Notes on some migratory birds rare, new or poorly known on Isla Providencia, Colombia

Notas sobre algunas especies de aves migratorias, raras, nuevas o poco conocidas en la Isla Providencia, Colombia

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Abstract
We present details of various interesting migratory bird records recorded on Isla Providencia (Old Providence island) in April 2018. These include apparently the first records for the island of Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica* and Antillean Nighthawk *Chordeiles gundlachii* and the first confirmed record of Purple Martin *Progne subis*. We also discuss a record of migratory individuals (*aestiva* group) of the Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia*, and their identification compared to the local endemic resident subspecies *armouri*, of the Golden Warbler (*petechia*) group. Finally, we present details of other records of migrant or non-endemic species, including photographic records of several species.

Keywords: New records, range extensions, identification

Resumen
Presentamos detalles sobre varios registros interesantes de aves migratorias, registradas en la Isla Providencia en Abril de 2018, incluyendo al parecer los primeros registros para la isla de *Chaetura pelagica* y *Chordeiles gundlachii* y el primer registro confirmado de *Progne subis*. Además, discutimos algunos registros de individuos migratorios (grupo *aestiva*) de *Setophaga petechia*, y su identificación comparada con la subespecie endemica y residente local *armouri* (grupo *petechia*). Finalmente, presentamos detalles de otras especies migratorios o que no son endémicas, incluyendo registros fotografícos de varias especies.

Palabras clave: Nuevos registros, extensión en distribución, identificación

Introduction

Old Providence or Isla Providencia (as known in Spanish and hereafter) is a Caribbean island lying *c*.250 km east of Nicaragua, midway between Costa Rica and Jamaica and *c*.90 km north-east of San Andrés Island. It is part of Colombia's department of the Archipiélago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina. Santa Catalina is a smaller island adjacent to Providencia and connected to it by a short footbridge. These islands, and neighbouring San Andrés, are host to various endemic landbirds, some of which are afforded species rank.

Providencia has been explored sporadically for birds (Cory 1887, Fisher & Wetmore 1931, Bond & Meyer de Schauensee 1944, Bond 1950, Russell *et al*. 1979, Tye & Tye 1991). Also, some lists have been produced of the islands' birds, but often together with birds of San Andrés (Hilty & Brown 1986, McNish 2003, McMullan & Donegan 2014). More recently, occasional records have appeared in the literature, especially when first national records have been found (e.g. Salaman *et al*. 2008, Ward-Bolivar & Lasso-Zapata 2012) or in local governmental reports (CORALINA 2012). The island has also become an increasing focus for birdwatchers, resulting in several site lists and new records, as well as many photographs of previously unconfirmed species appearing in eBird (2018).

Providencia's birds are, however, less well-known than those of neighbouring San Andrés. Publicly available sound recordings (on www.xeno-canto.org) exist to date only for the endemic Providencia Vireo *Vireo approximans*. The number of migratory species recorded or confirmed on the island is lower than for San Andrés, where netting and ringing efforts have taken place during migratory periods (e.g. Pacheco Garzón 2012). Its less-known fauna is a result of more restricted access and the time and costs of getting there: Providencia's airport has only a small runway, supporting just three micro-aircraft flights daily to San Andrés, which are costly. There is also a catamaran service between the islands, which may give opportunities for seawatching, but takes several hours. These factors also mean that Providencia has been less impacted by the adverse ecological and cultural aspects of mass tourism afflicted recently on nearby San Andrés, which by contrast is reached by tens of jumbo jets daily, both from within Colombia and internationally.

It came to our attention that a number of the birds we observed during a recent short trip to Providencia,

coinciding with the Spring migration period in 2018, were of species that lacked either records or confirmed records in the published literature. Moreover, Avendaño *et al*. (2017) recently purported to remove Antillean Nighthawk *Chordeiles gundlachii* from their version of Colombia's checklist, despite this having previously been listed for the archipegalo by the late McNish (2003) and being one of the birds we observed during our study. These two factors encouraged us to place some of our observations on record.

Methods

We observed birds at various localities across Providencia and Santa Catalina islands, including adjacent Crab Cay (Cayo Cangrejo), the Three Brothers (Tres Hermanos) Cays. We spent time mostly around the coast, the inland dammed reservoir (Represa) and some of the less accessible bays to the south of the island, all in April 2018. We made various sound recordings and took photographs. Birds were identified in the field using McNish (2003), McMullan & Donegan (2014) and photographs on eBird (2018), with Raffaele *et al*. (2003) and Cleere (2010) consulted on our return from the field.

Results

In the following sections, details of observations of birds new or poorly known on Providencia are presented.

Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*

A single swift was observed flying low south at Freshwater Bay on 12 April 2018 at *c*.5 pm. At closest, it approached within 8 m distance, directly above us. All the salient identification features visible from the underside of the bird were seen well, including its pale greyish upper throat and medium-sized tail, with typical proportions for this species. Chimney Swift is historically considered a rarity in Colombia, with only a handful of records. However, recent studies have considered it to be numerous in the Darién region and regular in the Colombian East Andes during the autumn passage (Bayly *et al*. 2014, Pulgarin *et al*. 2015). McNish (2003) listed this species for San Andrés and Providencia, but typically provided no information on observation dates or localities. Such records are presumed to be from San Andrés, where Thomas McNish lived (Balcazar *et al*. 2013). eBird (2018) includes information on five records for San Andrés, one of which is supported by a record photograph and all of which are autumn records. Ours appears to be the first record for Providencia and apparently only the third spring migration record of this species for Colombia (Hilty & Brown 1986, Pulgarin *et al*. 2015).

Antillean Nighthawk *Chordeiles gundlachii*

A nighthawk *Chordeiles* sp. was observed at dusk, foraging for insects over the beach and within 30 m of the coast at Freshwater Bay at *c*.6:00-6:30 p.m. on 10 April 2018. It was at low altitude, *c*.10-15m above sea level, and apparently hawking for aerial insects, flying directly and turning sometimes. No published records of the family Caprimulgidae exist for Providencia, although a group of *c*.70 *Chordeiles* were observed by Vanburen Ward Bolivar on 10 May 2017 (eBird 2018). A record photograph of one of these birds in silhouette (eBird 2018) was tentatively identified by the observer as Common Nighthawk *C. minor*.

Our bird was clearly a *Chordeiles* nighthawk, on account of its pointed wings and size. It was identified in the field immediately as a likely Antillean, owing mainly to its rather rufous belly and breast. The date of observation, behaviour and habitat also point to this species being more likely, as discussed below.

Only three *Chordeiles* species are plausible at this locality: (i) Common Nighthawk *C. minor*, which is a common passage migrant through Colombia and the Caribbean with a previous photographic record of unspecified locality or date on San Andrés or Providencia (McNish 2003), one mist-net capture on San Andrés in 2005 (Pacheco Garzón 2012), several other San Andrés records (eBird 2018: discussed below) and a single Providencia record (eBird 2018, discussed above); (ii) Lesser Nighthawk *C. acutipennis*, a resident of South and Central America which undertakes some seasonal movements and has been reported in San Andrés without published details or photographic support (McNish 2003) and with one mist-net capture on San Andrés in 2005 (Pacheco Garzón 2012), but it is unknown anywhere else in the Caribbean (C. J. Sharpe *in litt*. 2018); and (iii) Antillean Nighthawk *C. gundlachii*, which breeds on Caribbean islands, leaving the region, presumably for South America, for the Nearctic winter (Rafaelle *et al*. 2003), has been reported on San Andrés or Providencia, without any details of dates or localities records (McNish 2003) and was recently reported by F. Estela and colleagues from Asociación Calidris on nearby Cayo Roncador in September 2015 and Cayo Serranilla in September 2017 (eBird 2018, Asociación para el Estudio y Conservación de las Aves Acuáticas de Colombia 2017).

These three species are difficult (and can be impossible) to identify from one another based solely on dusk sight observations of a non-vocalising bird such as ours. As noted by Rafaelle *et al*. (2003), "the abundance of [Common Nighthawk] is unclear in the West Indies due to it being distinguishable from the more common Antillean Nighthawk only by its call and by the fact that both species are nearly silent" on migration. More recent research and photographs of both species in Cleere (2010) and eBird (2018) enable certain field marks to be elucidated and assisted our identification. In particular, some (but not all) Antillean Nighthawks have rather rufous underparts. The individual that we observed was one such bird. Its combination of rufous underparts, pointed wings and dusk observation even made us wonder if it was a Bat Falcon on first glimpsing it! The precise position of the primary marking, considered a possible identification feature for

Antillean, was not noted with sufficient detail to inform identification. In proportions, the bird was compact, with proportionately rather short wings and a marginally longer tail than can be observed in Common Nighthawk, and with relatively larger wings and tail compared to body size than seen in Lesser. Its 'jizz' as well as plumage did not well match Common Nighthawk or Lesser Nighthawk, which are species TD is familiar with.

The date of this observation is also noteworthy. In the Cayman Islands, 700 km to the north, more data on the temporal distribution of Antillean Nighthawks is available (eBird 2018). Birds arrive mostly in the middle to second half of April, with the earliest Spring record from 2 April (and one outlier on 3 March). In contrast, the main passage period for Common Nighthawks in the Cayman Islands starts in later April and is concentrated during early to mid-May, when large flocks of up to hundreds or even thousands of birds are recorded. The only previous record of Common Nighthawk for Providencia was on 10 May, which is typical. Similarly, the only two dated Spring migration records for San Andres of Common Nighthawk are on 5 May and 10 May (eBird 2018). Our mid-April record is therefore made at a time when Common Nighthawk passage migration is just starting in the south-western Caribbean, but when Antillean Nighthawk migration is in full swing.

As above, Common Nighthawk is often observed during Spring passage migration in Colombia, frequently in flocks. Up to hundreds of these birds can congregate near the cienagas around the Serranía de San Lucas region of northern Colombia (TD observations) and presumably then move northwards. Small flocks of Common Nighthawk have also been reported on San Andrés (eBird 2018 includes four records involving multiple birds, of 3, 3, 4 and 6 individuals, and just two records of singletons) but in the Cayman islands hundreds and sometimes thousands of birds occur together (eBird 2018). Antillean Nighthawks also sometimes migrate in flocks (eBird 2018), but the species is less numerous, abundant and widespread generally, meaning that these can be smaller. Of course, both species can be observed even during the migration period as singletons, such as in this observation.

The beach habitat in which we observed this individual is typical for Antillean Nighthawk (Guzy 2018). This bird was not apparently actively migrating, but foraging over a beach after emerging at dusk, presumably after having stopped on passage. Lesser Nighthawk has been recorded at the seaside in northern Colombia (Collins 2012) and Common Nighthawk also crosses the sea and must use available habitats on migration too, but the bird's habitat usage is a further non-diagnostic indicator for Antillean.

This is apparently the first record of Antillean Nighthawk for Providencia. Avendano *et al*. (2017) recently doubted McNish (2003)'s records of this species (which must be assumed to be for San Andrés) and eliminated the species from their version of Colombia's checklist. With this and other sight records published (McNish 2003 and F. Estela in eBird 2018 and Asociación para el Estudio y Conservación de las Aves Acuáticas de Colombia 2017), this species should be retained (cf. McMullan & Donegan 2014, Donegan *et al*. 2016) for Colombia's checklist.

Purple Martin *Progne subis*

Purple Martin is considered an "uncommon" and "rare" passage migrant in much of the Caribbean region (Rafaelle *et al*. 2003). It has been recorded in small numbers at sea during autumn migration in the Colombian Caribbean (Digby *et al*. 2015). There are previous records on San Andrés of unspecified locality and date (McNish 2003), with eBird (2018) listing just three records for that island and one for "San Andrés and Providencia", which presumably relates to the former. Adding to those records, TD observed two Purple Martins apparently in active migration on 7 October 2009 over Cayo El Acuario, east of San Andrés. The only previous record for Providencia results from inclusion of the species in a list of birds observed during December 2008 in a local government report that was published online (CORALINA 2012).

A single adult bird was observed during our visit to Providencia on 10 April 2018 at *c*.5:30 p.m at Freshwater Bay. It perched on a wire then was flushed to a rooftop, where photographed (Fig. 1). This was clearly a tired bird on migration. During our visit, we also observed a large movement of other hirundines, with many hundreds of Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* (Fig. 4) and tens of Sand Martins *Riparia riparia* concentrated in the Freshwater Bay and Represa (reservoir) areas. This is apparently the first confirmed or dated record of Purple Martin for Providencia and the first with a specified locality.

Figure 1. Purple Martin at Freshwater Bay, Providencia. © T. Donegan.

Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia*

Yellow Warblers in the Caribbean present a taxonomic and identification challenge, with migratory (American Yellow Warbler or *aestiva* group) and resident (Golden Warbler or *petechia* group) populations both present. These show remarkable genetic differentiation from one another and the two have been proposed for species rank by some authors (see further Chaves *et al*. 2012). In addition, noteworthy morphological variation and molecular structure has been observed between the numerous different insular and continental forms of the *petechia* group that occur in the Caribbean, Galapagos and continental mangroves of South and Central America.

At Crab Cay on 11 April 2018 at around 1 p.m., we observed a small flock (*c*.4-6 birds) of Yellow Warblers, several of which are illustrated in Fig. 2. We were inquisitive about this finding, since the resident Providencia endemic subspecies *armouri* of Golden Warbler (of the *petechia* group) has gone unrecorded in published literature since 1948 (Bond 1950) and, indeed, no kind of Yellow Warbler has been repored in literature (other than CORALINA 2012, p. 100, who reported *Dendroica petechia* in a table of observations from December 2008, without further details) since then.

There is limited literature available on the identification of the Providencia subspecies *armouri* from migratory populations. It is not illustrated in any field guide or journal publication of which we are aware. Identification issues arise because the resident subspecies has a yellow crown, unusually for the *petechia* group and potentially giving rise to confusion with migratory birds which are also yellow-headed. Subspecies *armouri* is also cited as having more extensive rufous markings on the underparts compared to other *petechia* group subspecies and a song which (like the San Andrés subspecies *flavida*), is less tuneful than the Cuban subspecies (*gundlachii*) (Greenway 1933, Bond 1950, Browning 1994). Bond (1950) considered *armouri* to be: "One of the rarest of the indigenous land birds of Providencia" and to be restricted to the north and east of the island, which Tye & Tye (1991) identified as likely being the mangroves around the airport. Neither Tye & Tye (1991) nor Russell *et al*. (1979) located *armouri* in their studies.

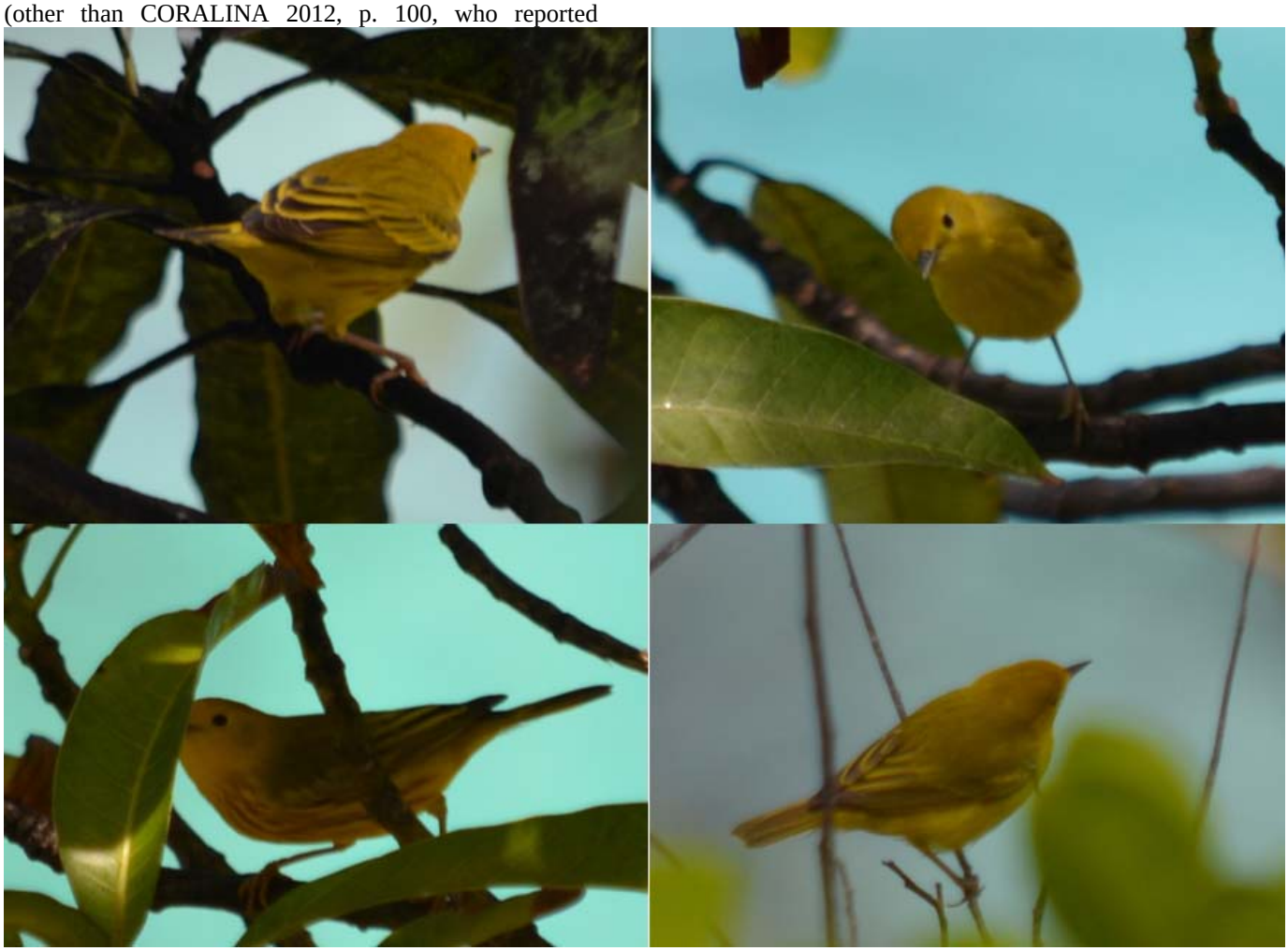

Figure 2. Individuals of the migratory (*aestiva*) group of Yellow Warblers *Setophaga petechia* photographed among a small flock at Crab Cay off Providencia. The two photographs on the left are of the same individual adult male, and those on the right are of females which might be the same bird but were taken at different times. © T. Donegan.

Figure 3. Four specimens of Golden Warbler *Setophaga petechial armouri* from Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, nos. 160320, 160319, 160318 and 160321. All collected by James Bond in 1948. © Dr. Nate Rice, Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

We located a series of *armouri* specimens using Biomap Alliance Participants (2018) at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and obtained photographs for comparison purposes from the curator (Fig. 3). These revealed probably the best identification features in adult *armouri* to be their darker wings and mantle. In particular, the resident subspecies has only marginally brighter yellowish markings to the tertials and also has essentially unstreaked red markings on the breast (Fig. 3). The birds we observed had bright yellow markings on the outer remiges of the tertials (Fig. 2). Although some individuals we observed were extensively streaked, this was typical of adult males of the *aestiva* group in breeding plumage (a yellow background to the breast streaking was clearly visible: Fig. 2). This means that the birds we photographed are migratory Yellow Warblers of the *aestiva* group, which are previously unrecorded or confirmed on Providencia in the literature.

There are, however, a few recent records of migratory Yellow Warblers on Providencia in eBird (2018), including record photographs which are difficult to identify to subspecies, most of which appear to concern migratory Yellow Warblers (or which would be expected to be so on account of being recorded away from the mangroves).

Paul Salaman (*in litt*. 2018) observed resident Yellow Warblers on Providencia in 2001. There is also a photographic record by Vanburen Ward Bolivar on 13 May 2017 (ML 57968261: eBird 2018), which seems to be of an undescribed juvenile plumage of *armouri*. These observations, and perhaps others, may clinch an encouraging rediscovery of conservation importance.

Other records and photographic confirmations for Isla Providencia

Various other migrants were recorded during our trip (Table 1, Fig. 4). Many of these are widespread and have been recorded previously on the island (as detailed in Table 1), but seven of the species we have photographed lack any previously published "confirmed" record for Providencia island.

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Biomap Alliance Participants (Darwin Initiative, Natural History Museum, Instituto de Ciencias Naturales de la

Table 1: records of migrant species observed and details of previous records in the literature. Species marked with an asterisk (*) in the left column are those which lack previous published photographic records for the island in the literature. For Blue-winged Teal and Grey Kingbird, ours are the first confirmed records more generally.

	Species	**Previous records**	**Details of our observations**
*	Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*	Various records on eBird (2018), including of 12 birds on 13 March 2013 (Pepper Trail) and four records at Represa, including three birds on 23 December 2015 (Marc Kramer); some in the eastern mangroves. No previous confirmed records.	Represa, 13 April 2018. At least 6 birds present, with distant photographs taken (Fig. 4).
*	Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea* *	Observed by Bond (1950) and Tye & Tye (1991), who considered it probably resident. Several records on eBird (2018), all times of year, including three photographed birds. Also, records in CORALINA (2012) from December 2008.	Record photograph taken of an immature on evening of 12 April 2018 at stream in Freshwater Bay (Fig. 4).
*	Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* *	Observed by Bond (1950), Russell *et al.* (1979) and Tye & Tye (1991). Presumed resident. Several records on eBird (2018), including three with photographs.	Santa Catalina on 11 April 2018 (Fig. 4).
	Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*	Seven records on eBird (2018) year round, one from the eastern mangroves, including a photograph (ML98948901: Vanburen Ward Bolivar) and listed in CORALINA (2012).	One observed at Manchineel Bay, 11 April 2018.
*	Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*	Several records from Providencia and Santa Catalina on eBird (2018), including four photographic records; also reported in CORALINA (2012).	Old Town shore, 12 April 2018, photograph (Fig. 4).
*	(Eastern) Willet *Tringa s. semipalmata*	Considered common by Tye & Tye (1991). Several records on eBird (2018), two of which include photographs and also listed in CORALINA (2012).	Old Town shore, 12 April 2018, photograph (Fig. 4).
	Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*	Sight records by Bond (1950) and Russell *et al.* (1979). Six specimens from Henderson expedition (Biomap Alliance Participants 2018). Numerous records on eBird (2018) and also reported by CORALINA (2012).	Old Town shore (photograph: Fig. 4); also east coast south of airport (observed). Both, 12 April 2018.
	Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*	Specimen salvaged by M. Álvarez at south-west bay: Universidad Nacional ICN collection no. 31797: Biomap Alliance Participants (2018). Numerous records on eBird (2018) and also in CORALINA (2012).	Abundant at all sites, all days. Record photographs (Fig. 4: at Represa).
	Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*	Reportedly shot by Bond (1950), but no specimens listed in Biomap Alliance Participants (2018). Three records on eBird (2018), including one photographic record by Chris Funk.	Small numbers among Barn Swallow flocks at Freshwater Bay and Represa only, all days; photographs taken.
*	Grey Kingbird *Tyrannus dominicensis*	Four sight records from Providencia in eBird (2018).	Freshwater Bay, 11 April 2018, photograph (Fig. 4).
	Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*	Four records in eBird (2018), two of which include photographs.	Observed at Freshwater Bay, 10 April 2018.
*	Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia*	Sight record by Russell *et al.* (1979). Seven sight records in eBird (2018), including one photographic record on 13 May 2017 from Santa Catalina (ML57964721: Vanburen Ward Bolivar) and listed by CORALINA (2012).	Represa, 13 April 2018, photograph (Fig. 4).
	Cape May Warbler *Setophaga tigrina*	Specimen record in Cory (1887). Several sight records and three photographic records in eBird (2018).	Freshwater Bay, briefly on both 11 & 13 April.
	Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*	Mist net captures and sight records in Russell *et al.* (1979). Numerous sight records in eBird (2018), with one photographic record at the same locality as ours (ML82682271: Rafael Tossi, 30 November 2017). Five specimens from Henderson expedition in Biomap Alliance Participants (2018) and records in CORALINA (2012) from December 2008.	North side of Town opposite Santa Catalina, 12 April 2018, photograph (Fig. 4).
	Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea*	Specimen collected by I. Jimenez at Universidad Nacional ICN collection no. 31793: Biomap Alliance Participants (2018). Three sight records in eBird (2018).	Pair observed, Freshwater Bay, 11 April 2018.

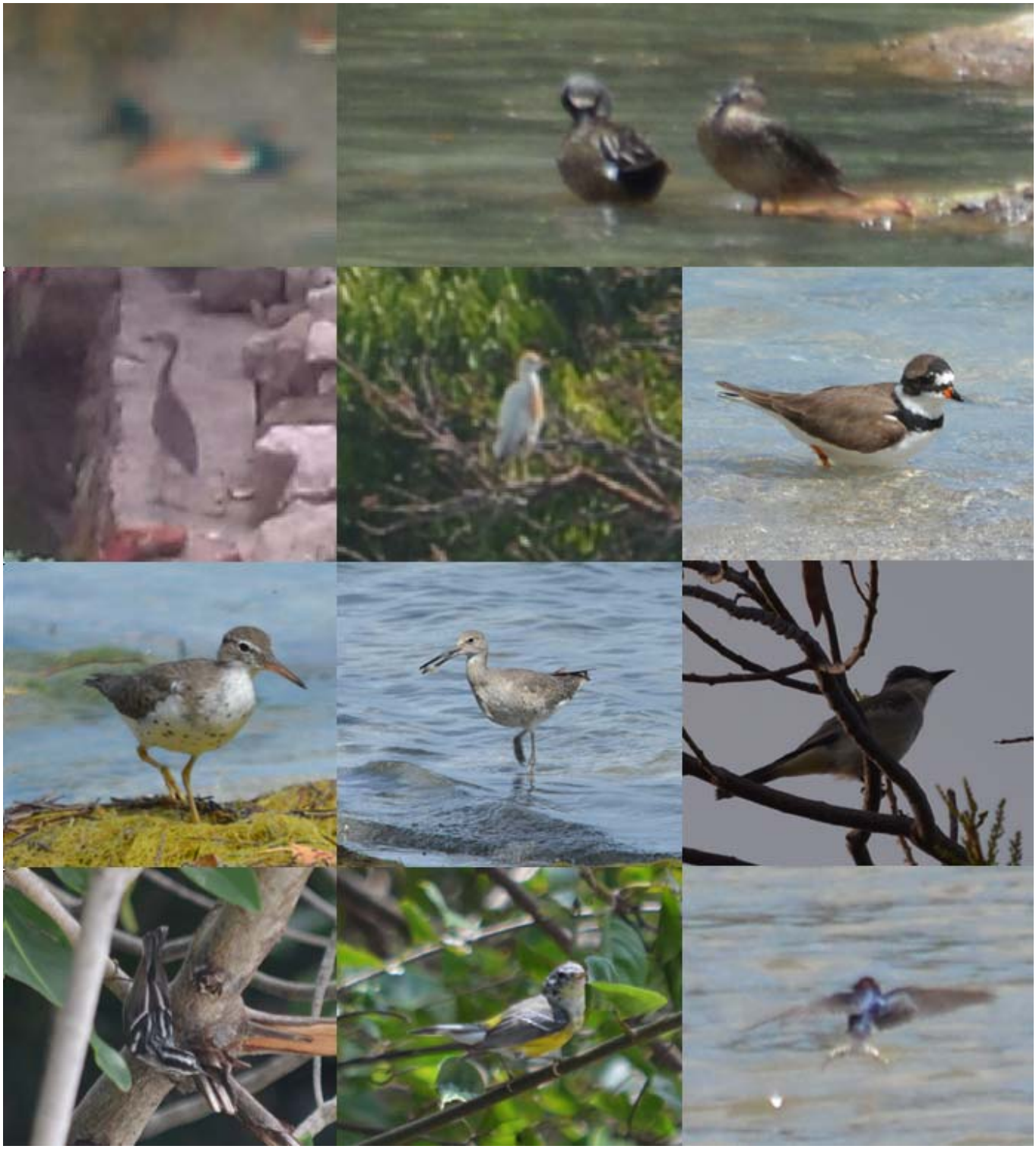

Figure 4. Collage of birds little-documented for Providencia. Details of observations and localities are in Table 1. Top left: distant adult male Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*. Top right: pair of same species. Second row left: juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea*. Second row centre: Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. Second row right: Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*. Third row left: Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*. Third row centre: (Eastern) Willet *Tringa s. semipalmata*. Third row right: Grey Kingbird *Tyrannus dominicensis*. Bottom row left: Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*. Bottom row centre: immature male Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia*. Bottom row right: Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: All photographs © B. Huertas / T. Donegan.

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