

# Avian vagrancy in the Neotropical region

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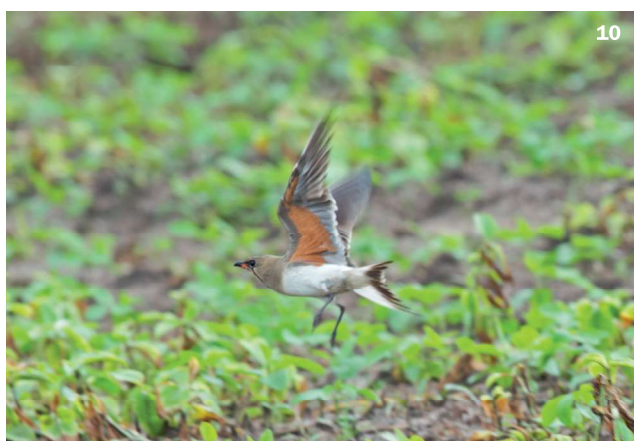
A remarkable new book under Bloomsbury's Helm imprint (reviewed on pp74–75) provides the first global assessment of vagrancy in birds. This article summarizes some of its Neotropical revelations.

**A**n obsession with the discovery of vagrant birds – individuals of species recorded outside of their normal distribution – has a long history at temperate latitudes in the Global North, especially at bird observatories on small islands. However, our understanding of the phenomenon in the tropics and subtropics has increased in line with the popularity of birding as a hobby in the Global South. The wealth of new records of vagrants generated by a burgeoning community of local birders and ornithologists has shown that the phenomenon of vagrancy is globally ubiquitous, and vagrant birds are now known from most branches of the avian tree of life and most locations on earth. For a full review see my and James Gilroy's recent book on the subject – Lees & Gilroy (2021).

The Neotropics are no exception and there are now records of vagrant birds found in the region emanating from most of the world's biogeographic provinces, often involving incredible oceanic crossings. As these typically celebrated records of inter-continental vagrants have accrued – often on offshore islands or at coastal 'vagrant traps' – there has also been a step change in our understanding of vagrancy of birds *within* the region too. In this article I will explore the geographic and taxonomic breadth of vagrancy to and within the Neotropics from the 'four corners of the globe'.

**1** Immature Corncrake *Crex crex*, Açude do Xaréu, Fernando de Noronha, Brazil, November 2017 (Kleber de Burgos: [kburgos.com.br](mailto:kburgos.com.br)). There are several records of vagrant Palearctic and Afrotropical rallids from the eastern Neotropics: Corncrake has been recorded in the West Indies as well as Fernando de Noronha.





Vagrancy from Australasia across the vastness of the Pacific would seem extremely unlikely for a landbird or even a waterbird, yet there is an old specimen record of Australasian Shoveler *Spatula rhynchotis* from Entre Rios, Argentina, taken prior to 1897, which had been mislabelled as Red Shoveler *Spatula platalea*. If there is no evidence of confusion or fraud (or possible hybrid origin), then a transpacific dispersal event by an austral duck would represent one of the most unlikely instances of vagrancy known to date (Croزاریol & Nacinovic 2017).

Unsurprisingly, several species of migratory shorebird have reached the Neotropics as vagrants. **9** South America's first Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata orientalis* (Punta Rasa, Buenos Aires, Argentina, January 2010; Mark Pearman). **10** South America's first Collared Pratincole *Gareola pratincola* (Caucaia, Ceará, Brazil, April 2015; Ciro Albano: [nebrasilbirding.com](http://nebrasilbirding.com)). **11** Venezuela's first (and South America's second) Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus* (El Pico, Falcón, Venezuela, February 2018; Christopher J. Sharpe). **12** Ruff *Calidris pugnax*, Campos de Quatipuru, Pará, Brazil, October 2013 (Alexander C. Lees), a species recorded in seven South American countries or territories ([museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCCountryLists.htm](http://museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCCountryLists.htm)).



## Vagrancy within the Neotropics

These superlative records are, however, the exception rather than the rule. Most instances of vagrancy in the Neotropical region involve more modest movements within the biogeographical region. Even the most sedentary of species occasionally end up dispersing 'too far', such as the Hoatzin *Opisthocomus hoazin* recorded in Parque Nacional Yacambú, Venezuela, in July 2013: although only a modest 46 km out of range, this bird was an impressive 1,000 m outside of the species' usual altitudinal habitat envelope (Buitrón-Jurado 2014)! Also extremely unexpected was a record of a Piura Chat-Tyrant *Ochthoeca piurae* from the Santa Eulalia Valley in Lima, Peru, c.300 km south of its range. This species is thought to be highly sedentary and has a narrow ecological niche; it must have moved through lots of unsuitable habitat to reach this location – perhaps a bird fledged at the species' range edge then embarked on search, in vain, for suitable habitat which took it further and further out of range (Witt *et al.* 2015).

Such records of long movements in sedentary species are rare, although some groups of birds