



A new species of Woodcock (Aves: Scolopacidae: *Scolopax*) from Hispaniola, West Indies

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Abstract

Several hundred late Holocene fossils from Trouing Jean Paul, a cave in Massif de la Selle, Haiti, represent an extinct species of woodcock (*Scolopax brachycarpa*, new species). *Scolopax brachycarpa* is known from most major skeletal elements; although volant, its carpometacarpus was very short relative to its humerus. The only other species of *Scolopax* from the West Indies is the extinct and presumably closely related *S. anthonyi* of Puerto Rico, which also had a relatively short carpometacarpus compared to continental congeners. Both *Scolopax brachycarpa* and *S. anthonyi* share more osteological characters with the Eurasian *S. rusticola* than with the North American *S. minor*.

Key words: extinct species, fossils, Haiti, Holocene

Introduction

The Eurasian Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) and American Woodcock (*S. minor*) are among the most familiar and distinctive species of birds within their ranges, whether to scientists or hunters (Sheldon 1967; de la Valdène 1990). Though closely related to the snipe (*Gallinago* s.l.; Gibson & Baker 2012), the woodcocks are distinctive among the Scolopacidae in their stout bodies, short wings, colorfully patterned plumage, courtship behavior, and osteology (Strauch 1978, Keppie & Whiting 1994; Van Gils & Wiersma 1996).

Seven species of *Scolopax* exist today, as follows: *S. rusticola*—Eurasia; *S. mira*—Ryukyu Islands, Japan; *S. saturata*—Sumatra and Java; *S. rosenbergii*—New Guinea; *S. bukidnonensis*—Philippines; *S. celebensis*—Sulawesi; and *S. rochussenii*—Northern Moluccas; and *S. minor*—North America (van Gils & Wiersma 1996:488–490; Dickinson & Remsen 2013:213–214). Thus, five of the seven extant species of woodcocks are endemic to one or more tropical or subtropical islands in the Asian or Papuan faunal regions. Very little is known about the life history of these Old World insular species.

No species of woodcocks live in the West Indies today. The only species of *Scolopax* previously known from any Caribbean island was the extinct *S. anthonyi* from Puerto Rico. First described as a snipe (*Capella* = *Gallinago*) by Wetmore (1920), the 10 fossils of *S. anthonyi* were collected in two Puerto Rican caves by H. E. Anthony in 1916. Olson (1976) re-examined these specimens, which represent six different skeletal elements, finding them referable to *Scolopax* rather than *Gallinago*, a conclusion with which we concur. The fossils of *S. anthonyi* are undated beyond being late Quaternary.

The only other described extinct species of woodcock is *Scolopax hutchensi* from the late Pliocene/early Pleistocene of Florida (Blancan and early Irvingtonian Land Mammal Ages; Emslie 1998). Compared to the living *S. minor* of North America, *S. hutchensi* had “larger, more robust wing bones relative to its leg elements” (Emslie 1998:59), a trend opposite that of the insular species that is the object of this paper.

Here we describe a second resident species of West Indian woodcock, based on fossils from Trouing Jean Paul, a late Holocene paleontological site on the island of Hispaniola. Steadman and Takano (2013) reported 4800+ non-