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Article in *Caribbean Journal of Science* · December 2006

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Caribbean Journal of Science, Vol. 42, No. 2, 273-275, 2006
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Two New Bird Records for the Lesser Antilles: Bufflehead (*Bucephala Albeola*) and Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis Swainsonii*)

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ABSTRACT.—We document the observation of two new records of migratory birds for the Lesser Antilles. On 19 January 2004, a Bufflehead, *Bucephala Albeola*, was observed on St. Martin, F.W.I. while a Swainson's Warbler, *Limnothlypis Swainsonii*, was banded on Anguilla, BWI. We document species observations as well as discuss each species normal migratory range within the West Indies region.

KEYWORDS.—Bufflehead, Swainson's Warbler, *Bucephala Albeola*, *Limnothlypis Swainsonii*, neotropical migrant

During surveys for birds in the Lesser Antilles, we observed two new records of migratory birds for the Lesser Antilles. A Bufflehead (*Bucephala Albeola*) was observed and photographed at Grand Etang Pond, St. Martin while a Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis Swainsonii*) was captured and banded at a mist-netting station in the Katouche Valley, Anguilla. Both birds were observed by multiple biologists and thoroughly documented. Photographs of both species were sent to the Academy of Natural Sciences VIREO collection and accessioned into the academies database. We document the observations of both species herein.

BUFFLEHEAD

While completing a regular monthly wetland survey at Grand Etang Pond, St. Martin F.W.I on 19 January 2004, we observed a

small duck among a group of 12 Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*). This duck, first seen from about 250 meters, was later observed from 25 m as it approached the observation area while foraging with the scaup.

The bird was observed in good light, as the sun was behind us, through 10 power binoculars and through a 50 power spotting scope. Additionally, approximately 30 photos of the bird were taken with our digital camera through a spotting scope.

Specifically, the head of the duck was mostly dark chocolate brown with darker areas near the eyes, adjacent to the bill, and through the median crown area. The nape, forward auricular area, and collar of the bird appeared a lighter shade of brown than the aforementioned areas. There was a distinct small oval white patch on the rear auriculars, covering approximately an eighth of the side of the head. The bill of the bird was gray and was very small, perhaps a third of the size of the head.

The chest of the bird was light gray brown, which washed onto the flanks. The belly of the bird appeared to be dirty white.

The wings of the bird were brown, and contrasted with the brown on the crown and nape. The inner secondaries were white, while the rest of the flight feathers were brown. The bird's back was spotted with dark chocolate and brown feathers, apparently going through some active body molt. The wings were seen open and no flight feather molt was observed.

The rump of the bird, observed while the bird was cleaning, was dark chocolate brown, similar in shade to the crown and nape of the bird. The short, stiff tail of the bird was also colored dark brown. The legs of the bird were not seen well, but appeared to be black in color.

The record of Bufflehead constitutes the first known record for this species in the Lesser Antilles, and in fact, east of Puerto Rico. The Bufflehead's breeding range is widespread in North America, extending from Alaska east across Canada into Quebec. The species also breeds in many northern states in the western and mid-west United States (Gauthier 1993; Laughlin et

ms. received June 17, 2005; accepted January 24, 2006

al. 1982). Buffleheads from east of Alberta migrate to the eastern United States and the Gulf of Mexico while the birds from western Canada migrate along the Pacific Flyway. During migration, the species is regularly recorded in most states within the United States, with the notable exception of southern Florida, where there are very few records (Gauthier 1993).

The species wintering range is along the majority of the United States Atlantic seaboard, the entire Pacific seaboard and along much of the Gulf Coast. The wintering range also spreads southward into both Mainland and Baja Mexico. On the wintering grounds, the species tend to concentrate along the coasts, with no particular area harboring the majority of the population (Gauthier 1993).

In the West Indies, the species is rarely recorded. In Cuba, the Bufflehead's status is very rare. The species is considered a vagrant in the Bahamas, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. With the exception of a questionable record for the species in St. Lucia, there are no records for this species east of Puerto Rico, including in the Virgin Islands and the Lesser Antilles (Bond 1987; Evans 1990; Keith 1997; Raffaele et al. 1998).

Its overwintering habitat generally includes fresh water ponds, lakes and rivers. However, the species will readily use saltwater lagoons, bays, and often sheltered saltwater bays (Sibley 2000). In this case, the bufflehead, as well as the scaup, opportunistically took advantage of filled wetlands after heavy early winter rains. The ongoing wetlands research project on the St. Martin has revealed many significant results in the status and distribution of wetland birds for the region (Brown and Collier 2003).

SWAINSON'S WARBLER

While banding birds in the Katouche Valley, Anguilla on 19 January 2004, we captured and banded a Swainson's Warbler. The habitat within the Katouche Valley is characterized by a small wetland surrounded by multiple mangrove species (*Rhizophora* sp.). The valley center is characterized by broad-leaf trees (*Bursera sima-*

rubra, *Hippomane mancinella*, *Jasminum fluminense*, and *Mangifera indica*). The rim of the valley is characterized by thorn scrub species, primarily *Acacia tortuosa* (Carrington 1993; Carrington 1998; Seddon and Lennox 1980).

The captured bird was identified at the banding station. Distinctive characteristics are as follows: The bird was banded with USFWS band number 2280-34107. It had a wing chord of 67 mm and weighted 14.4 grams. The bird's skull was completely pneumaticized. The bird was aged as an after-second year bird based on the presence of broad and truncate outer primary coverts that did not contrast in wear with the greater coverts. The outer rectrices were observed to be truncate in shape, also supporting the ageing of after-second year. The bird was not observed to be storing any fat. There was very little body molt and the bird did not appear to be actively molting flight feathers. The bird had slight flight feather wear (Pyle 1997).

Swainson's Warbler is a secretive, ground creeping bird, most often found foraging among leaf litter on the ground (Brown and Dickson 1994; Curson et al. 1994; Dunn and Garrett 1997; Strong 2000). This large warbler's overwintering range is primarily in the West Indies, where it is most commonly found in Jamaica. Up to 25,000 are estimated to over-winter in the Blue and John Crow Mountains of Jamaica (Brown and Dickson 1994; Graves 1996; Dunn and Garrett 1997).

The species is rare throughout the Bahamas. It is uncommon on Cuba. On the Cayman Islands and Puerto Rico it is rare. On Hispaniola and Puerto Rico the species is considered a vagrant. There are no records for this species in the West Indies, south of the Virgin Islands (Bond 1987; Kirkconnell et al. 1996; Dunn and Garrett 1997; Raffaele et al. 1998). The species is also known to winter in Mexico on the Yucatan Peninsula as well as in Veracruz. The species also winters in Belize (Brown and Dickson 1994; Curson et al. 1994; Dunn and Garrett 1997,).

Whether this species was overwintering or migrating south through Anguilla is unknown. We did not observe this species following our initial observation nor re-trap it.

However, the individual was likely overwintering, based upon its status as an overwintering migrant throughout the West Indies north of Anguilla.

The location of the Swainson's Warbler on Anguilla supports the concept that many species most likely go undiscovered while overwintering in the Lesser Antilles. Indeed, in most cases the status of recorded species in the Lesser Antilles is not well understood. In some cases, lesser known neotropical species from the region might be going undetected. Further research is needed in the occurrence and status of neotropical migrants in the Lesser Antilles. If discoveries of such rare species as the Swainson's Warbler are any indication, there is still much to learn regarding neotropical birds in the region.

Acknowledgments.—Our work on Anguilla was made considerably easier with the support of the Anguilla National Trust and the Gumbs family. Many thanks to the interns: Brendan Collins and Alicia Byrd.

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