9-2017

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The Wilson Journal of Ornithology 129(3):605–610, 2017

Geolocator Data Reveal the Migration Route and Wintering Location of a Caribbean Martin (*Progne dominicensis*)

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ABSTRACT.—Caribbean Martins (*Progne dominicensis*) are common breeders on most Caribbean islands, where they regularly roost and nest in urban areas from February through August. However, from September through January, the basic ecology of this species—its migration and wintering locations—are largely unknown. In 2012, we deployed seven geolocators, and in 2014, we recovered one geolocator from a female Caribbean Martin on the Commonwealth of Dominica, a small eastern Caribbean island. Her wintering location was the western portion of the State of Bahia, Brazil, ~3550 km southeast of Dominica. Although the location of the non-breeding grounds changed minimally, the fall departure date, migration route, and length of migration to western Bahia, Brazil, was different between years. In October 2012, the female followed a coastal migration route along the Atlantic coast of South America, then flew south to the non-breeding grounds. However in Oct 2013, she flew south from Dominica through Guyana, spent a few days in the Amazon rain forest, and then migrated southeast to the non-breeding grounds. These results provide insight into the repeatability of migration routes and wintering locations by this species, and serves as a first step in better understanding the Caribbean Martin's full life-cycle. *Received 25 August 2016. Accepted 26 January 2017.*

Key words: Commonwealth of Dominica, *Progne dominicensis*, State of Bahia Brazil.

Recent technological advances such as satellite transmitters and geolocators are rapidly expanding our understanding of the life-histories of migratory birds (McKinnon et al. 2013). For example, these tracking devices have revealed long non-stop flights (DeLuca et al. 2015), foraging patterns that allow managers to better plan fisheries' activities (Phillips et al. 2006), and migratory connectivity for landbird populations (Ryder et al. 2011). Even with the availability of these technologies, the basic ecology of many common and rare species remains unknown.

Although the breeding range of Caribbean Martins (*Progne dominicensis*) is well documented (BirdLife International 2012), their migration routes and wintering areas are largely unknown (Turner 2004). Some reports of Caribbean Martins during the non-breeding season have been published from the southern Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Barbados, and from Suriname and French Guiana in South America (Voous 1983, Murphy and Hayes 2001, Wells and Wells 2005, Ottema et al. 2009, Renaudier and de Guyane 2010). The greatest number of observations come from Suriname ($n = 8$), but only half of the records are from the period from November to January (Ribot 2017). However, these generally represent observations of individual birds and provide no information about where the birds came from, the routes taken to get there, or other locations that might be used during migration.

We used a geolocator to identify the migration routes and non-breeding areas of a Caribbean Martin. In 2012, we deployed seven geolocators on the Commonwealth of Dominica. In 2014, we retrieved one geolocator from a female and documented her movements over a 2-year period.

METHODS

We captured Caribbean Martins on the Commonwealth of Dominica, an eastern Caribbean island country with a land surface of 750 km^2 and a population of about 70,000. Here, Caribbean Martins roost and nest in both natural cliff faces and crevices in roof-tops. We focused on a colony in the village of St. Joseph (15° 24′ 16; –61° 25′ 34), where birds used the eaves of a small bakery located 50 m from the Caribbean Sea and 20 m from the St. Joseph River.

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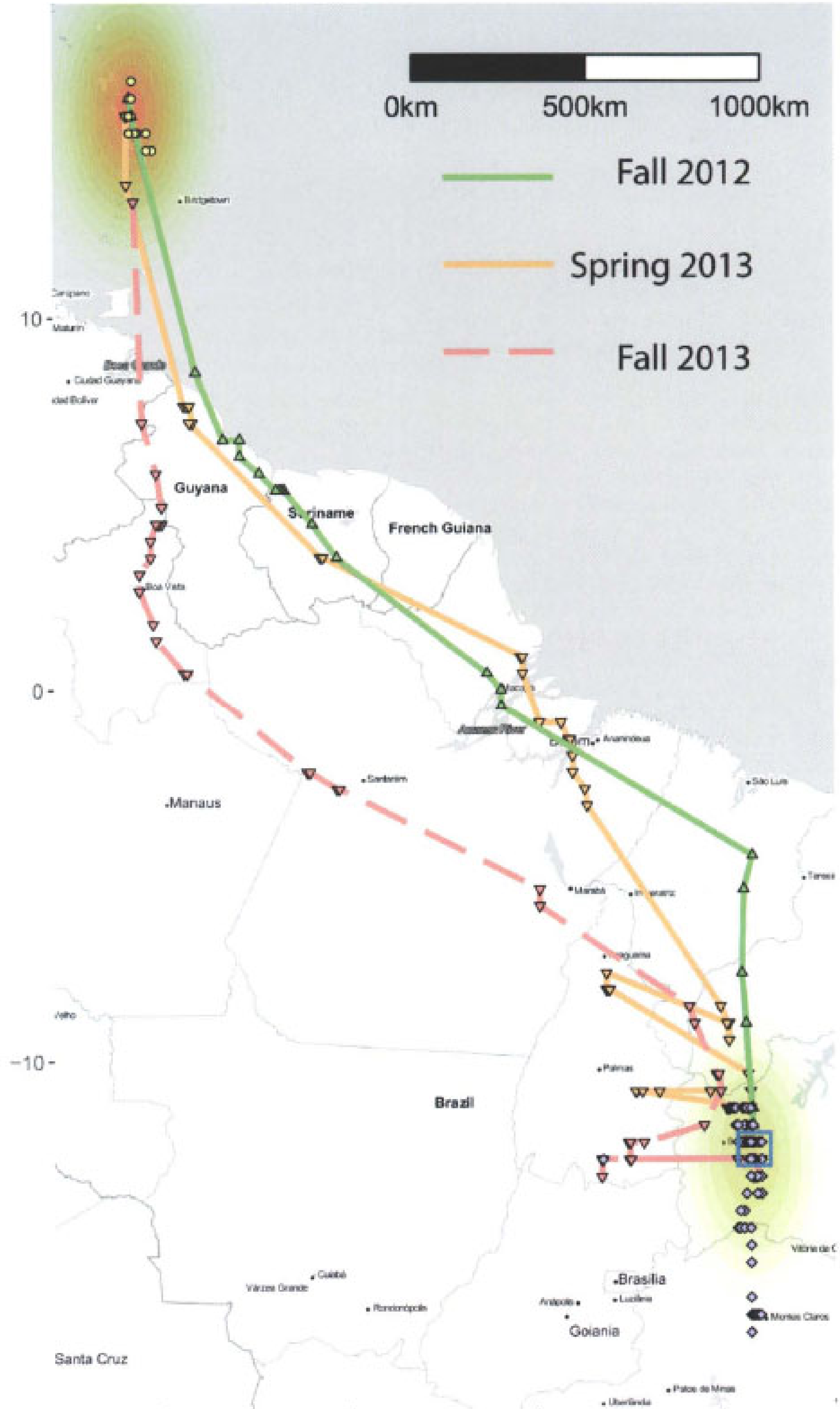

FIG. 1. Migration route of a female Caribbean Martin over 2 years estimated from solar geolocator data; she bred on the Commonwealth of Dominica, a 750-km^2 island in the eastern Caribbean, and she wintered in the western portion of Bahia, Brazil. Daily median positions are shown with the lines (green = fall 2012; orange = spring 2013; pink = fall 2013) and overall probability of occurrence regions with color (darker sections indicate higher probability). Fall migration in 2012 started on 1 Oct with arrival in the wintering area on about 31 October. Spring 2013 migration began about 19 February, and fall 2013 migration started about 11 September, with the female arriving in the wintering area on 20 October. Blue square shows extent of the main wintering area zoomed at Figure 3. Circles represent stationary periods in the breeding period, diamonds during the non-breeding period, and triangles represent movement periods.

We deployed 0.65-g solar geolocators (Intigeo-P65C2-7, Migrate Technology Ltd., Cambridge, United Kingdom) at nesting colonies using a leg-loop backpack harness made of 0.10-in (~0.25-cm) Teflon tape (Bally Ribbon Mills). To increase the probability of recovering geolocators, we aimed to deploy units on breeding birds. Prior to fieldwork, we believed that the breeding season would begin in mid- to late-March (B. Jno Baptiste, pers. comm.). From 6–10 Apr 2012, we caught birds with hand nets as they emerged from their night roost, and we deployed seven geolocators on birds assumed to be breeding. All birds were banded with a numbered band on one leg and a unique combination of two color bands on the other leg. We identified sex by plumage. We returned to Dominica from 5–9 May 2013 and 3–8 May 2014 to collect geolocators from birds.

Data were downloaded and formatted in IntiProc v1.03 (Migrate Technology) and are available at https://github.com/eldarrak/FLightR/tree/0.3.6/examples/Caribean_Martin. All subsequent data processing and estimation were done in R (R Core Team 2015). First, we selected twilight periods without strong patterns in shading in the BAStag package (Wotherspoon et al. 2013) and then used the template-fit method (Ekstrom 2007) in the FLightR package (Rakhimberdiev et al. 2015) to estimate positions from the light-level recordings. The BAStag output with preselected twilights and all analysis details are available at the github page referenced above. We calibrated the data during the second breeding period (15 Jun–30 Aug 2013) when the bird was likely on its breeding grounds in Dominica. We then used the particle filter in FLightR to map migration routes and identify the posterior distribution for the non-breeding locations (Rakhimberdiev et al. 2015). FLightR uses a hidden Markov chain model to obtain the most probable tracks of migrating animals from geolocator data. Because Caribbean Martins breed on islands, we used spatio-behavioral flight constraints allowing the bird to fly over (oceanic) water but not to remain stationary there. FLightR is able to estimate positions during migration and during equinoxes (Rakhimberdiev et al. 2016), but our tagged bird combined these two complications and migrated during equinox periods making estimated latitudinal positions for the migration period (Fig. 1) especially imprecise (see latitudinal credible intervals at Fig. 2). FLightR estimated arrival and departure days within the function "stationary.migration.summary." The function automatically finds sedentary periods and estimates when animals arrived and left the sedentary periods.

RESULTS

Of seven birds color-banded in 2012, we resighted four birds in 2013 and 2014, but we were unable to recapture them. Three of the four birds still had their geolocators attached. On 5 May 2014, we recaptured one of the four birds and recovered its geolocator; this bird was a female, initially banded on 4 April 2012. This female returned to the same non-breeding area in both years, an area located ~3,550 km southeast of the Dominican breeding grounds (Fig. 1). The wintering location was in the western portion of the State of Bahia (−44.3°, −12.3°) in Brazil, located ~700 km west of the city of Salvador; the bird spent 35% of the wintering period in one grid cell with an area of ~2,000 km^2.

Fall migration routes of the female Caribbean Martin differed between years. In 2012, the migration route from Dominica was along the Atlantic coast of South America. However in 2013, the female first flew due south from Dominica, through Guyana, likely into the Amazon rainforest in the eastern portion of the State of Amazonas, Brazil, for a few days, then traveled southeast to the wintering area. Fall migration in 2012 started on 1 October, arriving on the winter location near 31 October (Table 1; Fig. 2), with a total migration duration of 30 days, and migration route length of ~5,930 km. The spring 2013 migration—which was similar to the fall 2012 route along the Atlantic coast—began around 19 February, with the female arriving in Dominica on 1 March, with a total migration duration of 11 days and migration route length of ~4,170 km. The fall 2013 migration started around 11 September, and the female arrived at the wintering location on about 20 October, with a total migration duration of 39 days, and migration route length of ~6,370 km. Migration in spring 2014 apparently occurred sometime during the period from mid-February to early March, because the geolocator battery failed on 14 February while the female was still in the wintering area.

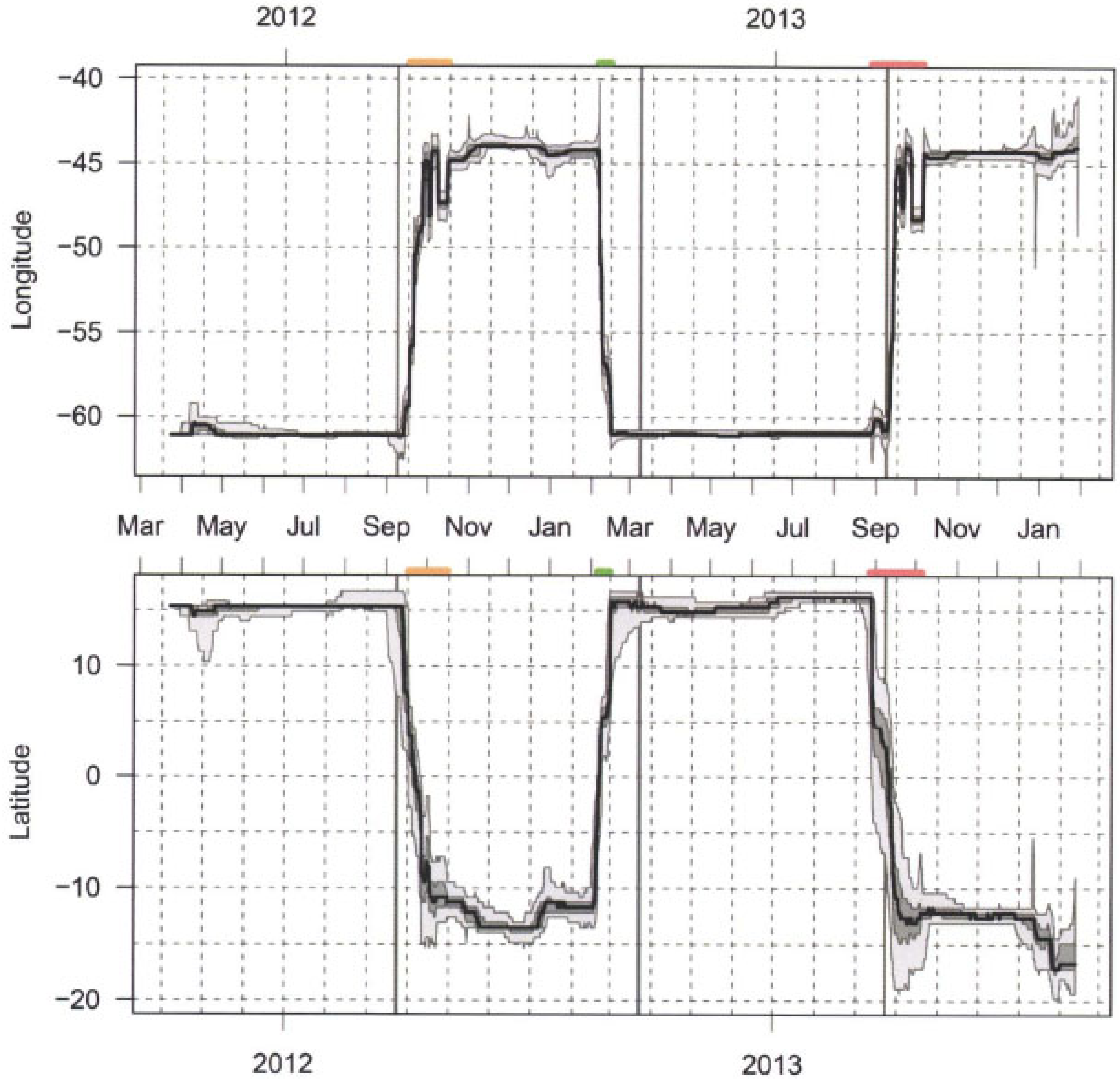

FIG. 2. Longitudes (upper panel) and latitudes (lower panel) of a track of a Caribbean Martin as estimated by FLightR. The medians of twilight positions estimated by FLightR include quartile ranges and 95% credible intervals.

DISCUSSION

Over 2 years, we found that a single female Caribbean Martin captured on Dominica used the same wintering area in the southern portion of the State of Bahiain Brazil. This area is ~2,100 km farther south than areas where Caribbean Martins have previously been reported during the winter in the scientific literature (Voous 1983, Murphy and Hayes 2001, Wells and Wells 2005, Ottema et al. 2009, Renaudier and de Guyane 2010) and through citizen science observations (eBird 2017). Fall migration routes likely differed between years, with the female taking a coastal route

TABLE 1. Summary departure and arrival dates, including migration lengths for a female Caribbean Martin who bred on Dominica and carried a geolocator for 2 years.

	2012	2013
Fall migration departure date	1 Oct	11 Sep
Arrival to winter location	31 Oct	20 Oct
Fall migration length	5,930 km	6,370 km
Spring migration departure date	19 Feb	>14 Feb
Arrival to breeding grounds	1 Mar	
Spring migration length	4,170 km	

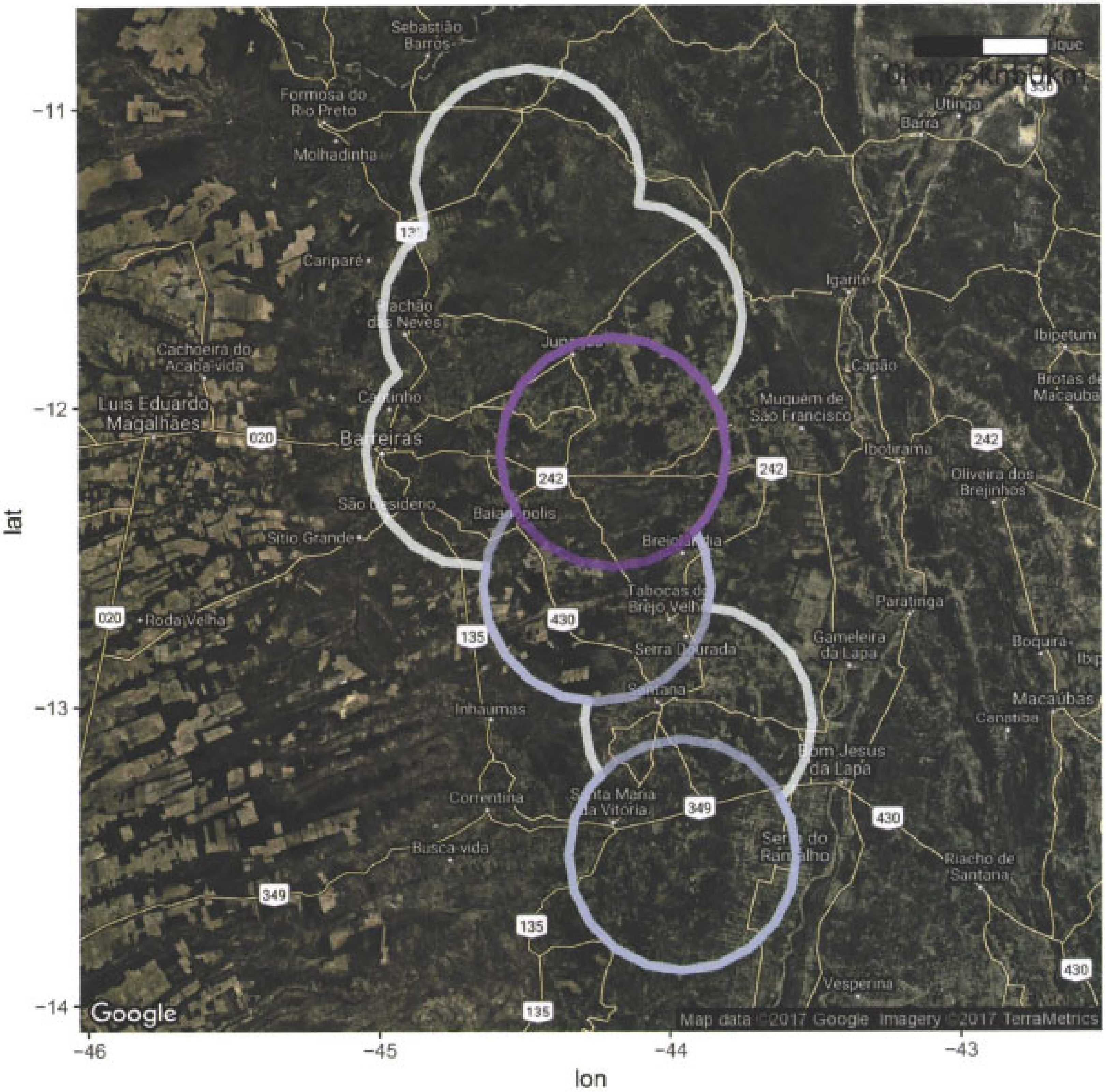

FIG. 3. The wintering region of the Caribbean Martin was ~700 km west of the city of Salvador (see box in Fig. 1); colored contours correspond to the smallest regions that contain 25% (purple), 50% (blue) and 75% (gray) of modeled probability of occurrence. This region consists primarily of sparsely forested uplands, cattle and other livestock rearing, forestry, small-scale agriculture along a network of roads, and scattered towns and villages.

one year and an inland route the next. The inland route is similar to the route taken by a Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) that migrating south from North America, took a southeasterly land-route from Central America to Brazil (Stutchbury et al. 2009). Likewise, some Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) migrating from northeastern North America followed both routes identified in our study (Hobson et al. 2015), although annual variation within individuals was not assessed. In fact, few geolocator studies have assessed the repeatability of fall migration—and thus we know little about what factors drive variation in routes within individuals. A study of Wood Thrushes (*Hylocichla mustelina*) found repeatable timing but non-repeatable migration routes (Stanley et al. 2012). Stanley et al. (2012) measured route repeatability by comparing longitude locations of the Wood Thrushes that were crossing 23.4° N during spring and fall migration; the researchers suggested that this lack of repeatability was likely caused by individual energetic condition and variable weather patterns. For the Caribbean Martin we tracked, fall migration started 20 days earlier in 2013 than 2012; this difference could indicate improved autumn body condition between years, or variation in favorable weather conditions.

The western portion of Bahia is a remote, semiarid and economically-marginal interior region. It consists primarily of sparsely forested uplands (~60% of land cover), cattle and other livestock rearing, forestry, and small-scale agriculture along a network of roads (30%), and scattered towns and villages (10%). The region is transitional between scrub lands called the *Sertão* to the east and moister, heavily irrigated, and densely cropped agricultural region called the *Cerrado* to the west (Fig. 3; IBGE 2016; TCK, pers. obs.).

We acknowledge that these results represent the migration routes and wintering locations of a single individual over 2 years and may or may not be representative of the species as a whole. Nonetheless, these results provide insight into the repeatability of migration routes and wintering locations by this species, and serves as a first step in better understanding the full life-cycle of Caribbean Martins.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Funding for this project came from the Blake-Nuttall Fund of the Nutall Ornithological Club and the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Environmental Studies at the University of New England. The Forestry, Wildlife and Parks Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in the Commonwealth of Dominica authorized this research. Wethank J. Fox for helping retrieve the data from the geolocator. And, we thank B. Jno Baptiste for his guidance and support on Dominica, and to S. Neumann for field assistance.

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