes the bird was probably a Kelp Gull. While none of these birds was identified conclusively, they all showed features indicative of Kelp Gull and suggest strongly that this species occurred in Yucatan prior to the first confirmed record in May 1991.

**Kelp Gulls in Yucatan**

Reports and photographs of birds thought to be a “mated pair” of Kelp Gulls in coastal Louisiana in the summers of 1989 and 1990 (Purrington 1990) spurred efforts to solve the identity of the Yucatan mystery birds. Three records of a pair of Kelp Gulls in Yucatan are now well-documented by photographs: 30 May 1991, San Fernando in the Río Lagartos Wildlife Refuge (Correa and David Alonzo; Figure 1); late May 1993, 11 km east of Las Coloradas (D. Tom Rogers); and 11 February 1994 at Las Coloradas (Howell, Keenan, and MacKinnon H.; Figure 2). The May 1993 birds were on an island in one of the many salt ponds, and were watched copulating once before they flew off to the east. As well as these photographic records, one to two adult Kelp Gulls have been reported regularly since 1991, from October to May in the Río Lagartos area, mostly around Las Coloradas (Keenan and P. Wood, pers. comm). The lack of records for June to September may simply reflect lack of observer coverage during those months.
The following description is derived from field notes and photos of what appears to be the same pair of birds in all three photographic records. In February 1994 the birds were studied in good light, at ranges down to 40 m, with a Questar telescope, in direct comparison with other species including Herring (L. argentatus), Ring-billed (L. delawarensis), and Laughing (L. atricilla) gulls.

Large gulls, similar in size to Herring Gull, and about twice the overall bulk of Ring-billed Gull. The stout bills, proportionately heavier than in Herring Gull, showed a distinct gonydeal swelling or angle (in Figure 1. Apparent pair of adult Kelp Gulls at the Rio Lagartos Wildlife Refuge, Yucatan, Mexico, 30 May 1991. Note the blackish backs, heavy bills, yellow legs, and slight size difference between the birds, suggesting a male and female.

Photo by Jorge Correa S.
notable contrast to the relatively slender bill of the Lesser Black-backed Gull in February 1994.) The head, neck, underparts, rump, tail coverts, and tail were clean white with no trace of dusky streaking on the head and neck. The back and upperwings were slaty blackish, often appearing black but, in good views, especially in flight, showing slight contrast with black wing tips. At rest, a white scapular crescent and a bold white tertial crescent, continuous with the broad white trailing edge to the secondaries, contrasted with the blackish upperparts. The wing tips at rest appeared black with small white tips to the outer primaries. In flight, the wing tips showed one small white mirror visible on the outermost primary, the secondaries were broadly tipped white, the inner primaries
more narrowly tipped white, and the outer primaries had narrow white tips (Figure 2). The bill was bright orange-yellow with a large red gonyx spot. The orbital rings of both birds were vermilion-red, slightly darker and thicker in front of and above the eye, slightly paler below and behind the eye. The eyes were pale yellow. The legs and feet were yellow, less bright and more ochre-yellow than the bill, similar to the leg color of an adult Ring-billed Gull, and typical of Kelp Gulls in northern Chile (Howell, pers. obs.; Figure 3). One bird was clearly larger and heavier-billed than the other, indicating male and female, supported by copulation noted in May 1993. In February 1994 the two birds associated strongly with one another and called antiphonally in response to our approach, one bird giving a low barking "owh", the other a slightly shorter "ah".

Of the several large black-backed gulls in the world, adults of other species are ruled out as follows. Great Black-backed Gull is more massive with a heavier bill and has flesh-pink legs and more white in the wing tips. Western, Slaty-backed, and Yellow-footed gulls are slaty gray above, not blackish; the first two have flesh-pink legs. Slaty-backed further has a distinct wing tip pattern, and Western and Yellow-footed have yellow to yellow-orange orbital rings.

Only nominate Lesser Black-backed Gull could have the same combination of blackish upperparts, yellow legs, and red orbital ring, but can be ruled out by virtue of its relatively slender bill (Figure 4). The Yucatan birds also appear to have the wrong structure for Lesser Black-backed Gull, being too bulky for that species. Howell has field experience with all of these large black-backed gulls and has no reason to doubt the identity of the Yucatan birds as Kelp Gulls. The pale yellow eyes of the Yucatan birds indicate that they are the nominate race dominicanus, rather than the brown-eyed South African race vetula (Brooke and Cooper 1979).

Discussion and Identification

The occurrence of Kelp Gulls in Yucatan corresponds with a marked expansion of this species' range in recent decades. For example, in Australia, the first record of Kelp Gull was in 1943, with breeding first proven in 1958; by 1982/83 there were approximately 400 nesting pairs
FIRST RECORDS OF THE KELP GULL IN MEXICO

Figure 3. Adult Kelp Gull at Huasco, north-central Chile, 28 November 1993. Note the stout bill with a swollen gonydeal angle, and the fairly bright yellow legs.

Photo by Steve N. G. Howell

(Blakers et al. 1984). In northernmost Africa, Kelp Gulls have nested recently in the northern hemisphere, with single nests found in Senegambia in 1980 and 1983 (Urban et al. 1986). In South America, the first nesting of Kelp Gulls in Ecuador was documented in 1993 (R.S. Ridgely, pers. comm.). This widespread expansion is generally attributed to increased food supply associated with refuse dumps and fishing harbors.

The Yucatan records parallel recent reports of probable Kelp Gulls in the southern U.S. (noted above) and may even involve some of the same individuals, Yucatan being directly south of Louisiana. They reaffirm that gulls have a remarkable potential for vagrancy and that all black-backed gulls in the Gulf of Mexico should be observed carefully: both
Western and Yellow-footed gulls have occurred recently on the Pacific side of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Oaxaca (Howell and Webb 1992), whence they could cross north into the Gulf of Mexico; a Slaty-backed Gull was seen in February 1992 within sight of Mexico in southern Texas (D. A. Sibley, pers. comm.); and a Great Black-backed Gull was reported in Belize in January 1989 (Howell et al. 1992). This last species has recently expanded its range in eastern North America and is being reported with increasing frequency on the Gulf Coast of the United States (Duncan 1981). Lesser Black-backed Gulls occur regularly in the Gulf of Mexico, and the presence of Kelp Gulls in the Gulf compounds an already difficult subject.

The identification of most large black-backed gulls is discussed in several North American guides and by Grant (1986). Differences between adult Kelp Gulls and adults of the other large black-backed gulls are mentioned above, the main problem being the separation of nominate Lesser Black-backed and Kelp.

**Structure.** - Kelp Gulls often appear heavier-built and stockier than Lesser Black-backed, particularly in the neck and chest, but this is subjective and requires comparative experience. Although the bill of Kelp
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Gull has a pronounced gonydeal angle and is stouter than that of Lesser Black-backed, Murphy (1936) pointed out the remarkable variation in bill size of Kelp Gulls in South America. Howell has examined specimens of Kelp Gulls at the American Museum of Natural History and also studied several hundred Kelp Gulls in Chile in November and December 1992 and 1993. He found some specimens and noted a few birds in the field with bills similar in overall size to the bills of Lesser Black-backed. All Kelp Gulls in the field, however, showed a swollen gonydeal angle such that the bill appeared thickest distally. Lesser Black-backed, however, has a bill typically fairly slender and thickest basally (Figure 4). Nonetheless, without careful scrutiny of bill shape, small-billed Kelp Gulls could be passed off as Lesser Black-backeds.

Adults. - Nominate Lesser Black-backed in basic plumage has fewer dusky markings on the head and neck than the southern-breeding subspecies graellsii, but still should show some “sparse but prominent spots and streaks, especially on the lower hindneck” (Grant 1986). Preliminary molt begins in January but it is unclear when nominate Lesser Black-backeds become cleanly white headed. Kelp Gulls have clean white heads and necks throughout the year.

Nominate Lesser Black-backed Gull has upperparts “as black or blacker than Great Black-backed Gull” (Grant 1986). This is similar to Kelp Gull, which Murphy (1936) considered had a mantle “darker than that of any other gull,” but different from graellsii Lesser Black-backed. Having field experience with both Kelp Gull and nominate Lesser Black-backed, but without direct comparison, Howell doubts that blackness of the upperparts is likely to be of use in identification.

Like Kelp Gull, nominate Lesser Black-backed shows only one white mirror on the outer primary (Grant 1986). This mirror averages smaller on Kelp Gull: measured along the shaft the white mirror is 9-23 mm (mean 17 mm) in Kelp (n=15 adults from Peru and Chile), versus 14-37 mm (mean 27 mm) in Lesser Black-backed (n=15 adult L. f. fuscus; the race graellsii being similar). On the same specimens, the white mirror was 22 mm shorter to 3 mm longer than the black area between it and the primary tip in Kelp Gull, versus 12 mm shorter to 22 mm longer in Lesser Black-backed.

The relative shape of the red gonys spot differs slightly between Kelp and Lesser Black-backed, perhaps due to the deeper bill of Kelp Gull. The red gonys spot of the Lesser Black-backed is distinctly oblong, being longer than it is high, and fades into the tip of the lower mandible. The red
gonys spot of Kelp Gull is less oblong, more rounded, by virtue of its
greater height, and the greenish-yellow tip of the lower mandible is usually
visible.

Murphy (1936) described the legs of Kelp Gulls in South America
as “greenish yellow.” In South Africa, the legs have been noted as “olive-
gray (the commonest color) to dull yellow” (Brooke and Cooper 1979),
and adults in New Zealand have grayish-green legs (L. B. Spear, photos).
All Kelp Gulls Howell observed in southern Chile in November-December
1992 and 1993 had grayish-green legs (similar to winter adult
California Gulls L. californicus), while those in central and northern Chile
had legs varying from greenish to fairly bright yellow (Figure 3), like the
Yucatan birds. The legs of Lesser Black-backed Gull typically are yellow
to orange-yellow, and rarely can be flesh-colored even in apparent adults
(Howell, pers. obs.).

**Imatures.** - Separation of immatures is also problematic and,
like adults, the plumages of the two species are virtually identical. Again,
bill shape (Figure 4) appears to be the most reliable feature to separate the
two species. Also, in their second year many Kelp Gulls have fleshy-
greenish legs unlike the yellowish-flesh legs of many Lesser Black-
backeds. Presumably, the molt schedules and plumages of immature Kelp
and Lesser Black-backed are not synchronized, since the former breeds
mostly from October to February, and the latter from April to August. If
confronted with an out-of-range black-backed gull, careful notes should
be made and, if possible, photographs taken. Bill size and shape appear to
be the best way to distinguish Kelp Gull from Lesser Black-backed Gull.

RESUMEN

Se describen observaciones de *Larus dominicanus* en la costa norte de
Yucatán desde el año 1991. Una pareja fue fotografiada en varias
ocasiones. Esta especie de gaviota del hemisferio sur ha tenido un gran
incremento poblacional recientemente.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank D. Tom Rogers, Stuart Tingley and Richard G. Wilson for
communicating their records, and Kenn Kaufman and David A. Sibley for
FIRST RECORDS OF THE KELP GULL IN MEXICO

helpful comments on the photographs of the May 1991 birds. Joann Andrews and Barbara MacKinnon H. kindly provided logistical support for Correa and Garcia during their attempts to identify and photograph the Kelp Gulls at Rio Lagartos. Steve W. Cardiff, Donna L. Dittmann, Joseph R. Jehl, and Peter Pyle made helpful suggestions on the manuscript. Reference photos are on file at VIREO. This is contribution number 639 of Point Reyes Bird Observatory.

LITERATURE CITED

ADDITIONAL SUMMER BIRD RECORDS FOR SOUTHERN MEXICO

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Middle America has been somewhat neglected by birders and ornithologists during the summer months. Records reported here are based on two weeks in the southern Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Chiapas in June/July 1992. With few exceptions, Binford’s (1989) detailed summary of bird distribution in Oaxaca provides the basis for our comments, and thus is generally not cited in full hereafter. Some of the findings of other researchers and tour leaders, especially in the Oaxaca Valley, have been relayed to us by Steve N.G. Howell and are cited where relevant. Capitalized regions in Oaxaca follow Binford’s definitions.

The following species accounts report on 26 species. In addition, 25 species are listed in Table 1, where breeding evidence we obtained extends, or otherwise adds information concerning, the Oaxaca nesting season for these species, as defined by Binford. We hasten to add that Binford, who over the years has worked to carefully define categories of nesting evidence in birds (Binford 1973, 1989, in litt.), strongly recommended exclusion of family groups as breeding evidence, especially for the Campylorhynchus wrens and Yellow-backed Oriole (Icterus chrysater). We have chosen to include this information and let the reader judge it as they wish. To help clarify, we have used the term “family group” when the behavior, and often plumage, of a small group of birds suggested to us that they represented recently fledged young still dependent upon their parents. In other words, we suspect that adults would have been observed feeding young had we followed these groups long enough. Records are attributable to both authors except where indicated otherwise by initials.
ADDITIONAL SUMMER BIRD RECORDS FOR SOUTHERN MEXICO

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Blue-footed Booby (*Sula nebouxii*). One on the bay at Zihuatanejo, Guerrero, 23 June was followed by five there the following day (RAE). One at this same location on 3 May 1992 and two or three at Las Islas Blancas and 11 or 12 at Isla Grande on 4 May 1992 are apparently the only previous records for Guerrero (Howell and Engel 1993).

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*). Two flew over Tehuantepec City on the evening of 29 June. Binford lists only six previous records for Oaxaca, all between 20 October and 19 February. Additional winter records have been obtained by Howell et al. (in litt.).

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*). One on the bay at Zihuatanejo, Guerrero, 24 June (RAE) was unseasonal; a few individuals remain in the winter range through the summer (Howell and Webb in press).

White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*). One was seen in grassland south of Palomares 3 July. Previous Oaxaca records (Binford, Parkes 1990), including several from this same area, have all been between the dates of 1 August and 20 April, leading to the characterization of this as only a winter resident in the State.

Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*). What was presumably the same light morph adult was seen at the Monte Albán ruins, Oaxaca, 28 June and 5 July. Previous published Oaxaca records are all from the Pacific slope between mid-October and late March, although Howell (in litt.) has seen the species in Interior Oaxaca between December and April and assumes they are resident.

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*). A dark-morph adult near the intersection of highways 200 and 134, northwest of Zihuatanejo, Guerrero, 26 June (RAE) was unexpected so near the coast in summer (Howell and Webb in press).

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*). One near Juchitán 3 July is, surprisingly, the only mid-summer record for Oaxaca.
White-tipped Dove (*Leptotila verreauxi*). According to Binford, this species is unknown from the Interior Region of Oaxaca, but Howell (in litt.) has found them "fairly common" there. In Oaxaca Valley on 29 June, two were heard approximately 7 km north of Teotitlán del Valle and one was heard at the Yagul ruins.

Stripe-tailed Hummingbird (*Eupherusa eximia*). Four in remnant tropical evergreen forest 4 km east of Palomares 30 June and one there 3 July (RAH) were at an elevation of approximately 100m. In Oaxaca, this species is an uncommon permanent resident in upper reaches of tropical evergreen forest and lower reaches of cloud forest, but has previously been recorded in the lowlands only as a presumed non-breeder in November, December, and May.

White-tailed Hummingbird (*Eupherusa poliocerca*). A male seen in cloud forest along highway 134 northeast of Zihuatanejo, Guerrero 26 June (RAE) was at the northwestern limit of the species' range, and in an area where the species has been rarely reported in the literature.

Ruddy Woodcreeper (*Dendrocincla homochroa*). One in remnant tropical evergreen forest 4 km east of Palomares 30 June was at an elevation of approximately 100m. The species is listed as rare in Oaxaca, with all previous records coming from cloud forest and upper reaches of tropical evergreen forest in excess of 1200m. Binford (in litt.) doubts the validity of this sighting, but Howell (in litt.) considers previous Oaxaca records atypical, noting that in most of its range, this species is found in lowlands (Howell and Webb in press).

Thick-billed Kingbird (*Tyrannus crassirostris*). Binford listed two nesting localities in riparian situations in the Interior Region of Oaxaca, and Parkes (1990) documented a third. We found a single bird in a narrow strip of riparian vegetation in the Oaxaca Valley approximately 7 km north of Teotitlán del Valle 29 June, where the species might be expected (Binford in litt.).

Rose-throated Becard (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*). A male was found on 29 June in the same riparian area approximately 7 km north of Teotitlán del Valle as the Thick-billed Kingbird (RAH). Binford (1989) and Parkes (1990) noted few other records for the Interior Region and none for the Oaxaca Valley,
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although Howell (in litt.) has found them fairly commonly there in winter.

Cliff Swallow (*Hirundo pyrrhonota*). Approximately 60 unaged birds were observed at a colony on cliffs in the Oaxaca Valley near the Yagul ruins 29 June. This is at the southern limit of the species’ known breeding range and represents only the fourth known nesting site in Oaxaca.

Bridled Titmouse (*Parus wollweberi*). Two in pine-oak woodland roughly 13 km east of El Camarón near the turnoff to San Juan Lajarcia (km 147 on highway 190, west of Tehuantepec City), Oaxaca on 29 June were just east of the southeastern limit of the species’ known range.

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*). Two birds on the east side of the Sierra de Juárez at km 71 on highway 175 southwest of Valle National, Oaxaca, 6 July were tentatively identified as "Southern House Wren" (the *musculus* group of races, sometimes considered specifically distinct). On 28 December 1993, Howell et al. (pers. comm.) found a single bird there, confirming the presence of this form at that location. Binford refers to more southerly records at Tutontepec and Capulalpan as "apparently being, [the] northernmost in [the] entire range of the group."

Rufous-backed Robin (*Turdus rufopalliatus*). Birds heard singing and glimpsed in Oaxaca City on 7 and 8 July were assumed to be this species; a singing bird at the Oaxaca City airport 8 July was well seen (RAE). Binford questions a 1965 nesting record for Oaxaca City (Friedmann 1966, Rowley 1984), stating the species is otherwise unknown in the Oaxaca Valley. In contrast, Howell (1990) found a population, at least irregularly, in the Oaxaca Valley in the 1980s, and suggested it originated from escaped cage-birds.

Dwarf Vireo (*Vireo nelsoni*). On highway 175 approximately 13 km northeast of Oaxaca City, at least one was observed in well developed riparian vegetation near El Estudiante (first highway switchback at the base of the mountain) on 6 July (RAH), and a singing bird was observed nearby, at km 205, on 7 July (RAE). Binford indicated that this species was limited to extreme northwestern Oaxaca, but it has recently been found to be "fairly common in Oaxaca Valley" (Howell 1990), including this stretch of highway 175 (Howell pers. comm.).

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ADDITIONAL SUMMER BIRD RECORDS FOR SOUTHERN MEXICO

Golden Vireo (*Vireo hypochryseus*). This species was considered unrecorded in the Oaxaca Valley by Binford, although Howell et al. (in litt.) report numerous winter sightings there. We observed Golden Vireos in some of these known winter localities on four occasions: one at the Monte Albán ruins 28 June; five approximately 7 km north of Teotitlán del Valle 29 June; four on highway 175 from 8-13 km northeast of Oaxaca City 5 July; and one there 7 July.

Olive-backed Euphonia (*Euphonia gouldi*). This species has been assumed to be a resident breeder in Oaxaca based only on “range, habitat, and dates,” so a pair observed building a nest high above the ground in remnant tropical evergreen forest 4 km east of Palomares 30 June represents the first confirmed nesting for the state.

Scarlet-rumped Tanager (*Ramphocelus passerinii*). A male was seen on the edge of remnant tropical evergreen forest 4 km east of Palomares on 3 July (RAH). This species was unrecorded in Oaxaca according to Binford, but has been seen previously in the extreme northeast corner of the State by A.T. Peterson et al. (Binford in litt.) and in the Palomares area 31 December 1991 - 1 January 1992 by Howell (in litt.).

Variable Seedeater (*Sporophila aurita*). A male was seen on the edge of remnant tropical evergreen forest 4 km east of Palomares on 3 July. There are only four previous reliable records for Oaxaca (Binford 1989, Parkes 1990), two from this general area. Previous records have spanned the period from 29 December to 25 March.

Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*). One in Guelatao, in the Río Grande valley between the Sierra Juárez and the Sierra Aloapaneca, 6 July was in an area of the Interior Region of Oaxaca where previously unreported.

Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*). There are only four specific records for the Interior Region of Oaxaca, so three seen near km 205 on highway 175 approximately 10 km northeast of Oaxaca City 5 July are noteworthy.

Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*). A male near El Estudiante (first switchback on highway 175 at the base of the mountain), approximately 13 km northeast
of Oaxaca City 7 July (RAE) was in riparian vegetation below the coniferous zone. Binford listed eight previous records for Oaxaca, one nearby at La Cumbre, near Cerro San Felipe. In addition, a pair was seen near Guelatao 26 December 1989 (R.A. Behrstock and Howell in litt.).

**House Sparrow** (*Passer domesticus*). One in Guelatao, in the Río Grande valley between the Sierra Juárez and the Sierra Aloapaneca, 6 July was in an area of the Interior Region of Oaxaca, where previously unreported.

**RESUMEN**

Se describen observaciones en verano de 26 especies de aves poco frecuentes en el sur de México (Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas) en junio-julio de 1992. Además se anotan registros de anidamiento de 25 especies adicionales.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We thank W. David Shuford for discussing breeding bird concepts with us, and Laurence C. Binford, Steve N.G. Howell, and John C. Sterling for commenting on a draft of this note. Binford and Howell's extensive comments were especially helpful in molding the text.
LITERATURE CITED


Table 1. Nesting records for selected species in southern Mexico, June/July 1992.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common Black-Hawk <em>(Buteogallus anthracinus)</em></td>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>edge of remnant tropical evergreen forest 4 km E of Palomares, Oaxaca</td>
<td>adult with juvenile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-necked Stilt <em>(Himantopus mexicanus)</em></td>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>near La Venta, east of Juchitán, Oaxaca</td>
<td>adult on nest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russet-crowned Motmot <em>(Momotus mexicanus)</em></td>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>ca. km 32 on Hwy. 190, E of the Oaxaca border, Chiapas</td>
<td>family group of four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermilion Flycatcher <em>(Pyrocephalus rubinus)</em></td>
<td>28 June</td>
<td>Monte Albán ruins, Oaxaca</td>
<td>pair feeding juveniles (RAE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Flycatcher <em>(Myiozetetes similis)</em></td>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>near Zanatepec, Oaxaca</td>
<td>family group of three</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tropical Kingbird <em>(Tyrannus melancholicus)</em></td>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>edge of remnant tropical evergreen forest 4 km E of Palomares, Oaxaca</td>
<td>pair at active nest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masked Tityra <em>(Tityra semifasciata)</em></td>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>edge of remnant tropical evergreen forest 4 km E of Palomares, Oaxaca</td>
<td>family group of four</td>
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1. Note our caveats in the introduction.
<table>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Gray-breasted Martin</td>
<td>23-24 June</td>
<td>Zihuatanejo, Guerrero</td>
<td>adults carrying food (RAE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Progne chalybea)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band-backed Wren</td>
<td>1 July</td>
<td>mixed deciduous/pine forest, km 70 on hwy. 190, W of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas</td>
<td>family group of six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Campylorhynchus zonatus)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray-barred Wren</td>
<td>6 July</td>
<td>Cerro San Felipe, NE of Oaxaca City Oaxaca</td>
<td>family group of six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Campylorhynchus megalopterus)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spot-breasted Wren</td>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>remnant tropical evergreen forest 4 km E of Palomares, Oaxaca</td>
<td>family group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Thryothorus maculipectus)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinaloa Wren</td>
<td>24 June</td>
<td>E of Playa la Ropa, Zihuatanejo, Guerrero</td>
<td>one nest-building (RAE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Thryothorus sinaloa)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-breasted Wood-Wren</td>
<td>30 June, 3 July</td>
<td>remnant tropical evergreen forest 4 km E of Palomares, Oaxaca</td>
<td>two family groups; one family group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Henicorhina leucosticta)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hutton's Vireo</td>
<td>1 July</td>
<td>mixed deciduous/pine forest, km 70 on hwy. 190, W of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas</td>
<td>two family groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Vireo huttoni)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Species</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Warbler (Ergaticus ruber)</td>
<td>6 July</td>
<td>km 70-100 on hwy. 175 SW of Valle Nacional, Sierra de Juárez, Oaxaca</td>
<td>family group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink-headed Warbler (Ergaticus versicolor)</td>
<td>1 July</td>
<td>deciduous/pine forest, km 70 on hwy. 190 W of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas</td>
<td>family group of four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden-browed Warbler (Basileuterus belli)</td>
<td>6 July</td>
<td>km 70-100 on hwy. 175 SW of Valle Nacional, Sierra de Juárez, Oaxaca</td>
<td>adults carrying food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive-backed Euphonia (Euphonia gouldi)</td>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>remnant tropical evergreen forest 4 km E of Palomares, Oaxaca</td>
<td>pair nest-building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Bush-Tanager (Chlorospingus ophthalmicus)</td>
<td>6 July</td>
<td>km 70-100 on hwy. 175 SW of Valle Nacional, Sierra de Juárez, Oaxaca</td>
<td>adults carrying food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Cardinal (Cardinalis cardinalis)</td>
<td>27 June</td>
<td>E of Playa la Ropa, Zihuatanejo, Guerrero</td>
<td>nest with young (RAE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varied Bunting (Passerina versicolor)</td>
<td>29 June</td>
<td>tributary to Arroyo Seco, 7 km N of San Pedro Totolapan (km 73 on hwy. 190), Oaxaca</td>
<td>pair carrying food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Species</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-vented Oriole (Icterus wagleri)</td>
<td>29 June</td>
<td>Yagul ruins, Oaxaca Valley, Oaxaca</td>
<td>adult carrying food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow-backed Oriole (Icterus chrysater)</td>
<td>1 July</td>
<td>deciduous/pine forest, km 70 on hwy. 190, W of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas</td>
<td>family group of six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow-winged Cacique (Cacicus melanicterus)</td>
<td>24 June, 27 June</td>
<td>E of Playa la Ropa, Zihuatanejo, Guerrero</td>
<td>many active nests (RAE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Sparrow (Passer domesticus)</td>
<td>8 July</td>
<td>Oaxaca City, Oaxaca</td>
<td>pair at active nest (RAE)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
AN AGGREGATION OF PEREGRINE FALCONS ON THE MEXICAN WINTER GROUNDS

PETER PYLE and STEVE N.G. HOWELL, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, 4990 Shoreline Highway, Stinson Beach, California 94970, U.S.A.

On 31 January 1984 we observed an aggregation of at least 20 Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) circling over a field in southern Mexico. Aggregating or swarming has not been reported previously in this well-studied species.

The observation was made over a 30-minute period in the mid-afternoon along Mexico Highway 186, near km post 164 about 10 km east of the border between the states of Campeche and Tabasco. The weather was sunny and hot with light winds. Two large arable rice fields were present on the south side of the highway, each of which contained a harvester actively cutting the crops. The falcons were circling on fixed wings at altitudes of 25-150 m over the two fields, a total area of approximately 750 x 500 m. The birds were fairly evenly-spaced, with distances of 75-300 m separating most individuals. Two or three falcons would occasionally come together resulting in subtle posturing or leisurely bouts of chasing but no fighting or overt acts of intraspecific aggression were observed. No stooping or predation was noted either. We counted at least 20 different individuals; obtaining a complete census was difficult under the circumstances, so more than 20 may have been present. All birds seen well showed the characteristics of the race *F. p. tundrius* (White 1968). Most of the birds were juveniles and females appeared to outnumber males. A sampling of ten closer individuals aged by plumage and sexed by direct size comparisons yielded eight juvenile females, one juvenile male and one male that appeared to be in partially-adult plumage. These ratios appeared to reflect those of the entire aggregation, although at least one adult (female) was also observed. Other scavengers and raptors counted in the vicinity of the fields included 30 Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures (*Cathartes burrovianus*), 11 White-tailed Hawks (*Buteo*
AN AGGREGATION OF PEREGRINE FALCONS

*Falco alboicudatus* and ten Crested Caracaras (*Caracara plancus*). Approximately 50 Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) were foraging behind each harvester.

Despite numerous studies on Peregrine Falcons worldwide (e.g., Cramp and Simmons 1980, Ratcliffe 1980, Cade et al. 1988) this is the first published report we are aware of describing aggregating in this species. Typically, wintering peregrines hunt either solitarily or in pairs, although winter communal roosting of small groups has been reported (Kelly and Thorpe 1993). In areas of high winter densities such as Porto Alegre, Brazil (Albuquerque 1988) and the Farallon Islands, California (Pyle, pers obs.) territorial singles or pairs will rigorously exclude other peregrines; however, at both of these locations most territorial birds were adults. It is possible that aggregating in peregrines is more likely to occur with non-territorial immatures and/or females, as we observed in Mexico. The focus of the aggregating Peregrine Falcons and other raptors that we observed was likely an abundance of avian and mammalian prey being flushed or killed by the harvesters, although we saw no examples of this during our observation. Relatively high densities of breeding peregrines have been encountered in areas of food abundance (Beebe 1960, Cade 1960) and/or limited nesting habitat (Hickey 1942). In these instances, however, aggressive territoriality resulted in maximum possible spacing regarding nest placement and foraging areas (see Ratcliffe 1980). Further field observation may reveal whether non-territorial and/or juvenile Peregrine Falcons regularly aggregate on the wintering grounds, or if the aggregation and non-territorial behavior that we observed was anomalous, the result of an unnaturally high concentration of prey. This is contribution number 590 of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory.

RESUMEN

En la fecha 31 de enero 1984 encontramos una agregación de más de veinte Peregrinos (*Falco peregrinus*) sobre dos campos agrícolas en el estado de Campeche, México. La mayor parte de las aves eran juveniles y/o hembras, y nunca demostraron comportamiento territorial agresivo. Este es el primer registro de agregación por esta especie en una localidad. Probablemente las aves se concentraron aquí en busca de presa espantada por dos segadoras que estaban trabajando en los campos. Necesitamos más observaciones de campo para ver si la agregación de Peregrinos jóvenes y/o Peregrinos no agresivos es típica, o anómala.
AN AGGREGATION OF PEREGRINE FALCONS

LITERATURE CITED


Binford (1989) listed but a single record of the Harpy Eagle (*Harpia harpyja*) for the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, at the northwestern extreme of the species' range. The record consists of a specimen (United States National Museum of Natural History [USNM] 54224) taken by F. Sumichrast near Almoloya on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec on 8 October 1868. While recataloging and reorganizing the ornithological collections of the Instituto de Biología of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (IBUNAM), we found a second specimen of Harpy Eagle from Oaxaca. The specimen is among those rescued from the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, and carries no data except the locality, “Rincón Antonio, Oax.,” and the IBUNAM catalog number P000463. The catalog of the birds of the Museo Nacional (Herrera 1895) indicates that the collection included a single Harpy Eagle (catalog number 1599) from the vague locality “Tehuantepec.” Whether or not this specimen is the one now in the IBUNAM collection is unclear, but the existence of two such specimens seems unlikely.

Rincón Antonio, according to Binford (1989), was the name of the railway station serving Matías Romero, now a city on the low pass across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Almoloya and Matías Romero are hence close together in dry forest within the lower part of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. According to Sumichrast himself (Binford 1989), the
RECORDS OF THE HARPY EAGLE IN OAXACA, MEXICO

Harpy Eagle

Sketch by Sophie Webb
USNM specimen was taken in the hills south of the town. The IBUNAM specimen, however, might have been collected to the east of Matías Romero in the region known as the Chimalapas, where the species’ preferred habitat, lowland rain forest, is well represented.

Binford (1989), based on a statement by Sumichrast, concluded that the Harpy Eagle was “probably an accidental vagrant... and not.. a resident” in Oaxaca. Based now on two specimens of the species, which is exceedingly difficult to collect, from the eastern lowlands of the state, and given its extremely low population density and large home range size (Alvarez del Toro 1980), and the presence of extensive and well-preserved (even today!) lowland rain forest in the nearby Chimalapas, we suggest that Harpy Eagles were resident in eastern Oaxaca. Populations may still exist in the Chimalapas; surveys designed to detect these populations are currently in progress (A.T.Peterson, unpubl. data).

RESUMEN

Se describen registros del Aguila Harpía (Harpia harpia) para el estado de Oaxaca, México. Es posible que la especie todavía exista en el área de Chimalapas.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank R.S. Kennedy and L.C. Binford for their comments on an earlier version of the manuscript. This paper represents the seventh in a series entitled “New Distributional Information on Mexican Birds.”

LITERATURE CITED


A recent issue of *The Euphonia* carried commentaries on two articles recently published by us and our colleagues (*Euphonia* 1:44-46). We are quite pleased to see that our work is being read, and feel, however, that the commentaries reflect some misunderstandings of the purposes for which those articles were written. Hence, we respond to them, in the hopes of laying a base for better understanding and collaboration between the systematics-scientific community and the birding community, both of which are fascinated by the diversity of birds of Mexico.

In both commentaries, it is noted that we use statistics heavily, with the implication that we use a sophisticated tool to demonstrate the obvious. In part, this is true—we also could see clearly, for example, that *Thalurania ridgwayi* has a less deeply forked tail than other *Thalurania* woodnymphs. Our use of statistics was to elucidate morphological differences among all of the forms of *Thalurania* woodnymphs from Mexico to northern South America, and to understand the different dimensions along which morphological diversification has taken place in the genus. Statistics are but a tool, and we use them to clarify situations that are not obvious to the naked eye, not to demonstrate the obvious in a fancy manner. Statistics are also required in peer-reviewed scientific journals for statements such as that one form is "bigger" or "longer-winged" than another.

Our description of the new species of swift was criticized for the paucity of characters differentiating the new form from *Cypseloides cryptus*, and for uncertainty regarding the resident population. Both of these points are indeed cause for concern. Indeed, few characters separate *C. storeri* from *C. cryptus*—this, however is the case in the entire family Apodidae, attested to by the fact that all four of the initial specimens of…
C. storeri were misidentified by experienced ornithologists. Regarding the resident status of the population, a fifth specimen now exists of C. storeri—an individual found dead and mummified in a stream bed between June and September in Jalisco (Navarro et al. 1993, Wilson Bull. 105:366-367). Although an exact date is not available for the specimen, the excellent state of its preservation suggests it died at some point between May and August, and that C. storeri is indeed resident in Mexico. The criticism of our statement about Deltarhynchus flammulatus and Calocitta colliei, among other species, being “endemic to the mountains of western Mexico” is correct; indeed, we added in proof the correction “to mountains and adjacent lowlands of western Mexico,” but for whatever reason, the correction was not made by the editorial staff of the journal.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we are concerned about the suggestion that the description of C. storeri as a species was premature. The entire genus Cypseloides is exceptionally poorly known and difficult to understand—in fact, most of the species in the genus are known from vanishingly few specimens. The geographic distribution of C. storeri is disjunct from that of C. cryptus by a considerable distance, and at least one character makes it easily distinguishable. We, of course, know nothing about its reproductive isolation from C. cryptus, but such is the case for all disjunct pairs of taxa, and especially for rare and poorly known tropical birds; the absence of structural characters differentiating the two species is nothing unusual in bird taxonomy—see, for example, the Dendroica warblers. We are most concerned that an opinion has been expressed about the validity of the taxon by someone who has never even seen specimens of the species. Anyone who wishes to examine them is perfectly welcome, and at that point we would openly welcome comment and criticism on the validity of the taxon.

In sum, we appreciate the interest in our work expressed in The Euphonia. We hope that, in the future, commentators for the journal can understand that our systematic studies have various purposes, not all of which are directly relevant to taxonomy of Mexican birds. We hope that journals such as The Euphonia can serve as a meeting ground in which common interests can be explored, rather than as a source of criticism and conflict.
I would like to offer further thoughts on the new swift taxon *storeri* (White-fronted Swift) and other points raised by Peterson and Navarro in their response to recent literature reviews in *The Euphonia*.

Peterson and Navarro state that "Statistics are also required in peer-reviewed scientific journals . . ." This seems to be an overstatement, since probably 95% of the species and subspecies described to date required, at most, simple descriptive statistics such as wing chord or tail length. Many birders, and perhaps ornithologists, may wonder why the complex statistics of Escalante and Peterson for central and South American woodnymphs (*Wilson Bull.* 104:205-219) are required by journals since they served to show no mensural differences and equally suggest that the forms are not, in fact, different. The same is true of the scatterplots used in describing White-fronted Swift (Navarro et al., *Wilson Bull.* 104:55-64, 1992).

Further, if statistics are used, the comment of Allan R. Phillips (Bull. Brit. Ornithol. Club 114:43, 1994) bears repeating: "Obviously, the first step before taking a measurement should be to make sure it is valid. But current bio-statistics ignores this. Thus the first specimen of a supposedly new swift appears as a female with a very short wing and tail in Navarro et. al. 1992:59; but A.R.P. had labelled it (10 July 1979) "Female (?)", with all rectrices pin-feathers, wings in moult, and both length in flesh and extent (wingspan) therefore followed by a "[+]" sign. Clearly no one read the label or examined the feathers; but they gave full data on coefficients of variation, bootstrapped distributions, etc."

Peterson and Navarro noted a mummified specimen of *storeri* that died, probably, at "some point between May and August" as additional evidence that White-fronted Swift . . . "is indeed resident in Mexico." This new data can be added to the type specimen collected on 2 September, and the three other specimens, all from July. Based on information kindly provided by Peterson, I and three other observers spent 11-13 March 1993 checking several waterfalls around Tacámbaro, Michoacán (including Salto de Santa Paula whence come three of the five specimens of *storeri*) and saw 1300-1400 White-naped Swifts (*Streptoprocne semicollaris*), 60-80 Chestnut-collared Swifts (*Cypseloides rutilus*), and 3 Great Swallow-tailed Swifts (*Panyptila sanctihieronymi*),
but no sign of anything that might have been *storeri*. That the type specimen was collected “clinging to a towel in camp late on a foggy night” suggests it could have been a migrant, since resident swifts generally have traditional roost sites. Further, Navarro et al. noted that they saw “no *storeri*-like swifts. . . in the many months of additional field work in . . . central and southern Guerrero.” Thus we have specimens for July and September, one for some time between May and August, and negative data for March. An equally parsimonious interpretation is that White-fronted Swift is a migrant present in Mexico from July (or May?) to September. Whether it breeds in Mexico, or is a non-breeding migrant from Central or South America, remains to be shown.

Contrary to Peterson and Navarro, I consider “the absence of structural characters differentiating . . . two species” to be quite unusual in bird taxonomy (e.g., Blackpoll and Bay-breasted warblers are the only *Dendroica* warblers that approach this description, and even they can be separated by a structural character: the presence or absence of emargination on the sixth primary). Further, in cases of close structural similarity, status as a full species tends to be supported by data on vocalizations, breeding biology, plumage, etc. Other than testes size of the type specimen, the description of *storeri* by Navarro et al. lacked any potentially relevant biological data such as gonad size (if available) for the other specimens, molt, state of plumage, etc. Peterson and Navarro appear concerned that I have not examined specimens of *storeri*. Despite looking hard for distinguishing characters, Navarro et al. showed that *storeri* differs from *C. cryptus* (White-chinned Swift) only in the more extensive whitish feathering across the forehead. I doubt I would find anything different, and reiterate my opinion that, while *storeri* appears to be a valid taxon and may well breed in Mexico, describing it as a species seems premature based on the information available.

Additionally, despite many months of field work, Navarro et al. considered Guerrero to lie in “an apparent distributional gap” for Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*). S. Webb and I saw up to 60-70 Black Swifts [but no *storeri*-like birds] daily within a few km of the type locality of *storeri* in Guerrero during 21-23 May 1990.
Additional comments on the White-throated Sparrow in Baja California—Michael A. Patten P.O. Box 59159, Riverside, California 92517-2959, U.S.A.

In a recent note in the *Euphonia* (2:42-44, 1993), I discussed the status of the White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) in Baja California. The aim of my note was to put the status of this species into a larger context; that is, I hoped to make it clear that records of any "vagrant" to western North America cannot be reviewed in a vacuum. In that regard, stating that a species is "accidental" in Baja California, even if there are but a few records, is wholly misleading if the species occurs regularly and in large numbers in an adjacent region. I used White-throated Sparrow as an example, as it occurs in the low hundreds every year in California, but is listed as accidental in Baja California by Wilbur (1987, *Birds of Baja California*, Univ. Calif. Press, Berkeley).

It was not my intent to summarize all records of White-throated Sparrow for Baja California; I just wished to mention a few of them to make my point. For the record however, the two birds seen by Steve N.G. Howell, Peter Pyle, Kurt Radamaker and me that I discuss in that note were found on 9 January 1993. I had indicated that the location for the second bird was "El Ciprés," but apparently that location is actually several miles north of the site where we saw this bird (Thomas E. Wurster pers. comm.). As such, its location should be treated as simply the "Maneadero Plain." Further, Wurster kindly corrected information that I had received regarding the bird he and others saw there, and to which I refer in my note: their bird was a tan-striped adult seen on 26 November 1990 (not 16 January 1989, as I had reported).

Lastly, I wish to mention an additional four White-throated Sparrows seen by Wurster in January 1994 on the Maneadero Plain. These birds suggest that my hypothesis is correct: the White-throated Sparrow is a "rare but regular visitant to northwestern Baja California from mid-October through April."

I thank Steve N.G. Howell, Richard E. Webster, and Thomas E. Wurster for taking the time to discuss this issue with me, for correcting errors, and for supplying new information.

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**Photo spot: White-naped and White-collared Swifts** (*Euphonia* 2:66-68, 1993)--
The location name in figure 1. and figure 3. should read Tacáñbaro not Tacimbaro.

**A record of Bar-tailed Godwit for Mexico** (*Euphonia* 2:58-65, 1993)--
Apologies to Robert Behrstock, for misspelling his name.

The Euphonia 2: 102, 1993