

NEW SEABIRD RECORDS FROM ARUBA, SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN, INCLUDING THREE PELAGIC SPECIES NEW FOR THE ISLAND

JOLANDA A. LUKSENBURG¹ AND GEORGE SANGSTER^{2,3}

¹*Department of Environmental Science and Policy, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030 4444, USA (j.luksenburg@yahoo.com)*

²*Department of Bioinformatics and Genetics, Swedish Museum of Natural History, P.O. Box 50007, SE-104 05 Stockholm, Sweden*

³*Department of Zoology, Stockholm University, SE-10691 Stockholm, Sweden*

Received 12 July 2013; accepted 12 August 2013

Aruba (12°30'N, 69°58'W) is a small (180 km²) island located 27 km north of the Paraguaná Peninsula of Venezuela and is part of the Leeward Antilles, southern Caribbean. Until recently, Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire were part of the Netherlands Antilles, but, following the autonomy of Aruba in 1986 and of Curaçao in 2010, the three islands have been labeled by the non-political term "ABC Islands."

The avifauna of Aruba was most recently reviewed by Prins *et al.* (2009), who listed 222 species. Although the landbirds are relatively well-known, there has been very little study of the island's seabirds apart from studies of nesting gulls and terns. The only prolonged observations at sea in adjacent waters were those made by Ruud van Halewijn in 1970–1972 (Voous 1983).

While conducting cetacean surveys in Aruban waters (Luksenburg 2011, in press), photographic evidence was obtained for the occurrence of several new or otherwise interesting bird species. A total of 415 boat-based surveys were made on 350 dates between 9 April 2010 and 22 November 2011. All surveys were within 31 km of the coast. We also report one sighting made from land of a group of American Flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber*. Sighting localities were determined by GPS. A more detailed description of the methodology of the surveys and equipment used is given in Luksenburg (in press).

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

(See the appendix available on the Web site for details on identification.)

Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*)

On 14 April 2011, at least three Black-capped Petrels were photographed approximately 3 km from the island's northern tip (12.647 N, 70.072 W) (Fig. 1a). The petrels were observed associating with killer whales (*Orcinus orca*), which appeared to be hunting (Luksenburg 2013). The petrels were observed flying as low as 10 cm above the killer whales when they surfaced. At the time, abundant flying fish (Exocoetidae) and albacore tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*) were observed in the area. The plumage was consistent with the dark type of this species (Howell & Patteson 2008). Pale type Black-capped Petrels have more white on the ear coverts, a wider pure white collar and a poorly developed breast band. Ongoing research may show that these types actually represent different species (Howell & Patteson 2008, Manly *et al.* 2013). Black-capped Petrel is considered a non-breeding visitor in small numbers in the ABC islands (Prins *et al.* 2009). All previous records in the ABC islands (1970–1972) were

from April to May, except for one in December (Prins *et al.* 2009; R. van Halewijn *in litt.*).

Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris borealis*)

A Cory's Shearwater was recorded 8.8 km off the southwestern coast of Aruba (12.447 N, 70.082 W) on 18 February 2011 (Fig. 1b). When first seen, the bird was sitting on the water and later flew away. This is the first record of *C. borealis* for the ABC islands (Prins *et al.* 2009). This species appears to be rare in the southern Caribbean. In Colombia, *C. borealis* is known from one record in May 2009 (Ruiz-Guerra & Cifuentes-Sarmiento 2010). Unidentified *C. borealis/C. diomedea* have been recorded in Costa Rica in 2003 and December 2004 (Solano-Ugalde & Herrera 2005), in Panama in September 1985 (Ridgely & Gwynne 1989), in Venezuela in February 1997 and December 1999 (Murphy 2000, Marín *et al.* 2002), and in Trinidad and Tobago multiple times in January–June and November (e.g. Murphy 2000, Ebels 2002, Kenefick 2012).

Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*)

Single Red-billed Tropicbirds were observed and photographed on four occasions: (i) 18 June 2010, 8.7 km from the southwest coast (12.479 N, 70.116 W); (ii) 20 April 2011, 22.6 km from the northeast coast (12.761 N, 69.888 W); (iii) 3 June 2011, 1.0 km from the northern tip of Aruba (12.627 N, 70.039W) (Fig. 1c); and (iv) 25 June 2011, 8.0 km from the southwest coast (12.438 N, 70.058 W). These are the first records of this species for Aruba (Prins *et al.* 2009). Red-billed Tropicbird was previously known in the ABC islands from Curaçao and Bonaire, with five records each (Prins *et al.* 2009). The nearest breeding sites are in Archipiélago Los Roques, Venezuela (Lee & Walsh-McGehee 2000).

Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*)

Masked Boobies were observed 44 times, mostly in July (10 records) and September (9 records) (Fig. 1d). Nearly all records occurred along the northwest (21) and southwest (21) coasts. Sightings ranged from 0.8 km to 18.8 km from shore. Group size ranged from one to four individuals. Masked Boobies were observed in all months of the year except January, February and March. Prins *et al.* (2009) listed six previous records for Aruba. Immature birds had various degrees of brownish mottling on head, upperparts and upper wing coverts. Our sightings indicate that this species is a regular visitor to Aruban waters. The birds sighted in Aruba probably originate from the breeding colony in the Archipiélago de los Monjes, Venezuela, approximately 90 km west of Aruba.



Fig 1. Photographs of seven bird species in Aruban waters: (a) Black-capped Petrel, north of Aruba, 14 April 2011; (b) Cory's Shearwater, west of Aruba, 18 February 2011; (c) Red-billed Tropicbird, north of Aruba, 3 June 2011; (d) Masked Booby, west of Aruba, 16 July 2011; (e) American Flamingo, Malmokbaai, Punta Brabu Beach, Aruba, 7 July 2011; (f-g) South Polar Skua, part of a group of 11 individuals, north of Aruba, 15 July 2011; (h) Pomarine Skua, west of Aruba, 9 April 2010. Photographs by J.A. Luksenburg.

American Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)

A group of 9–11 American Flamingos was regularly observed in Malmokbaai, Punta Brabu Beach, Aruba, from 16 May until 22 July 2011 (Fig. 1e). On most of our visits, nine adults and two juveniles were present. Prins *et al.* (2009) listed four previous records of this species on Aruba, three in 1986 and one in 2004. The birds observed on Aruba most likely originate from either the large breeding population on Bonaire (Prins *et al.* 2009) or the colony in Ciénaga de los Olivitos, Zulia, Venezuela (Casler *et al.* 1994).

South Polar Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*)

On 15 July 2011, a single South Polar Skua was sighted approximately 1 km from the northeast coast of Aruba (12.627 N, 70.040 W) (Fig. 1f, g). The individual was observed flying towards deeper waters in a northeastern direction. Based on our photographs, it is difficult to rule out the possibility that this was a Brown Skua *S. antarcticus*, although the pale brown nuchal collar is absent in this species (Jiguet 1997, S. Votier *in litt.*). Brown Skuas breed on islands in the Southern Ocean and on the Antarctic Peninsula. However, unlike *S. maccormicki*, *S. antarcticus* does not perform transequatorial migrations (Devillers 1977). There are no accepted records of *S. antarcticus* on either side of the North Atlantic (AOU 1998, Parkin & Knox 2010) and no irrefutable evidence that it migrates or straggles north of the equator in the Atlantic Ocean (Devillers 1977).

This is the first documented record of *S. maccormicki* for Aruba and the ABC islands. It is rarely recorded in the southern Caribbean. There are single records in Venezuela (Hilty 2003) and Trinidad (Manolis 1981), and four sight records in Colombia (Estela 2004, Donegan *et al.* 2009). Prins *et al.* (2009) mentioned a sight record of an unidentified large skua between Curaçao and Bonaire in July 1970.

Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

Pomarine Skuas (Fig. 1h) were observed on 11 occasions at distances of 1.1–22.3 km from the coast. All were single individuals, except one sighting of two individuals. Sightings were in February (2), March (1), April (1), May (1), September (1), November (1), and December (4). There are nine previous at-sea records of this species in the neighbourhood of the ABC islands, and one record on Aruba in June 1974 (Voous 1983, Prins *et al.* 2009). The species is known in the Caribbean part of Colombia from a small number of sightings and specimens (Estela *et al.* 2004, Salaman *et al.* 2008). It is rather common in the southwestern side of the Golfo de Venezuela, where it is mostly recorded in April to June (Casler & Pirela 2005). It is rare in Trinidad and Tobago (White *et al.* 2007).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Leo Croes for his encouragement and help during field work. We are grateful to Ruud van Halewijn and Steve Howell for their comments on the manuscript and Steve Votier for sharing his knowledge on the identification of South Polar Skua. Field work was supported by the Prins Bernhard Culture Fund, George Mason University, Cetacean Society International, the Society for Marine Mammalogy, the Lerner-Gray Fund for Marine Research

of the American Museum of Natural History, Humane Society International, the Aruban Department of Agriculture, Husbandry and Fisheries, and K.M. Luksenburg-Bouwmeester.

REFERENCES

- AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION (AOU). 1998. *Checklist of North American birds*. 7th ed. Washington, DC: American Ornithologists' Union.
- CASLER, C.L. & PIRELA, D. 2005. Abundancia estacional de Salteadores Parásitos y Pomarinos (Aves: Stercorariidae) de la costa suroeste del Golfo de Venezuela. *Boletín del Centro de Investigaciones Biológicas* 39: 146–158.
- CASLER, C.L., ESTÉ, E.E. & PARDO, H.M. 1994. Breeding of the Greater Flamingo in western Venezuela. *Colonial Waterbirds* 17: 28–34.
- DEVILLERS, P. 1977. The skuas of the North American Pacific coast. *Auk* 94: 417–424.
- DONEGAN, T., SALAMAN, P. & CARO, D. 2009. Revision of the status of various bird species occurring or reported in Colombia. *Conservacion Colombiana* 8: 80–86.
- EBELS, E.B. 2002. Transatlantic vagrancy of Palearctic species to the Caribbean region. *Dutch Birding* 24: 202–209.
- ESTELA, F.A. 2004. Observaciones del págalalo del polo sur (*Catharacta maccormicki*) en el Caribe colombiano. *Ornitología Colombiana* 2: 50–52.
- ESTELA, F.A., NARANJO, L.G. & FRANKE-ANTE, R. 2004. Registros de págalalos (Aves: Stercorariidae) en las costas de Colombia. *Boletín de Investigaciones Marinas y Costeras* 33: 245–250.
- HILTY, S.L. 2003. *Birds of Venezuela*. Second ed. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- HOWELL, S.N.G. & PATTESON, J.B. 2008. Variation in the Black-Capped Petrel — one species or more? *Alula* 14: 70–83.
- KENEFICK, M. 2012. Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee: rare birds in 2008–10. *Cotinga* 34: 166–171.
- JIGUET, F. 1997. Identification of South Polar Skua: the Brown Skua pitfall. *Birding World* 10: 306–310.
- LEE, D.S. & WALSH-MCGEHEE, M. 2000. Population estimates, conservation concerns, and management of tropicbirds in the Western Atlantic. *Caribbean Journal of Science* 36: 267–279.
- LUKSENBURG, J.A. 2011. Three new records of cetacean species for Aruba, Leeward Antilles, southern Caribbean. *Marine Biodiversity Records* 4: e4. doi:10.1017/S1755267210001193
- LUKSENBURG, J.A. In press. The cetaceans of Aruba, southern Caribbean. *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom*. doi:10.1017/S0025315413000337
- MANLY, B., ARBOGAST, B.S., LEE, D.S. & VAN TUINEN, M. 2013. Mitochondrial DNA analysis reveals substantial population structure within the endangered Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*). *Waterbirds* 36: 228–233.
- MANOLIS, T. 1981. First sight record of South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki* for Trinidad, West Indies. *American Birds* 35: 982.
- MARÍN, G., MUÑOZ, J., GUEVARA, S. & RODRÍGUEZ, J.R. 2002. *Calonectris diomedea*, nuevo Procelárido para Venezuela. *Ornitología Neotropical* 13: 91–92.
- MURPHY, W.L. 2000. Observations of pelagic seabirds wintering at sea in the southeastern Caribbean. *Department of Life Sciences, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Occasional Papers* 11: 104–110.

- PARKIN, D.T. & KNOX, A.G. 2010. *The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland*. London: Christopher Helm.
- PRINS, T., REUTER, J.H., DEBROT, A.O., WATTEL, J. & NIJMAN, V. 2009. Checklist of the birds of Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire, South Caribbean. *Ardea* 97: 137–268.
- RIDGELY, R.S. & GWYNNE, J.A. 1989. A guide to the birds of Panama with Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Honduras. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- RUIZ-GUERRA, C. & CIFUENTES-SARMIENTO, Y. 2010. Primer registro del petrel de Cory (*Calonectris diomedea*) para Colombia. *Ornitología Colombiana* 10: 65–68.
- SALAMAN, P., BAYLY, N., BURRIDGE, R., GRANTHAM, M., GURNEY, M., QUEVEDO, A., URUEÑA, L.E. & DONEGAN, T. 2008. Sixteen bird species new for Colombia. *Conservación Colombiana* 5: 80–85.
- SOLANO-UGALDE, A. & HERRERA, P. 2005. Segundo registro de la Pardela Cenicienta *Calonectris diomedea* (Procellariidae: Aves) en las costas caribeñas de Centroamérica. *Zeledonia* 9(1): 57–59.
- VOOUS, K.H. 1983. *Birds of the Netherlands Antilles*. 2nd ed. Zutphen, Netherlands: Walburg Pers.
- WHITE, G., KENEFICK, M. & MURPHY, W.L. 2007. The status and abundance of birds in Trinidad and Tobago. *Living World, Journal of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club* 2007: 57–68.
-