

NOTABLE BIRD SIGHTINGS FROM CUBA, WINTERS 2002 AND 2003

JULIE A. CRAVES¹ AND KIMBERLY R. HALL²

¹*Rouge River Bird Observatory, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Dearborn, MI 48128, USA; and* ²*Michigan State University, Dept. Fisheries and Wildlife, 13 Natural Resources Bldg., E. Lansing, MI 48824, USA*

Abstract.—We present significant sight reports of birds made in Cuba during late winter 2002 and winter 2003. Of special interest are the second documented report of Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*), the first wintering reports for Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrina*) and Canada Warbler (*Wilsonia canadensis*), and a range expansion for Olive-capped Warbler (*Dendroica pityophila*).

Key words: *Blue-winged Warbler*, *Calidris alpina*, *Cuba*, *Dendroica pityophila*, *Dunlin*, *Hooded Warbler*, *Olive-capped Warbler*, *Pheucticus ludovicianus*, *Regulus calendula*, *Rose-breasted Grosbeak*, *Ruby-crowned Kinglet*, *Tennessee Warbler*, *Vireo flavifrons*, *Vermivora peregrina*, *Vermivora pinus*, *Wilsonia citrina*, *winter records*, *Yellow-throated Vireo*

Resumen.—AVES NOTABLES REGISTRA DE CUBA, LOS INVIERNOS 2002 Y 2003. Nosotras observaciones significativas presentes de aves hicieron durante invierno tarde 2002 y el invierno 2003. Del interés especial son el segundo el registro documentado de *Regulus calendula*, los primeros registros de aves invernando estaban para el *Vermivora peregrina* y *Vermivora pinus*, y una expansión de la distancia para el *Dendroica pityophila*.

Palabras clave: *Bijirita Azul de Garganta Negra*, *Bijirita de Alas Azules*, *Bijirita de Tennessee*, *Bijirita Peregrina*, *Bijirita del Pinar*, *Calidris alpina*, *Cuba*, *Degollado*, *Dendroica pityophila*, *Monjita*, *Pheucticus ludovicianus*, *Regulus calendula*, *Reyezuela*, *Verdón de Pecho Amarillo*, *Vermivora peregrina*, *Vermivora pinus*, *Vireo flavifrons*, *Wilsonia citrina*, *winter records*, *Zarapico Gris*

ALTHOUGH OF INTEREST to ornithologists and birders for its 21 endemic bird species and 39 unique subspecies (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000), Cuba is also an important wintering and stopover site for many North American migrant birds because of its size and location (Gonzalez Alonso *et al.* 1992). Knowledge of the true wintering ranges and winter ecology of North American migrants is critical in understanding apparent declines in their populations (Remsen 2001). For species that can be reliably identified by skilled observers, observations of birds in their winter habitat can provide an important addition to collections and banding data as sources of range information.

In recent years, “eco-tours” have become a popular form of travel, and many tour companies include trips that focus on birdwatching and attract people with strong bird identification skills. As these tours have become established, the recognition of the potential conservation value of observations made on these trips has increased. In some cases, the goal of contributing to conservation efforts has led tour leaders to more conscientiously document bird sightings by groups that incorporate natural history into their itineraries. Here we present some interesting distributional and temporal records compiled by Craves (22 February to 1 March 2002, “Group A”) and Craves and Hall (31 January to 8 February

2003, “Group B”) on two tours of central and western Cuba in which the authors were able to make bird observations. In addition, we also present previously undocumented observations made by members of other tour groups, who provide context for our observations.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*).—Six were counted on 23 February 2002 (Group A) and three on 1 February 2003 (Group B) at Las Salinas Refuge, Zapata peninsula, Matanzas province. Dunlin are reported to be very rare transients and winter residents at Zapata and Cayo Coco (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000). This species was not recorded in Cuba until 1989 (Norton 1990, Wallace *et al.* 1999), and until 1997 all reports were from the Zapata area. Dunlin were then photographed at Cayo Coco (Wallace *et al.* 1999) and reported from Holguín province (Peña Rodríguez *et al.* 2000).

Gull-billed Tern (*Sterna nilotica*).—Two were seen well on 1 February (Group B) and 15 February 2003 (another tour) at Las Salinas Refuge, Zapata peninsula, Matanzas province. This species is considered a rare transient and winter resident in Cuba (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000), and there have been previous published reports from Las Salinas (Norton 1988, 1994). Wallace *et al.* (1999) gave the first reports for the Archipiélago de Sabana-

Camagüey along the northern coast from 1996–1997, and stated there were 10 previous records or reports from Cuba.

Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*).—Group A observed a Yellow-throated Vireo in the endemic forest section of the Jardín Botánico Nacional in La Habana province on 22 February 2002, and single birds were seen at the same location on 6 December 2002 (another tour) and 31 January 2003 (Group B). The botanical garden is regarded as a traditional wintering location for this species (O. Garrido, pers. comm.). In 2003, Group B found this species in several locations in Pinar del Río province: Soroa (two on 4 February and one on 6 February), El Taburete near Las Terrazas (one on 5 February), and La Guira National Park (two on 7 February). A previous tour also had two at La Guira on 10 December 2002. Garrido and Kirkconnell (2000) report them as rare winter residents in Cuba. Perhaps Yellow-throated Vireos are more common in winter in Cuba than previously believed.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*).—The second documented report for Cuba was of a bird discovered at a native forest site between Pálpite and Playa Larga on the Zapata peninsula, Matanzas province. The bird was first seen by a tour group on 8 December 2002. At that time, none of the observers noted a red crown (M. Kraus and M. J. Good, pers. comm.). On 1 February 2003, two independent sets of people in Group B, among them Cuban ornithologist William Suárez, found a Ruby-crowned Kinglet at the same location. One person provided a sketch, and several gave written descriptions, including references to the active foraging behavior typical of kinglets (versus the more sluggish foraging maneuvers of the similar Cuban Vireo *Vireo gundlachi*). Again, none of the observers noticed a red crown. A few weeks later, a third tour group relocated the kinglet in the same place (O. Garrido, pers. comm.).

Only one previously published record exists for Ruby-crowned Kinglet in Cuba, a bird collected near La Habana on 18 October 1964 (Garrido and García Montaña 1975, Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000). Ruby-crowned Kinglets are noted as vagrants in Cuba (Ingold and Wallace 1994), and Jamaica and the Dominican Republic (Raffaele *et al.* 1998).

Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*).—One was observed by Group A with O. Garrido in the endemic forest section of the Jardín Botánico Nacional in La Habana province on 22 February 2002. Garrido also located one with a tour at La Guira Na-

tional Park, Pinar del Río province, on 10 December 2002 (M. J. Good, pers. comm.). In Cuba, these warblers are listed as rare winter residents and transients (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000), with only six records listed by Garrido and García Montaña (1975). Blue-winged Warblers are rare in the Greater Antilles and occasional in the Lesser Antilles (Gill *et al.* 2001).

Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrina*).—Several sightings in Pinar del Río province represent the first wintering reports of Tennessee Warblers in Cuba. One was seen well through a scope by a tour including O. Garrido in Viñales on 12 December 2002 (M. J. Good, pers. comm.). Other Tennessee Warblers were found by Group B in 2003. Two were watched (one by Garrido) as they foraged in large trees at the forest edge outside the Ecological Station at Las Terrazas on 4 February. The next day, another was found at nearby El Taburete. Finally, one (possibly two) was noted at La Guira National Park on 7 February.

In Cuba, this warbler is regarded as an uncommon transient (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000). Although the early spring migration arrival date for Tennessee Warblers is listed as 8 February (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000), Garrido (pers. comm.) believes Tennessee Warblers to be late migrants, generally, and he judged the sightings we report here to represent wintering birds. This species is described as a rare to uncommon transient in much of the West Indies, and uncommon in winter in Bermuda, Grand Bahama, and Jamaica (Rimmer and McFarland 1998). Raffaele *et al.* (1998) lists the Tennessee Warbler as an uncommon non-breeding resident through the Bahamas, Cayman Islands, and San Andres.

Olive-capped Warbler (*Dendroica pityophila*).—Two were observed by Group B and O. Garrido in pine trees outside of the Ecological Station at Las Terrazas on 4 February 2003. This species is a common but local permanent resident in Pinar del Río province (in the west) and in two far eastern provinces (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000). This sighting represents the easternmost report in Pinar del Río province (O. Garrido, pers. comm.).

Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*).—Group B detected a male Hooded Warbler in an open, disturbed site in mature second-growth forest at Soroa, Pinar del Río province. The bird was first seen by one observer on 5 February 2003. The next day, another member of the group found a male Hooded Warbler (presumably the same bird) foraging in low vegetation at the same location. Considered a com-

mon transient and rare winter resident (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000) in Cuba, most Hooded Warblers are reported to winter in south to eastern Mexico and Belize, with smaller numbers in the West Indies, including Cuba (Evans Ogden and Stutchbury 1994). This species is noted as uncommon to rare in the Bahamas, and rare in Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin and Cayman Islands (Raffaele *et al.* 1998).

Canada Warbler (*Wilsonia canadensis*).—The first winter report for Canada Warbler in Cuba (O. Garrido, pers. comm.) was of a bird foraging in dense shrubs bordering marshy ground in Soplillar, Matanzas province on 2 February 2003 by Group B. The sketch and description indicate a first-winter female. This species is described as wintering from Venezuela and Colombia south through eastern Ecuador to central Peru (Conway 1999) and is recorded as a very rare transient in Cuba (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000). Raffaele *et al.* (1998) lists Canada Warblers as very rare migrants and even less common winter residents in the northern Bahamas and Cuba.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*).—Group B observed two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (both male, one a first-winter and the other an older adult) in mature, second-growth forest at Soroa, Pinar del Río province, on 6 February. The same group also saw a female foraging along the road through open forest at La Guira National Park, Pinar del Río province, on 7 February 2003. Another tour counted four females there on 12 December 2002 (M. J. Good, pers. comm.). In Cuba, this species is regarded as a rare transient and very rare winter resident (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000).

For the foreseeable future, it is probable that professional field work in Cuba will continue to be limited by travel restrictions, a shortage of resources, and the isolation imposed by governmental policy. As emphasized by Wallace *et al.* (1999), even modest amounts of field work in Cuba yield much new information. The reports above demonstrate the potential for future tour groups to make noteworthy contributions to the understanding of the status and distribution of birds in Cuba. Observers are encouraged to note not only numbers and habitats, but also gender where discernable, to add to the body of work on sexual segregation by habitat in overwintering migrants (e.g., Lopez Ornat and Greenberg 1990, Lynch *et al.* 1985, Parrish and Sherry 1994, Wunderle 1992). We are willing to provide suggestions and assistance to travelers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Orlando Garrido, William Suárez (Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, Havana), and Frank Medina (Ciénaga de Zapata Parque Nacional), one or more of whom were always with us providing insight and guidance. Gary Markowski has been resolutely pursuing ways to improve our knowledge of birds in Cuba since 1995, and these surveys would not have been possible without him, or the inspiration of John McNeely. The American Birding Association has endorsed and promoted bird survey tours in Cuba. In addition to the authors, the 2003 group consisted of many experienced field observers and bird-banders, several of whom provided documentation on these sightings: D. Armstrong, H. Chambers, R. Denton, W. King, G. Norwood, D. O'Brien, F. Oatman, and S. Ruck. R. Brooks, M. J. Good, Jr., M. and J. Kraus, and B. Walker provided details on observations from other groups.

LITERATURE CITED

- CONWAY, C. J. 1999. Canada Warbler (*Wilsonia canadensis*). In *The birds of North America*, No. 421. (Poole, A., and F. Gill, Eds.). Philadelphia, PA: Birds of North America, Inc.
- EVANS OGDEN, L. J., AND B. J. STUTCHBURY. 1994. Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*). In *The birds of North America*, No. 110. (Poole, A., and F. Gill, Eds.). Philadelphia, PA: Birds of North America, Inc.
- GARRIDO, O. H., AND F. GARCÍA MONTAÑA. 1975. *Catálogo de las aves de Cuba*. La Habana, Cuba: Academia de Ciencias de Cuba.
- GARRIDO, O. H., AND A. KIRKCONNELL. 2000. *Field guide to the birds of Cuba*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press
- GILL, F. B., R. A. CANTERBURY, AND J. L. CONFER. 2001. Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*). In *The birds of North America*, No. 584. (Poole, A., and F. Gill, Eds.). Philadelphia, PA: Birds of North America, Inc.
- INGOLD, J. L., AND G. E. WALLACE. 1994. Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*). In *The birds of North America*, No. 119. (Poole, A., and F. Gill, Eds.). Philadelphia, PA: Birds of North America, Inc.
- LOPEZ ORNAT, A., AND R. GREENBERG. 1990. Sexual segregation by habitat in migratory warblers in Quintana Roo, Mexico. *Auk* 107:539–543.
- LYNCH, J. F., E. S. MORTON, AND M. E. VAN DER

- VOORT. 1985. Habitat segregation between the sexes of wintering Hooded Warblers (*Wilsonia citrina*). *Auk* 102:714–721.
- NORTON, R. L. 1988. West Indies region. *American Birds* 42:327–328.
- NORTON, R. L. 1990. West Indies region. *American Birds* 44:335–336.
- NORTON, R. L. 1994. West Indies region. *American Birds* 48:156–158.
- PARRISH, J. D., AND T. W. SHERRY. 1994. Sexual segregation by American Redstarts wintering in Jamaica: importance of resource seasonality. *Auk* 111:38–49.
- PEÑA RODRÍGUEZ, C. M., A. FERNÁNDEZ, E. REYES, N. NAVARO, AND J. A. LA'O. OSORIO. 2000. Nuevos registros de Charadriiformes (Scolopacidae) para la costa norte de oriente, Cuba. *Pitirre* 13:21.
- RAFFAELE, H., J. WILEY, O. GARRIDO, A. KEITH, AND J. RAFFAELE. 1998. *A guide to the birds of the West Indies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- REMSEN, J. V., JR. 2001. True winter range of the Veery (*Catharus fuscescens*): lessons for determining winter ranges of species that winter in the Tropics. *Auk* 118:838–848.
- RIMMER, C. C., AND K. P. MCFARLAND. 1998. Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrina*). In *The birds of North America*, No. 350. (Poole, A., and F. Gill, Eds.). Philadelphia, PA: Birds of North America, Inc.
- WALLACE, G. E., E. A. H. WALLACE, D. R. FROELICH, B. WALKER, A. KIRKCONNELL, E. SOCÁRRAS TORRES, H. A. CARLISLE, AND E. MACHELL. 1999. Hermit Thrush and Black-throated Gray Warbler, new for Cuba, and other significant bird records from Cayo Coco and vicinity, Ciego de Ávila province, Cuba. *Florida Field Naturalist* 27:37–51.
- WUNDERLE, J. M., JR. 1992. Sexual habitat segregation in wintering Black-throated Blue Warblers in Puerto Rico. Pp. 229–307 in *Ecology and conservation of Neotropical migrant landbirds* (Hagan, J. M., III, and D. W. Johnson, Eds.). Smithsonian Inst. Press, Washington, DC.