Noteworthy records of aquatic birds in the state of Querétaro, Mexico.

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Abstract
A systematic sampling of aquatic birds was conducted over a period of two years in the state of Querétaro, Mexico. Twenty nine species have been added to the official list of species for the state, nine of which have few records in the interior of the country: Dendrocygna autumnalis, D. bicolor, Lophodytes cucullatus, Gavia immer, Pluvialis squatarola, Charadrius semipalmatus, Numenius phaeopus, Limosa haemastica, and Thalasseus maximus.

Key words: avifauna, distribution, new records, wetlands.

Introduction
There have been few studies conducted of the aquatic birds of continental wetland habitats in Mexico (Barragán et al. 2002, Mellink and de la Riva 2005, SEMARNAT 2006). This is the case for Querétaro, where although the total list of birds for the state has increased considerably in the last 19 years, aquatic birds have received little attention and records are limited to occasional surveys in a few local reservoirs. Presently, 41 species of aquatic birds have been reported for the state (Navarro et al. 1991, 1993, Rojas-Soto et al. 2001, González 2001, González-García et al. 2004), belonging to the orders Anseriformes, Podicipediformes, Ciconiiformes, Suliformes, Pelecaniformes, Accipitriformes (Pandionidae), Gruiformes, Charadriiformes, Coraciiformes (Alcedinidae) and Passeriformes (Cistothorus palustris and Geothlypis trichas). However, unpublished records and geographic extrapolations of distribution maps (e.g., Howell and Webb 1995) suggest that there are more species present in Querétaro. This paper is the result of a systematic study of the aquatic birds of 12 reservoirs in a semiarid region of the central state of Querétaro, Mexico, and includes new records and distribution confirmations.
Scirpus sp. During the rainy season, various terrestrial plant species were found along the banks, including Iva ambrosifolia, Chenopodium ambrosioides, Ambrosia psilostachya, and Amaranthus hybridus.

Figure 1. Location of Querétaro, study area and sampled reservoirs. Urbanized areas are shown in purple. Large cities are: (A) Querétaro, (B) San Juan del Río, and (C) Tequisquiapan.

Data collection
Sampling was carried out once a month at nine reservoirs during 2 years (October 2004 to September 2005 and August 2006 to June 2007). During the second year, three additional reservoirs were sampled (see Appendix 1). For sampling, we used a transect along the longest axis of each reservoir. Sampling time varied between 45 and 90 minutes, depending on the size of the reservoir. Observations were made using 10 x 50 mm binoculars and a Canon EOS1 camera with a SIGMA 270-500 mm lens, which allowed the creation of a species image database.

The taxonomic sequence and nomenclature of the species used in this study follow the list of the American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU 2010). References to the National Collection of Birds (CNAV) and the Ornithological Collection of the Museum of Zoology, Faculty of Sciences (MZFC), were obtained by the Global Biodiversity Information Facility portal (GBIF 2010). These references were used to cite the nearest record of some species.

Results
In this study, we observed 69 bird species (Appendix 2), of which 29 species represents new records for the state of Querétaro (Figure 2). In addition, two previously recorded species were confirmed. The new records (N) and confirmations (C) for the state are as follows (the number of observed individuals is in parentheses and abbreviations for specific locations are referred in Figure 1):

Dendrocygna autumnalis (Black-bellied Whistling-Duck) (N). This species was recorded irregularly during the second year of sampling, on 30 August 2006 (L)(2), 20 December 2006 (L)(2) and 11 January 2007 (Ce)(7). This is a rare visitor in the interior of Mexico, where there are few prior records (Howell and Webb 1995, Forcey 2002, Colón 2004, Forcey and Aragón 2009). The occasional record of the species in the interior of Mexico suggests a pattern of natural wandering, as has been suggested previously for the species in the United States (Halliwell 2000).

Dendrocygna bicolor (Fulvous Whistling-Duck) (N). This species was observed on 17 November 2006 (Ll)(8) and 14 May 2007 (Ce)(9). This species often wanders after breeding in the United States (Hohman and Lee 2001). Likewise, it is considered a sporadic visitor in the interior of Mexico (Howell and Webb 1995), where there are few records (Wilson and Ceballos-Lascurain 1993, Forcey 2002, Colón 2004, Urbina-Torres et al. 2009). As for the previous species, the occasional records of this species suggest a pattern of natural wandering in this region.

Chen caerulescens (Snow Goose) (N). This species was observed from late October to early June (L)(1). The area of non-reproductive distribution of this species is found near the state of Querétaro and in adjacent areas of Guanajuato, although occasionally the species has been observed in Belize and Honduras (Howell and Webb 1995).

Anas strepera (Gadwall) (N). This species was observed on the outskirts of Amealco on 2 February 2005 (5) and 2 March 2005 (17). It was absent in the reservoirs sampled during the first year of surveys, whereas 93 individuals appeared during the second year, from late October to mid-April (Ca, Ce, Ch, Ll, Ll, M, and T). The highest numbers were observed on 9 January (20)(M) and 11 January 2007 (20)(L). This species is found from
October to May in most parts of the country (Howell and Webb 1995).

*Anas cyanoptera* (Cinnamon Teal) (N). This species was recorded from late October to early April (S, J, B, Ca, Ll, Ce, T, Cr, L, and Cn), mainly during the second year, with a maximum of records in the winter, on 13 February 2007 (141)(B). Although Howell and Webb (1995) suggest that the species is a resident in the southern portion of the state, we did not observe this species during the summer months.

*Aythya valisineria* (Canvasback) (N). This species appeared from September to December (M, B, Ca, T, L, and Cn). Generally, there were only one to three individuals sighted, except in Santa Catarina, where approximately 60 individuals were observed in an area of dense vegetation on 15 November 2006. Howell and Webb (1995) considered this species to be a non-reproductive visitor in central and northern Mexico, from November to April. However, the reductions of wetlands during the dry season have seemingly limited its presence, as this is a species of deep bays, lakes, and ponds (Mowbray 2002).

*Aythya collaris* (Ring-necked Duck) (N). This species was observed from mid-October to mid-March (M, Ca, Ll, Ce, L, and Cn), with a maximum number (1200) in El Centenario on 12 February 2007. This species occurs from October to April in central and northern Mexico (Howell and Webb 1995).

*Lophodytes cucullatus* (Hooded Merganser) (N). A juvenile appeared on 14 November 2006 (Cr). Howell and Webb (1995) mapped occasional sightings of this species in Mexico during the non-reproductive season, including a record for Distrito Federal, where the species has been collected previously (CNAV 0302, 0303), as well as in the State of Mexico (CNAV 0304).

*Oxyura jamaicensis* (Ruddy Duck) (N). This species was recorded year-round (M, S, J, B, Ca, Ll, Ce, T, Cr, and L), which confirms its status as resident in the area of study indicated by Howell and Webb (1995). The highest numbers were observed in Santa Catarina on 12 January 2007 (1380) and in El Centenario on 27 February 2005 (1190) and 18 November 2006 (1350), suggesting the arrival of wintering birds from the north.

*Gavia immer* (Common Loon) (N). Two juveniles (see Sibley 2003) were observed on 6 January, 22 January, and 7 February 2007 (Cn). Apparently these same individuals died in March when becoming entangled in nets used by local fishermen. We were unable to recover the specimens. This species has previously been sighted in central Mexico (Ramírez-Bastida et al. 1994, Howell and Webb 1995, Contreras-Balderas and Ruiz-Campos 2007, Romero-Aguila et al. 2007). Our records give support to the suggestion by Romero-Aguila et al. (2007) that this species may be more frequent on the Mexican Plateau than previously supposed.

*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos* (American White Pelican) (N). This species was recorded from mid-September to early June (J, Ca, Ll, Ce, and Cn), with the highest numbers observed in February 2005 in El Centenario (852). During the second sampling period there were no sightings of this species in El Centenario, probably because high fish mortality due to a cyanobacteria bloom in the reservoir during the summer of 2005. Howell and Webb (1995) consider this species as a nomadic non-reproductive visitor from September to April on the coast and most of the interior of Mexico. The closest records are from Yuriria Lagoon (Babb 2000) and San Miguel de Allende reservoir in Guanajuato (GBIF 2010).

*Pelecanus occidentalis* (Brown Pelican) (C). We observed an immature at Constitución de 1917 on 6 and 11 January 2007 and 2 immatures at Santa Catarina on 23 April 2007. This species appears occasionally in the interior of the country (Wilson and Ceballo-Lascuráin 1993, Howell and Webb 1995, Urbina-Torres et al. 2009) and already has been recorded in the borders of the state by Rojas-Soto et al. (2001) and González-García et al. (2004).

*Ixobrychus exilis* (Least Bittern) (N). One individual was observed in the secondary vegetation along the wall in the reservoir Benito Juárez on 13 November 2004. This species is considered a resident near the western part of the state (Howell and Webb 1995).

*Egretta tricolor* (Tricolored Heron) (N). We observed an immature at Constitución de 1917 on 13 September 2006 and 7 February 2007. In central Mexico, this species is a non-reproductive visitor in several localities (Howell and Webb 1995), and was observed in November at the De Silva reservoir, Guanajuato (GBIF 2010).

*Plegadis chihi* (White-faced Ibis) (N) This species was observed throughout the year (M, S, Ca, Ce, Cr, Ll, and Cn), principally in Santa Catarina, La Llave, and El Centenario, with irregular numbers of up to 460 individuals at Santa Catarina on 8 February 2007. This species is a resident of other central and western highlands of Mexico (Howell and Webb 1995). The closest record for the White-faced Ibis is near Yuriria Lagoon, Guanajuato (MZFC 3273).

*Porzana carolina* (Sora) (N). This species was present from early September to mid-November (M, J, Ca, and Cr), with the greatest number (4) on 21 September 2006 (M). This species was always associated with aquatic vegetation, which together with its secretive habits suggest that it may not have been detected at several reservoirs and during different months. This species has commonly been observed from August to
May in most parts of the country (Howell and Webb 1995) and was reported by González-García et al. (2004) for El Epazote, an area of the state of Hidalgo near Querétaro.

*Pluvialis squatarola* (Black-bellied Plover) (N). Adults in non-breeding plumage were observed on 5 April (1) and 6 April (3) 2007 at La Llave. Howell and Webb (1995) note that this species appears occasionally in the interior of Mexico as a non-reproductive visitor, and they mapped sightings in Guanajuato and San Luis Potosi, close (or in?) Querétaro.

*Pluvialis dominica* (American Golden-Plover) (N). An immature was observed at Constitución de 1917 on 7 February 2007 and two non-breeding adults were observed at La Llave on 5 and 19 April 2007. The birds were found in low areas of the reservoir surrounded by vegetation, which is its normal habitat during migration and the non-reproductive season (Johnson and Connors 1996). In Mexico, it is a migratory species mainly observed during the spring, from mid-February through May (Howell and Webb 1995). The closest record is for northeastern Hidalgo (Valencia-Hervert et al. 2008).

*Charadrius semipalmatus* (Semipalmated Plover) (N). This species was observed on 11 January 2007 (Cn)(1), 18 April 2007 (Cn)(4), 10 April 2007 (LI)(5) and 11 May 2007 (Cn)(1). This species occasionally spends the non-reproductive season in the interior of the continent (Nol and Blanken, 1999). In Mexico, this species has been recorded occasionally on the Mexican Plateau from September to May, and has been recorded in the state of Guanajuato, near Querétaro (Howell and Webb 1995).

*Jacana spinosa* (Northern Jacana) (N). One adult was observed throughout the year, except at the beginning of the summer in La Llave. One or two immature specimens appeared in other reservoirs, on 23 December 2004 (2)(Ce), 27 February 2005 (2)(Ce) and 9 February 2007 (1)(M). This species was observed associated with water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*), except in Mompaní, where it walked and fed along areas without vegetation. Howell and Webb (1995) mapped it as resident in areas bordering the state, and it has been observed at San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato (GBIF 2010).

*Tringa flavipes* (Lesser Yellowlegs) (N). This species was reported from mid-August until mid-May (M, S, J, Ca, Ll, Ce, T and L), mainly at La Llave on 19 August 2006 (19). This latter reservoir had the preferred habitat of the species, including shallow and muddy beaches with areas of vegetation (Tibbitts and Moskoff 1999). It is a non-reproductive visitor in Mexico, from July to May (Howell and Webb 1995) and has been observed in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato (GBIF 2010).

*Bartramia longicauda* (Upland Sandpiper) (N). One or two individuals were observed on banks with low vegetation on 30 August 2006 (2)(Ce), 1 September 2006 (2)(Ca) and 11 de September 2007 (1)(Ce). In central Mexico, it is a migratory species from late July to mid-October and from March to mid-May (Howell and Webb 1995). This species has been reported in Zacatecas and Guanajuato (Friedmann et al. 1950).

*Numeria phaeopus* (Whimbrel) (N). A solitary individual was recorded at Santa Catarina on 28 April 2005. In the interior of Mexico, there are only isolated records from Zacatecas, Tamaulipas (Howell and Webb 1995) and Coahuila (CNAV 13275).

*Limosa haemastica* (Hudsonian Godwit) (N). Adults with partial breeding plumage were observed at La Llave on 11 May (2 females, 1 male) and 17 May (3 females, 2 males) 2007. This species migrates through the Great Plains of the United States in spring (Elphick and Klima 2002), with migration peak in May. In the interior region of Mexico, the species has been sighted in Mexico City (Howell and Webb 1995) and Hidalgo (Ortiz-Pulido et al. in press).

*Calidris himantopus* (Stilt Sandpiper) (N). Ten individuals in partial breeding plumage were observed at Santa Catarina on 23 April 2007. This is a non-reproductive resident species in the Transvolcanic Belt, where it is uncommon from October to March (Howard and Webb 1995). Based on the date of observation, this species is apparently a transient migrant for the study area.

*Leucophaeus atricilla* (Laughing Gull) (N). One to three individuals appeared towards early September to mid-May (Ca, Ce, and Cn), mainly at the Constitución de 1917 reservoir. In the southern Mexican Plateau, this is a rare non-reproductive visitor (Howell and Webb 1995). Friedmann et al. (1950) recorded this species in San Luis Potosí.

*Leucophaeus pipixcan* (Franklin’s Gull) (N). One or three individuals were observed on 15 and 16 November 2006 (1)(Cn) and 24 April 2007 (1)(Cn). This species is a transient migrant throughout most of Mexico, being absent only from northwestern and Baja California (Howard and Webb 1995), and has been recorded by González-García et al. (2004) from the Tula River in Hidalgo, close to Querétaro.

*Larus delawarensis* (Ring-billed Gull) (N). This species appeared from mid-November to mid-May (J, Ca, Ce, and Cn), with a maximum of 20 individuals on 18 April 2007 (Cn). This species remains in Mexico from October to May (Howard and Webb 1995). Friedmann et al. (1950) reported this species for adjacent states: San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato and Michoacán.

*Sterna forsteri* (Forster’s Tern) (N). One to three individuals were observed irregularly from mid-
September to early June (Ca and Cn). This species is a non-reproductive visitor in central Mexico from August to May (Howell and Webb 1995).

*Thalasseus maximus* (Royal Tern) (N). On 2 March 2005, this tern was observed at the Constitución de 1917 reservoir. This species has been recorded occasionally in the interior of the United States (Buckley and Buckley 2002). In the interior of Mexico, it has only been recorded in Mexico City (Howell and Webb 1995).

*Cistrothorus palustris* (Marsh Wren) (C). This species was recorded from late October to late April (J, Ca, Li, Ce, L, and Cn). The individuals observed probably belonged to the group *paludicola*, which frequently remains from September to mid-May in the area (Howell and Webb 1995). González (2001) reported this species for northeastern Querétaro.

**Discussion**

This work increases by 71% the number of species of aquatic birds reported for Querétaro. With the new additions reported here, the state has a total of 376 recorded bird species (Navarro et al. 1991, 1993, Eitniear et al. 2000, Rojas-Soto et al. 2001, Gómez de Silva and Medellín 2002, González-García et al. 2004, Pineda-López et al. 2010). Of the 29 new records reported in this paper, 20 had been suggested as potentially present in the state or in nearby areas by Howell and Webb (1995). The remaining nine species are considered occasional or rare records for the Mexican Plateau and included: *Dendrocycnya autumnalis*, *D. bicolor*, *Lophodytes cucullatus*, *Gavia immer*, *Pluvialis squatarola*, *Charadrius semipalmatus*, *Numenius phaeopus*, *Limosa haemastica* and *Thalasseus maximus*. These species may be more frequent than previously supposed on the Mexican Plateau, as suggested by Romero-Aguila et al. (2007) in comments concerning *Gavia immer*.

Most (97%) of the new records were from large reservoirs (Cn, Ce, Ca, and Li), which presented a greater number of species. However, half of the new records were also recorded from small reservoirs (10 – 40 ha), including three of the occasional records for the Mexican Plateau. There is an extensive system of small, basically uncharted wetlands in the Transvolcanic Belt and the Mexican Plateau. There is an extensive system of small, basically uncharted wetlands in the Transvolcanic Belt and the Mexican Plateau, which given the high number of species recorded from these systems, suggests that they are critical areas for the conservation of aquatic birds as priority taxonomic group and as flag species for conservation of other biotic groups.

Future management strategies should also consider the reduction of pollution that can directly affect aquatic bird species, and promote a significant increase in vegetation, which is highly favorable to the diversity of aquatic birds (Weller 1999). More extensive studies are needed of the aquatic systems in the semiarid areas of Mexico, where many natural lakes have disappeared (Navarro de León et al. 2005), such as the lake formerly found in the study area in what is now the city of Tequisquiapan (Balbontín 1867). For this reason, it is necessary to implement management strategies for these ecosystems that include the conservation of aquatic birds as a priority taxonomic group and as flag species for conservation of other biotic groups.

**Acknowledgments**

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### Appendix 1. Location and characterization of sampled reservoirs for aquatic birds in Querétaro.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and symbol of the reservoir</th>
<th>Latitude N</th>
<th>Longitude W</th>
<th>Altitude (m)</th>
<th>Area (ha)</th>
<th>Vegetation cover (ha)</th>
<th>Vegetation type***</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El Zapote (Z)</td>
<td>20°39′45″</td>
<td>100°32′40″</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mompaní (M)</td>
<td>20°41′55″</td>
<td>100°30′30″</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>El Salitre (S)</td>
<td>20°40′12″</td>
<td>100°24′46″</td>
<td>1876</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juriquilla (J)</td>
<td>20°41′45″</td>
<td>100°27′14″</td>
<td>1879</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Santa Catarina (Ca)</td>
<td>20°47′11″</td>
<td>100°27′12″</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>174.3</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>S, C, F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benito Juárez (B)</td>
<td>20°37′08″</td>
<td>100°23′53″</td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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<td>El Centenario (Ce)</td>
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<td>99°53′41″</td>
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<td>192.1</td>
<td>46.7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>La Llave (Ll)</td>
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<td>380.4</td>
<td>87.3</td>
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<td>Constitución de 1917* (Cn)</td>
<td>20°24′25″</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>21.8</td>
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<td>San Luis* (L)</td>
<td>20°33′40″</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
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<td>El Carmen* (Cr)</td>
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<td>Amealco**</td>
<td>20°11′31″</td>
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<td>2550</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Reservoirs sampled only in the second year.
** Reservoir sampled occasionally.
***A: aquatic permanent (see text), S: semiaquatic (see text), C: crops flooded (mainly corn Zea mays), F: flooded land with terrestrial plant species.
### Appendix 2. Aquatic birds observed in 12 reservoirs in southern Querétaro, Mexico. Species in bold type are new records for the state or confirmations of previously recorded species.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Species</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Anatidae** | *Dendrocygna autumnalis*  
**Dendrocygna bicolor**  
*Chen caerulescens*  
*Aix sponsa*  
*Anas strepera*  
*Anas americana*  
*Anas platyrhynchos diazi*  
*Anas discors*  
*Anas cyanoptera*  
*Anas clypeata*  
*Anas acuta*  
*Anas crecca*  
*Aythya valisineria*  
*Aythya americana*  
*Aythya collaris*  
*Aythya affinis*  
*Lophodytes cucullatus*  
*Oxyura jamaicensis* |
| **Gaviidae** | *Gavia immer* |
| **Podicipedidae** | *Tachybaptus dominicus*  
*Podilymbus podiceps*  
*Podiceps nigricollis* |
| **Phalacrocoracidae** | *Phalacrocorax brasilianus* |
| **Pelecanidae** | *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*  
*Pelecanus occidentalis* |
| **Ardeidae** | *Ixobrychus exilis*  
*Ardea herodias*  
*Ardea alba*  
*Egretta thula*  
*Egretta caerulea*  
*Egretta tricolor*  
*Bubulcus ibis*  
*Butorides virescens*  
*Nycticorax nycticorax* |
| **Threskiornithidae** | *Plegadis chihi* |
| **Pandionidae** | *Pandion haliaetus* |
| **Rallidae** | *Porzana carolina*  
*Gallinula chloropus*  
*Fulica americana* |
| **Charadriidae** | *Pluvialis squatarola*  
*Pluvialis dominica*  
*Charadrius semipalmatus*  
*Charadrius vociferus* |
| **Recurvirostridae** | *Himantopus mexicanus*  
*Recurvirostra americana* |
| **Jacanidae** | *Jacana spinosa* |
| **Scolopacidae** | *Actitis macularius*  
*Tringa solitaria*  
*Tringa melanoleuca*  
*Tringa flavipes*  
*Bartramia longicauda*  
*Numenius phaeopus* |
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cistothorus palustris</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parulidae</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Geothlypis trichas</td>
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</tbody>
</table>