

First record of wintering Swainson's Warbler *Limnothlypis swainsonii* in Chiapas, Mexico

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En el presente trabajo se presenta el primer registro de un chipe corona café *Limnothlypis swainsonii* invernando en el Estado de Chiapas, México. Durante un proyecto de monitoreo de aves en la Reserva de la Biosfera Selva El Ocote se recapturó un individuo de esta especie con un intervalo de 69 días, respecto a su captura original. Consideramos a la especie como un residente de invierno poco común en la reserva.

Swainson's Warbler *Limnothlypis swainsonii* is a generally uncommon and local breeder throughout much of the south-east USA, excluding the Florida peninsula. It winters primarily in the West Indies, and in south-east Mexico to northern Guatemala⁴. In Mexico, the winter range is primarily within the Yucatán, although the species is considered a rare winter visitor to southern Veracruz and possibly coastal Tabasco and northern Oaxaca^{9,10,15,16}. In Chiapas, Swainson's Warbler has been reported only as a transient^{1,9}, a conclusion based on just two state records: a specimen from southern Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve, in October 1987, and one collected north-east of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, on an unknown date¹².

El Ocote Biosphere Reserve is located in north-west Chiapas, bordering the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz (16°55'N 93°45'W). It covers 101,000 ha and elevation ranges from 180 to 1,560 m¹³. Major forest types are low tropical deciduous forest, tropical evergreen forest and tropical semi-evergreen forest. In the two latter habitats we conducted intensive bird surveys involving mist-netting between January 1999 and March 2002. Six mist-netting stations were established using 15 mist-nets set over an area of c.5 ha. Mist-netting stations were operated on average for three continuous days every other month between October and April.

On 30 October 2000, we captured and banded a first-year Swainson's Warbler (partially ossified skull). It was recaptured 7 January 2001, c.25 m from the location of its original capture, and thus represents the first record of a wintering Swainson's Warbler in Chiapas and significantly extends the species' winter range in Mexico. Six additional individuals were trapped during our study, between 17 December and 22 February: a first-year in December, two second-years and one older than first-year in January, and two older than second-years in February. Ages were determined using skull and/or plumage characters following Pyle¹¹. All six had no visible fat and all were captured within karstic tropical evergreen forest (see below) at 200–700 m. These records strengthen the impression that El

Ocote is a hitherto unrecognised over-wintering area for the species.

Graves⁷ described mist-netting as a poor method for studying wintering populations of Swainson's Warbler, primarily because of the species' secretive foraging behaviour. In addition, Graves found wintering territories of the species in Jamaica to be large and widely dispersed. Call/song playbacks are the recommended censusing technique, as undisturbed birds rarely fly at mist-net levels but instead remain close to the ground foraging in leaf litter^{7,8}. This species' foraging habits, low densities, unobtrusive nature and the scant ornithological research in this region are the most likely reasons for its recent discovery in El Ocote.

The karstic tropical evergreen forests typical of the western half of El Ocote are part of a large karstic relief occupying 4,800–4,900 km² between north-east Oaxaca and south-east Veracruz to north-west Chiapas⁵. Large portions of this region are covered in mature humid forest, although many areas (e.g. southern Veracruz) have been deforested and converted to agriculture or grazing⁶.

Swainson's Warbler is ranked by Partners in Flight as a species of high conservation concern² and the Mexican government lists it as meriting special protection status³. Habitat degradation on both the breeding and wintering grounds are the most significant causes of population declines¹⁴. Our preliminary conclusion is that Swainson's Warbler is an uncommon winter resident in El Ocote. However, we recommend that the species be formally and more rigorously censused within the reserve and surrounding areas following techniques described in Graves⁷ both to estimate wintering density and to map the extent of its range there.

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