

**Occurrence of an Over-wintering Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pennsylvanica*)
on St. Martin, Lesser Antilles**

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Abstract - We report the first island record of Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pennsylvanica*) for St. Martin, Lesser Antilles. On 12 February 2002 at Pic Paradis, the bird was trapped in a mist-net and banded. This species is rare in the Greater Antilles and very few records exist from the Lesser Antilles.

Key words: Chestnut-sided Warbler, St. Martin, mist-netting, *Dendroica pennsylvanica*, Lesser Antilles, record.

Resumen – Reportamos el primer registro de *Dendroica pennsylvanica* en St. Martin. Para el 12 de febrero un individuo fue atrapado. Esta especie es rara en las Antillas Mayores y muy pocos registros existen por las Antillas Menores.

OBSERVATION

On 12 February 2002, while running a mist-netting station for Environmental Protection In the Caribbean (EPIC) at Pic Paradis, St. Martin, we trapped a second-year female Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pennsylvanica*) in one of our mist-nets. The bird was only observed while being banded and was not seen before or after this event. The bird was banded (USFWS band #2250-79431), measured, photographed, and then released. The occurrence of this species on St. Martin indicates a first island record, and one of very few records for the Lesser Antilles.

DESCRIPTION

Having the bird in the hand gave us ample opportunity to check all field marks. This warbler species was yellowish-green from the top of the head back to the rump area. The feathers on the lower back and on the upper-tail coverts had indistinct black centers. The upper-wing was also yellowish-green with some darker green on the primaries. The wing showed two relatively distinct white wing-bars. The bird had a gray face with a distinct white eye-ring. The chin of the bird, through the chest and upper belly, were a dull gray. The flanks were also gray with no hint of chestnut. The main center belly and lower parts were more white than the chest region. The outer retrices and outer primaries of the bird were truncate. The bird's legs were ashen gray. There was very little white on the outer retrices, indicating it as a second year female. No call was heard from the bird. The relaxed wing chord of the bird measured 58 millimeters. The weight of the bird was 9.0 grams and it had no apparent fat stores. The bird had no significant body molt or flight feather molt. The flight feather wear was moderate.

DISCUSSION

The Chestnut-sided Warbler is a long-distant migrant who breeds in central-eastern North America and migrates either along the gulf coast of the United States or flies across the Gulf of Mexico to the Yucatan Peninsula. Over-wintering normally takes place in the southern Central American countries of Panama, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. The species has been recorded over-wintering as far south as Ecuador, as east as Venezuela, and as far north as Mexico (Curson *et al.* 1994; Dunn and Garrett 1997). Additionally, the species has been recorded with increasing regularity in the Greater Antilles. Chestnut-sided Warbler is now considered an uncommon over-wintering resident in Cuba, and is recorded as rare, but regular in the Bahamas, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands. Chestnut-sided Warbler is exceedingly rare in the Lesser Antilles, where it has been recorded on Antigua, Guadeloupe,

Dominica, Barbados, and St. Vincent. The bird also is recorded regularly from San Andres in the southwestern Caribbean, where these birds are most likely straying from Central America and Venezuela (Curson *et al.* 1994; Dunn and Garrett 1997; Raffaele 1989; Raffaele *et al.* 1998; Bond 1985; Brudenell-Bruce 1975; Voous 1983; Evans 1990). West Indian records indicate this species in the region from as early as September 3rd and as late as May 11th (Bond 1985). The Chestnut-sided Warbler banded on St. Martin was trapped within a secondary dry forest, primarily consisting mainly of Breadfruit Trees (*Artocarpus communis*), Cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*), Mango (*Mangifera indica*), and Royal Palm (*Roystonea regia*) (Seddon and Lennox 1980). Additionally, a seasonal stream and a year-round spring are found within this forest. On over-wintering grounds of Central America, the Chestnut-sided Warbler prefers second-growth forest and often second-growth habitat margins, within shrubs or cleared areas. They are usually found singly on over-wintering habitat (Curson *et al.* 1994; Dunn and Garrett 1997). Within the West Indies, the species is usually found in well-forested areas (Raffaele 1989).

The status of the Chestnut-sided Warbler in North America indicates a steady decline in abundance on the breeding grounds (Curson *et al.* 1994). The decline of long-distant migrants due to fragmented habitat, less abundance of food sources as in the past, and rampant pesticide use has been well documented (Terborgh 1989; Terborgh 1992; Hagen and Johnston 1992; Finch and Stangel 1993). Research into the status of long-distance migrants that over-winter in the West Indies should be a priority. Banding studies coupled with regular standardized point counts should be taking place within the region. Regional island officials should be made increasingly aware of the role each island, and the region as a whole, plays in the over-wintering requirements of neotropical-nearctic species, such as the Chestnut-sided Warbler. Increased study on over-wintering migrant passerines on St. Martin has indicated a greater abundance of many warbler species including: Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*), Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*), Northern Parula (*Parula americana*), Cape-May Warbler (*Dendroica tigrina*), Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens*), Myrtle Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*), Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*), Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*), Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*), Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*), and American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*) than was previously recorded (EPIC unpublished data). The abundance of these species might have been overlooked in the past, or it might be due to an increased presence of these birds in the region during the winter. As more research programs begin within the West Indies, we will not only gain increased knowledge into the populations of over-wintering birds in the region but also, begin to better manage their rapidly disappearing habitat. EPIC would like to thank the management of Lotterie Farm for providing access to the secondary dry forest below Pic Paradis. We would additionally like to thank the Nature Foundation of Sint Maarten, and the Reserve Naturelle de St. Martin for supporting EPIC's research,.

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