

San Andrés

30 – 1 November 2016



Report compiled by: Håkan Thorstensson

Travellers: Anders Kornstedt, Morgan Svensson, Håkan Thorstensson & Torbjörn Vik

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Having signed up for a commercial bird tour in Colombia starting November 1st, we decided to allow a few days extra in the country in the event of trouble with baggage being left behind on our flight to Bogotá. We all agreed Isla San Andrés in the West Indies would be a perfect start to the birding bonanza that was to follow, the reason of course being the opportunity to add San Andrés Vireo to our life lists. The island, also known as St Andrew, is located off the coast of Nicaragua, and is Colombia-owned. There are several daily flights from Bogotá to San Andrés, and the flight time is about two and a half hours. Before passing the security check, a “visitors fee” at 99 000 Colombian pesos had to be paid, this to support the protection of the islands nature. We had booked ourselves into Hotel Cocoplum at Cocoplum beach on the eastern coast. The hotel is situated right at the beach with a restaurant on its premises, and is also conveniently located with the Botanical Garden, a reliable site for the vireo, within walking distance. Apart from birding, we also took a snorkelling tour, including swimming with rays as icing of the cake.

Arriving San Andrés at about noon on October 30, our plan was to stay one night and then fly back to Bogotá late the next evening. In fact, we even boarded the return flight, sat there for an hour without moving one inch, and then were told the flight was cancelled due to the airport in Bogotá having been forced to close due to very difficult weather conditions (this is apparently not uncommon). The airline arranged a hotel for us to spend the night, and on the next day we were back in Bogotá.

San Andrés is a very relaxed island, and the commonly spoken language is Creole. The atmosphere is distinctly different here compared to mainland Colombia. So, while here, slow down your pace, adopt to the leisure style and simply enjoy!

Sites visited

We birded three sites: Jardin Botanico (Botanical Garden), La Laguna (Big Pond) and Old Point Manglares (mangrove). The first two sites are included in the site guide Birdwatching in Colombia by Jurgen Beckers and Pablo Florez (the latter being Colombia's top lister). As already mentioned, Jardin Botanico is within walking distance from Cocoplum beach, the other two areas are easily reached by short taxi rides.

All three sites are quite small and easily covered. At La Laguna, there is a small shack selling drinks and simple food, and seemingly this is quite a popular area where the islanders come to watch the caymans that were once introduced here. Jardin Botanico charges a small entrance fee, and so does Old Point, although the latter is an unofficial one where you are shown to the walkway by a not so young man, who will, repeatedly, make sure you understand that you *will* tip him.

We found our target bird, the San Andres Vireo, in Jardin Botanico, and the second most important bird, Jamaican Oriole, at La Laguna – and both were subsequently seen at Old Point.

Apparently very few birders visit San Andrés, and the status of many species remains poorly known. This is especially true for migrants, with many species certainly much more frequent than present literature suggests.

Species list

A total of 61 species (IOC taxonomy) were recorded during our short visit.

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*

A flock of about 20 birds at Old Point.

Monotypic.

Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*

Readily seen.

Ssp: *rothschildi*

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

1 at Old Point.

Ssp: *hoactli*

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea*

2 Old Point.

Ssp: probably *violacea*

Green Heron *Butorides virescens*

A few at La Laguna.

Ssp: *virescens*

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

About 20 at La Laguna.

Ssp: *ibis*

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*

Singles seen.

Ssp: *occidentalis*

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

A few seen.

Ssp: *egretta*

Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor*

A handful at Old Point.

Ssp: *ruficollis*

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*

Fairly common at La Laguna and Old Point.

Monotypic.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

2 seen in Cocoplum area.

Ssp: *carolinensis*

American Coot *Fulica americana*

1 La Laguna.

Ssp: nominate *americana*

Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*

1 at La Laguna.

Monotypic.

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

1 at La Laguna was a surprise find, identified by call as it flew past us having taken off from the edge of the lake.

Monotypic.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*

Several at Old Point.

Ssp: nominate *griseus*

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

3 in the mangroves at Old Point.

Ssp: *hudsonicus*, which has been regarded a candidate for species status for many years.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*

A few seen.

Monotypic.

Willet *Tringa semipalmata*

2 at Old Point.

Ssp: nominate *semipalmata*. The two subspecies are sometimes considered separate species.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

8 in Cocoplum area.

Ssp: *morinella*

Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*

Easily seen along the shores.

Ssp: *atricilla*

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus*

Readily seen.

Ssp: *maximus*

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*

Seen.

Introduced.

Common Ground-Dove *Columbina passerina*

Seen in Cocoplum area.

Ssp: possibly *neglecta*, but this is a guess only as I have failed to find information in literature available.

White-crowned Pigeon *Patagioenas leucocephala*

This handsome pigeon was pleasantly easy to see., e.g. in Cocoplum area.

Monotypic. A Caribbean species with mainland occurrence only on Yucatan Peninsula and southern Florida. Absent, though, from most of Lesser Antilles.

White-winged dove *Zenaida asiatica*

Fairly common.

Ssp: *asiatica*



White-winged Dove



Caribbean Dove

Caribbean Dove *Leptotila jamaicensis*

1 heard Jardin Botanico, and 2 seen at La Laguna.

Ssp: *neoxena*, endemic to San Andres. The species is otherwise restricted to Jamaica, Cayman Islands, southeastern Mexico, northwestern Belize and islands off Honduras.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*

1, perhaps 2, at La Laguna.

Monotypic.

Green-breasted Mango *Anthracothorax prevostii*



1 Hotel Cocoplum, 3 at La Laguna, and 1 at Hotel Sol Caribe Campo opposite Jardin Botanico.

Ssp: *hendersoni*, present only on San Andrés and neighbouring Isla de Providencia, these being the only islands in the West Indies where the species occurs.

Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*

1 at La Laguna.

Monotypic.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

1 in Cocoplum area.

Ssp: nominate *columbarius*

Brown-throated Parakeet *Eupsittula pertinax*

Fairly common.

Ssp: *aeruginosa* or *ocularis*

Caribbean Elaenia *Elaenia martinica*

1 Jardin Botanico and 1 La Laguna.

Ssp: *cinerescens*. This ssp is restricted to the three islands of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina.

Eastern Wood-Pewee *Contopus virens*

About 5 at La Laguna.

Monotypic.

Thick-billed Vireo *Vireo crassirostris*

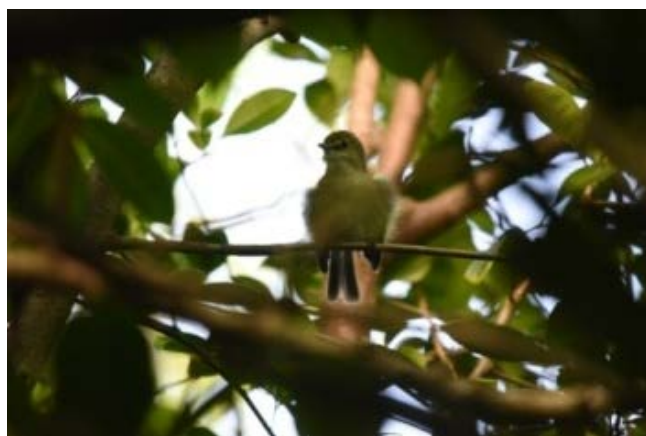
1 La Laguna.

In spite of thorough checking in literature and on the internet, I have failed to find any information on what subspecies is found on the island – maybe it is not even documented?

San Andres Vireo *Vireo caribaeus*

The prime target of the island's avifauna proved to be quite common, and was seen at all three sites visited.

Monotypic. Endemic to San Andrés.



San Andrés Vireo



Black-whiskered Vireo

Black-whiskered Vireo *Vireo altiloquus*

With perseverance, one was seen at Old Point.

Ssp: *canescens*, which is endemic to San Andrés. Widespread in the West Indies, also occurring in southern Florida and on Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao and Isla Margarita off Venezuela. Populations from Florida, Bahamas, Little Cayman, Cayman Brac and the Greater Antilles are migratory.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

A few at Cocoplum beach.

Ssp: *riparia*

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Several at Cocoplum beach.

Ssp: *erythrogaster*

Tropical Mockingbird *Mimus gilvus*

Easily seen. The endemic subspecies on San Andrés, *magnirostris*, is sometimes awarded species status as San Andres Mockingbird. This is, however, not widely accepted.

Bananaquit *Coereba flaveola*

Common.

Ssp: *oblita*, endemic to San Andrés.

Black-faced Grassquit *Tiaris bicolor*

Easily seen, e.g. in the open area at the watchtower in Jardin Botanico.

Ssp: *grandior*, present only on San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina.

Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra*

2 in Jardin Botanico.

Ssp: *rubra*

Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*

1 at La Laguna.

Monotypic.

Tennessee Warbler *Leiothlypis peregrina*

2 in Jardin Botanico.

Monotypic.

Northern Parula *Setophaga americana*

A handful at La Laguna.

Monotypic.

Mangrove Warbler *Setophaga petechia*



Several at Old Point.

Ssp: *flavida*, which is a San Andrés endemic.

Yellow Warbler *Setophaga aestiva*

Several at La Laguna.

Ssp: uncertain as birds occurring represents various subspecies from North American breeding grounds.

Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia*

1 at La Laguna.

Monotypic.

Bay-breasted Warbler *Setophaga castanea*

A few at La Laguna.

Monotypic.

Black-throated Blue Warbler *Setophaga caerulescens*

A beautiful male in Jardin Botanico.

Ssp: not certain, but probably *cairnsi* as nominate race mainly winters in Bahamas and Greater Antilles.

Yellow-throated Warbler *Setophaga dominica*

1 in Cocoplum area. Always a treat to see.

Monotypic.

Prairie Warbler *Setophaga discolor*

1 Jardin Botanico.

Ssp: nominate *discolor*

Palm Warbler *Setophaga palmarum*

3-4 at La Laguna, and 1 at Hotel Sol Caribe Campo.

Ssp: *palmarum*

American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*

Several seen.

Monotypic.

Prothonotary Warbler *Protonotaria citrea*



1 of this stunning warbler was seen in the mangroves at Old Point.

Monotypic.

Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*

Singles seen at all three sites visited.

Monotypic.

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla*

2 at La Laguna.

Ssp: probably *aurocapilla*

Northern Waterthrush *Parkesia noveboracensis*

1 in Jardin Botanico, and several at Old Point.

Ssp: unknown

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*

1 at La Laguna.

Ssp: *trichas*

Jamaican Oriole *Icterus leucopterus*



1 at La Laguna, and 5 or 6 at Old Point.

Ssp: *lawrencii*, endemic to San Andrés, while nominate is found on Jamaica – these two islands comprise the entire range of the species. A third subspecies, *bairdi*, is extirpated from Grand Cayman, where it was last recorded in 1967.

Great-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus*

Fairly common.

San Andres is the only island in the West Indies where this species is found.