

# First Record of Kirtland's Warbler from the Dominican Republic and Additional Bird Observations

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**ABSTRACT.** – Non-systematic searches for Kirtland's Warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*) were made in the Dominican Republic during 5-18 March 1985. Here we describe the first confirmed record of Kirtland's Warbler from the Dominican Republic. Our observation also represents the southernmost record of the species. We also recorded the numbers of other bird species found. From those observations, we report on three other species new to the country, and provide data on 22 additional species.

## INTRODUCTION

We searched for Kirtland's Warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*) in the Dominican Republic during March 1985. Our field work was part of a larger research effort involving wintering Kirtland's Warbler throughout the Bahamas Archipelago, including the Turks and Caicos Islands (Faanes et al., in prep.) Although previously unreported from the Dominican Republic, the presence of five Kirtland's Warblers in February 1985 on Grand Turk and South Caicos islands about 145 km north suggested that the species may also be present in the Dominican Republic.

Ancillary to that effort, we recorded data on all bird species observed in the field. Subsequent review of the literature revealed that several of our observations involved species not previously recorded from the Dominican Republic, first locality records, or unusual numbers of individuals at specific locations (Wetmore and Swales, 1931; Dod, 1981).

In this paper, we report on 26 of the bird species we observed. Our data include 3 species new to the country, and 9 new locality records.

## STUDY AREA AND METHODS

We conducted field work in the Dominican Republic during 5-18 March 1985. Our efforts were concentrated primarily in the southern and northwestern regions of the

country (Fig. 1). A summary of locations visited and general habitat types searched is presented in Table 1. Vegetation types surveyed included dry coastal scrub, interior scrub, mangrove communities, mountain cloud forest, and residential areas. Most of our observations in cloud forest are from near the Haitian border at El Aguacate in the Sierra de Baoruco range. The bulk of observations in dry coastal habitats are from near Parque Nacional del Este, or near Laguna Saladilla in the arid northwest. Durland (1922) described the major natural vegetation types in the Dominican Republic.

Bird observations were made generally during dawn to dusk searches in each area visited. Birds were encountered as we walked slowly through a particular habitat type (sensu Lack, 1976), or at point count stations (Blondel et al., 1970). Because our main objective was to locate Kirtland's Warbler, we did not establish systematic census transects in any habitat type. Therefore, our findings can only be used to indicate the spatial and temporal distribution of the bird species observed.

## SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*).—Dod (1978) reported that the Least Grebe occurs infrequently on lakes, ponds, and rivers in the Dominican Republic. Wetmore and Swales (1931) considered Least



FIG. 1. Geographic location of bird survey areas in the Dominican Republic

Grebe fairly common but stated that there were few definite records for the Dominican Republic. We recorded 45 individuals during eight field days between 5 and 17 March. Twenty-five Least Grebes were observed on Laguna Saladilla on 14 March. The laguna, a large freshwater wetland on

the Haitian border, is in the northwestern corner of the Dominican Republic about 25 km south of Monte Cristi (Fig. 1). A. R. Keith (pers. comm.) stated that we observed unusually large numbers of Least Grebes, indicating the recovery of this species over the last 20 years.

TABLE 1. Daily itinerary for fieldwork in the Dominican Republic during March 1985.

Date	General location	Habitat	No. bird species seen
5 Mar	Santo Domingo	Residential	7
6 Mar	Santo Domingo	Jardin Botanico	39
7 Mar	Santo Domingo-Azua	Coastal scrub	31
8 Mar	Azua-El Aguacate	Coastal scrub, cloud forest	67
9 Mar	El Aguacate	Cloud forest	59
10 Mar	Santo Domingo	Coastal scrub	28
11 Mar	Santo Domingo-Hato Major	Interior scrub	33
12 Mar	Santiago-Puerto Plata	Coastal scrub	30
13 Mar	Monte Cristi-Laguna Saladilla	Mangroves, thorn scrub	69
14 Mar	Near Laguna Saladilla	Thorn scrub	57
15 Mar	Santiago-Punta Rucia	Coastal scrub	48
16 Mar	Santiago-Santo Domingo	Interior scrub	33
17 Mar	Parque Nacional del Este	Coastal scrub	41
18 Mar	Santo Domingo-Bani	Coastal scrub	40

Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*). — We recorded 1 bird at Laguna Saladilla on 14 March. Dod (1978) recorded this heron primarily in the Rio Yaque valley east of Santiago. Wetmore and Swales (1931) mention observations from Monte Cristi, Copey, and Lago Enriquillo.

West Indian Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna arborea*). — A group of 28 West Indian Whistling-Ducks was found near the north shore of Laguna Saladilla on 14 March. Danforth (1929) shot 12 West Indian Whistling-Ducks at Laguna Saladilla on 26 June 1927. Wetmore and Swales (1931) believed that most West Indian Whistling-Ducks in the Dominican Republic occurred near Samana Bay. Several records are mentioned for other regions of the country through the late 1920's; there have been few records in the intervening years (Dod, 1981).

Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*). — We found 2 male Green-winged Teal at Laguna Saladilla on 14 March. Dod (1981) described Green-winged Teal as very rare in the Dominican Republic. Wetmore and Swales (1931) believed that Green-winged Teal was more common in winter than their few records suggested. Ours is the first definite winter record in recent years (A. R. Keith, pers. comm.).

Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*). — We recorded 9 Northern Shovelers at Laguna Saladilla on 13 and 14 March. This is a rare, although probably regular, winter visitor to the Dominican Republic (Dod, 1981).

Canvasbacks (*Aythya valisineria*). — We recorded 2 males near the north shore of Laguna Saladilla on 14 March. This is the first known record for the Dominican Republic (Dod, 1981). Canvasbacks is of at least casual occurrence in the West Indies. AOU (1983) mentioned records from Bermuda, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Swan Islands. Raffaele (1983) considered Canvasbacks an accidental winter visitor known from five records on Puerto Rico.

Masked Duck (*Oxyura dominica*). — We found 9 Masked Ducks (5 males; 4 females) in a small, vegetation-choked wetland, along a trail to the north shore of Laguna Saladilla on 14 March. Dod (1981) stated that Masked Duck is endangered in the Dominican Republic. Wetmore and Swales

(1931) described only one confirmed record from the Dominican Republic. Ours was the largest number of this species recorded at one location in the last decade (A. R. Keith, pers. comm.).

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*). — We recorded 2 Merlins near the coast at Monte Cristi on 13 March, and a lone bird at Punta Rucia on 15 March. These birds may have been migrants, although Merlins are known to winter at least occasionally in the Dominican Republic (Dod, 1981).

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). — We recorded 2 individuals near the west shore of Laguna Saladilla on 14 March, and 1 individual along the coast at Punta Rucia (Puerto Plata Province) on 15 March. Wetmore and Swales (1931) reported only one record from the Dominican Republic.

Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*). — We found one Red Knot among other shorebirds on a mudflat at Monte Cristi on 13 March. Dod (1981) considered this a rare migrant. Wetmore and Swales (1931) did not record Red Knot in the Dominican Republic. Ours is one of few records for Hispaniola although the species is probably regular in small numbers but overlooked (A. R. Keith, pers. comm.).

Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*). — We found a group of 11 Long-billed Dowitchers on a mudflat at Monte Cristi on 13 March. This is the second Dominican Republic record; first in spring. Separation of this species from the Short-billed Dowitcher (*L. griseus*) was based on vocalizations heard while the birds foraged.

Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*). — We found 2 Common Snipe in a flooded rice field near Laguna Salada, about 40 km northwest of Santiago on 15 March. Common Snipe has not been reported previously from northwestern Dominican Republic (Wetmore and Swales, 1931).

Gray-headed Quail-Dove (*Geotrygon caniceps*). — A group of three Gray-headed Quail-Doves was seen at the edge of an extensive cloud forest along the trail south of El Aguacate on 9 March. Wetmore and Swales (1931) stated that Gray-headed Quail-Dove was well distributed in the mountains throughout the Dominican Re-

public. They speculated that the range of this bird would become more restricted in the future as rain forest was cleared to provide cropland. This uncommon species is now restricted to three southwestern mountain ranges of the Dominican Republic (Dod, 1981).

Least Pauraque (*Siphonorhis brewsteri*).—One Least Pauraque was heard calling from xeric scrub vegetation about 2 km northwest of Laguna Saladilla on 13 March. This species, endemic to Hispaniola, is declining rapidly due to habitat loss, and has not been recorded previously from this specific locality (Dod, 1981).

White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*).—A single adult observed in xeric scrub vegetation near Punta Rucia, Puerto Plata Province, on 15 March, was the first record for the Dominican Republic. AOU (1983) listed the normal winter range to include the Bahama Islands east to San Salvador, and from Bermuda to the south and west. White-eyed Vireo apparently occurs casually during winter on Puerto Rico, and in the U.S. Virgin Islands (AOU, 1983).

Flat-billed Vireo (*Vireo nanus*).—A single Flat-billed Vireo was located in xeric scrub vegetation near Punta Rucia on 15 March. Dod (1981) reported that Flat-billed Vireo is fairly common in semi-arid vegetation at low elevations on the north coast of the Dominican Republic, although this species has not been reported previously from Punta Rucia.

Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*).—One individual, the second record for the Dominican Republic (first in 1980) (Dod, 1981), was observed on 6 March at the edge of a moist riverine forest in the botanical garden within the city limits of Santo Domingo. AOU (1983) lists the normal winter range of this species to include regions generally west from the Bahamas Archipelago, although occurring at least casually on St. Thomas and St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*).—Although regular in winter and migration, rarely more than one or two individuals are seen at a time (Dod, 1978). Our records include the following: 2 individuals on 8 March in cloud forest near

El Aguacate; 11 individuals on 13 March and 12 individuals on 14 March in xeric scrub vegetation near Laguna Saladilla; 1 individual on 17 March in xeric scrub at Parque del Este, Altigracia Province. Wetmore and Swales (1931) considered Magnolia Warbler rare in winter, listing two specimens and one sight record from the north coast.

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*).—We observed this species in the following locations: 2 individuals on 6 March in moist forest in the botanical garden in Santo Domingo; 8 individuals on 7 March in xeric scrub vegetation along the south coast at Azua, Azua Province; 9 individuals on 8 March and 1 individual on 9 March in humid pine forest near El Aguacate; 4 individuals on 10 March in xeric scrub vegetation near the Las Americas Airport east of Santo Domingo. Wetmore and Swales (1931) considered Yellow-throated Warbler fairly common locally in the Dominican Republic, but most of their records are from the eastern third of the country.

Kirtland's Warbler.—A female Kirtland's Warbler was observed in xeric scrub vegetation about 1 km north of Laguna Saladilla on 14 March; the bird was seen there briefly on 15 March. This is the first species record for the Dominican Republic as well as the most southerly location known within the species' range (Walkinshaw, 1983). This individual was observed foraging with a mixed-species flock of Cape May (*Dendroica tigrina*), Prairie (*D. discolor*), and Palm (*D. palmarum*) Warblers when first observed.

Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*).—Although Dod (1981) described the Prairie Warbler as common in the Dominican Republic, our observations involved unprecedented numbers of individuals (A. R. Keith, pers. comm.), including the following: 90 individuals on 13 March and 101 individuals on 14 March in xeric scrub vegetation near Laguna Saladilla; 26 individuals on 16 March in dry vegetation near Santiago; 21 individuals in xeric scrub near Parque del Este; 15 individuals in xeric scrub near Parque del Este; 15 individuals on 7 March in xeric scrub near Azua.

The apparent preference of this species for xeric vegetation is indicated by our observation of only five individuals on 8 and 9 March in the humid cloud forest vegetation near El Aguacate. Wetmore and Swales (1931) found Prairie Warbler mainly in the coastal plain and lower hills, stating that this warbler did not appear to occupy mountain habitats.

**Palm Warbler.**—We found Palm Warbler commonly throughout most of the Dominican Republic. Largest numbers encountered included 85 individuals on 17 March in xeric scrub near Parque del Este; 60 individuals on 15 March and 59 individuals on 13 March in xeric scrub near Laguna Saladilla; 54 individuals in dry, coastal vegetation between Santiago and Puerto Plata on 12 March; and 20 or more individuals on six other dates between 8 March and 18 March.

**Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*).**—One individual was seen and heard on 6 March along a stream in the botanical garden in Santo Domingo. Most previous records of Louisiana Waterthrush have been from near the north coast (Wetmore and Swales, 1931).

**Stripe-headed Tanager (*Spindalis zena*).**—Dod (1981) stated that this species is usually encountered above 500 m elevation in the mountains of the Dominican Republic. Wetmore and Swales (1931) found Stripe-headed Tanager casually in arid habitats. We regularly found Stripe-headed Tanager throughout the Dominican Republic. The largest numbers were recorded in xeric vegetation along the north coast, including 12 individuals near Puerto Plata on 12 March; 27 individuals on 13 March, and 33 individuals on 14 March near Laguna Saladilla; 11 individuals on 15 March near the coast at Punta Rucia. We also found 8 individuals in dry scrub thickets near Parque del Este on 17 March.

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*).**—Two individuals (one of each sex) were found in xeric scrub vegetation along the coastal road at Punta Rucia on 15 March. Dod (1981) stated that in the Dominican Republic this species is most regularly encountered in the Sierra de Baoruco and the Cordillera Central mountain

ranges. Rose-breasted Grosbeak is seldom reported along the coast and, although it probably occurs annually, there are few records (Dod, 1981). Wetmore and Swales (1931) considered Rose-breasted Grosbeak rare on Hispaniola, with their few records only from Haiti.

**Northern Oriole (*Icterus galbula*).**—We found one male of this rarely encountered species in coastal scrub vegetation near Punta Rucia on 15 March. Wetmore and Swales (1931) did not record Northern Oriole from the Dominican Republic, although AOU (1983) described the winter range to include the Greater Antilles east to the Virgin Islands.

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