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Eighth Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee: Rare Birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2010

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The Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee (TTRBC) was established in 1995 with the principal aim to assess, document and archive the occurrence of rare or unusual birds in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). The Committee has now assessed all records submitted during 2010. In all, 72 records were adjudged, representing 49 different species. No additional species have been added to the Official List of Birds of Trinidad and Tobago and the running total remains at 471 species. However, when considering our two islands separately, each have added a new species to their own lists during the year under review. Thus one species, previously recorded for Trinidad only, has been found on Tobago for the first time and one species previously recorded for Tobago has now been found in Trinidad for the first time. Of the submissions assessed, in only five cases did the Committee find the identification inconclusive. The decisions on two records are pending as the committee is seeking external expert opinions. The records tabulated below follow the nomenclature and taxonomic order of the American Ornithologists Union South American Checklist, January 2011.

The Committee comprises the following members: Martyn Kenefick (Secretary), Geoffrey Gomes, Floyd Hayes, Bill Murphy, Courtenay Rooks and Graham White.

Archived records including photographic submissions are held at 36 Newalloville Ave., San Juan. Previous reports of this Committee were prepared by Hayes and White (2000); White and Hayes (2002) and Kenefick (2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010).

Members of the TTRBC are aware that a number of other rare birds are found each year in T&T and urge finders not only to report their sightings to us, but to document same. A recently revised list of those species considered by the TTRBC, together with the Official List of the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago, and details of all accepted records by the Committee can be accessed from our new website at <http://rbc.ttfnc.org>

RECORDS ACCEPTED

An adult **White-faced Whistling-Duck**, *Dendrocygna viduata*, was found amongst a flock of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at Kernaham on 11 September, 2010 (MK, GW). This is the first documented sighting for eight years although the species true status may be masked by lack of observer coverage at traditional feed-

ing grounds.

An adult male **Muscovy Duck**, *Cairina moschata*, was photographed perched in a tree overlooking Los Blanquizales Swamp on 9 January, 2010 (KS). The TTRBC is aware of a release programme from the Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust which may cloud the true origin of future records of this species.

Two male and one female **Comb Ducks**, *Sarkidiornis melanotos*, were photographed at Caroni Rice Project on 10 July, 2010 (MK, NL, DS). This is the first record of this casual visitor from mainland South America since 2002.

A female **Ring-necked Duck**, *Aythya collaris*, was photographed on a narrow pool within the Lowlands complex, Tobago on 30 January, 2010 (MKe, NL, DS). It was still present until 19 March, at least. This winter visitor has now been found in six out of the last 10 years with all records from south-west Tobago.

A small flock comprising one breeding plumaged male and three female **Masked Ducks**, *Nomonyx dominicus*, were found in suitable nesting habitat in Tobago on 11 February, 2010 (MKe, NL, DS). Birds were still present in early April and the Committee has decided to withhold the exact location.

Two **Trinidad Piping-Guans**, *Pipile pipile*, were photographed inside Cumaca Forest on 28 February, 2010 (MKe, FO, DS). This is the first documented sighting from this area in the last 15 years at least.

An adult **White-tailed Tropicbird**, *Phaethon lepturus*, was photographed from the seabird watchpoint on Little Tobago island on 14 March, 2010 (MKe) (See Plate). Whilst there have been several verbal reports of this species appearing amongst the Red-billed Tropicbird breeding colony, this is the first documented report for nine years.

Two **American Flamingos**, *Phoenicopterus ruber*, were photographed at Orange Valley on 16 March, 2010 (SP) with one present at least until 2 April. All recent records have come from this stretch of tidal mudflats. The Committee has been told that at least some of the flock found in 2008 fell to the hunters rifle.

A juvenile **Wood Stork**, *Mycteria americana*, was found in roadside mangrove beside the Caroni Bird Sanctuary on 13 January, 2010 (SM, DR) (See Plate). The bird remained in the area, faithful to a particular roosting tree, at least until 17 January. This is the second documented

record since 1942.

An immature **Rufescent Tiger-Heron**, *Tigrisoma lineatum*, was photographed perched in a tree beside Los Blanquizaes Swamp on 9 January, 2010 (KS) (See Plate). Close by, a breeding plumaged adult was photographed on 20 June, 2010 (KS). Elsewhere an adult was seen in swamp forest close to Trinity Hills on 16 March, 2010 (GW) and two adults were found in the Aripo Savannah on 12 June, 2010 (MK, NL, DSm).

An immature **Purple Heron**, *Ardea purpurea*, was found at Bon Accord Lagoons, Tobago on 2 February, 2010 (BB *et al.*) (See Plate). It was extensively photographed and remained in the area, seen intermittently, until the end of the year (NG, pers. comm.). As a result of this submission, the TTRBC has re-assessed and accepted retrospectively a historical sighting from Buccoo Marsh, September 1999 (AS). There are now three records for Trinidad and Tobago. There are no other documented records for South America.

An adult **Cocoi Heron**, *Ardea cocoi*, was photographed inside Bon Accord Lagoon, Tobago on 8 March, 2010 (MK_e). This is the fifth sighting from Tobago in the last 15 years.

Two immature **Glossy Ibis**, *Plegadis falcinellus*, were videotaped on exposed tidal mudflats within Caroni Swamp on 3 May, 2010 (SM, BM *et al.*). On 4 September, an immature was found on Caroni Rice Project (NL, DSm). Two immatures were subsequently found on 8 September approximately one kilometre further west (MK, GW), and another was photographed east of Woodland Settlement on 10 October (MK, DS, NL, HV). A total of 15 birds have now been found in the last 15 years.

An adult **Eurasian Spoonbill**, *Platalea leucorodia*, was seen in flight over Nariva Swamp on 12 November, 2010 (LF, PP, MD, CR). This is the first record for Trinidad; the only other sighting in this country was in Tobago, November 1986.

An adult male **Snail Kite**, *Rostrhamus sociabilis*, was photographed feeding in Valsayn rice fields on 24 May, 2010 (GW, DSm). It remained in the area until 5 June when it was last seen on the border of the Caroni Rice Project. Still a rare visitor from the mainland, there have been just four individuals documented in the last 15 years.

An adult **Crane Hawk**, *Geranospiza caerulescens*, was found in roadside palm trees close to the Piarco junction on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway on 26 September, 2010 (GG).

An immature **Rufous Crab-Hawk**, *Buteogallus aequinoctialis*, starting to attain adult plumage was photographed in roadside mangrove at Guayaguayare on 28 April, 2010 (GW, MK) (See Plate). Two adults were seen

repeatedly mating and subsequently perched together and photographed on pylons at Icacos on 29 May, 2010 (KS). Whilst long suspected as a rare resident, this is the first documented evidence of breeding. The TTRBC is currently working on definitive criteria to identify birds in juvenile plumage.

A single adult **Great Black-Hawk**, *Buteogallus urubitinga*, was photographed drifting over Cat's Hill on 6 June, 2010 (KS, DSm). Whilst Great Black-Hawks are a fairly common resident of forested areas of eastern Tobago, they are still a rare bird in Trinidad.

Single adult **Black Hawk-Eagles**, *Spizaetus tyrannus*, were seen soaring over Edward's Trace, Guayaguayare on 10 March, 2010 (GW); over Trinity Hills on 30 March, 2010 (GW) and over Pt. Fortin on 11 May, 2010 (SP).

An immature **Ornate Hawk-Eagle**, *Spizaetus ornatus*, was briefly seen perched in Trinity Hills on 10 March, 2010 (GW). Close by, at Cat's Hill, an adult was photographed on 11 April, 2010 (KS). These are the first reports of this species away from the Northern Range this decade.

Both adult and immature **Crested Caracaras**, *Cacacara cheriway*, were widely reported from the Manzanilla and eastern Nariva coastline throughout the year (many observations) and breeding is suspected. Away from this stronghold, an immature was photographed at Galera Pt. on 25 May, 2010 (IK).

Juvenile **Aplomado Falcons**, *Falco femoralis*, were photographed east of Woodland Settlement on 31 August, 2010 (See Plate) and still present on 5 September at least (NL, DSm, KS). Another bird was seen at the Caroni Rice Project on 25 September, 2010 (DSm, FO, NL). There have now been 16 records this decade; 11 of which have been during the period August - October.

An adult **Paint-billed Crane**, *Neocrex erythrops*, was photographed crossing a narrow farm road east of Woodland Settlement on 25 July, 2010 (KS). Two cranes, possibly this species, were briefly seen at exactly the same place on the 27th (DS, MK). About 2 km to the south, another adult was seen on three occasions between 29 July - 4 August, 2010 (NL, TM *et al.*). The Committee awaits the submission of photographs to support a report of three more birds found in the Aripo area earlier in the year. Prior to 2010, there were only three records of this casual visitor from South America, the latest being in 2001.

A colour banded **Red Knot**, *Calidris canutus*, was photographed in San Fernando Bay on 13 August, 2008 (TM). Whilst not a national rarity, the event is worthy of documentation as investigation revealed that the bird was originally banded in the Rio Negro province, Argentina



Legends to Plate

1. Wood Stork, Caroni Swamp, 13 January, 2010. Photo, Dave Smith.
2. Purple Heron, Bon Accord Lagoon, Tobago, 11 February, 2010. Photo, Matt Kelly.
3. Dark-billed Cuckoo, Woodland, South Oropouche, 31 August, 2010. Photo, Kris Sookdeo.
4. White-tailed Tropicbird, Little Tobago, 14 March, 2010. Photo, Matt Kelly.
5. Magnolia Warbler, Castara, Tobago, 7 January, 2010. Photo, Zac Loman.
6. Crested Doradito (Male), Woodland, South Oropouche, August 2010. Photo, Dave Smith.
7. Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Los Blanquizales Swamp, 9 January, 2010. Photo, Kris Sookdeo.
8. Crested Doradito (Female), Woodland, South Oropouche, August 2010. Photo, Dave Smith.
9. Short-eared Owl, Caroni Rice Project, 3 October, 2010. Photo, Dave Smith.
10. Aplomado Falcon, Woodland, South Oropouche, 31 August, 2010. Photo, Dave Smith.
11. Rufous Crab-Hawk, Guayaguayare Bay, 28 April, 2010. Photo, Graham White.

on 28 March, 2006. This highlights the distance of their southbound migration.

An adult **Buff-breasted Sandpiper**, *Tryngites subruficollis*, was found in a ploughed field south-west of Debe and seen only briefly before flying strongly south on 18 September, 2010 (MK, GG). Thereafter, single birds were found in wet grassy areas at Couva on 7 October (DS, HV) and Kernaham on 9 October (MK, DS, KS, NL). These sightings fall within the established pattern of migration dates in T&T being 17 September - 16 October.

An adult **Ring-billed Gull**, *Larus delawarensis*, was found on the mudflats roosting site at Orange Valley on 10 February, 2010 and was seen intermittently until 2 April at least (NL, DS, MK). On 1 March it was briefly joined by a second bird which visually resembled the winter plumaged adult found in October 2009. Whilst now quite regularly reported from the west coast of Trinidad in recent times, all sightings may well just relate to two individual birds.

Two **Scaly-naped Pigeons**, *Patagioenas squamosa*, were photographed at Grafton Sanctuary, Tobago on 7 February, 2010 (MK, DS). Whilst widespread throughout the Lesser Antilles, this species was first found in T&T back in 2005. There have now been four documented sightings, all from Tobago.

Two **Dark-billed Cuckoos**, *Coccyzus melacoryphus*, were photographed in wet meadows east of Wood-

land Settlement on 31 August, 2010 (NL, DSm, KS) (See Plate). Both were still present on 5 September, one remaining until the 10 September at least. A rare visitor to Trinidad and only the third record in the last 15 years.

A **Short-eared Owl**, *Asio flammeus*, was photographed in a recently cut rice field in the Caroni Rice Project on 3 October, 2010 (KS, MK, DSm) (See Plate). The only previous record of this species for T&T was in late September 2001 in exactly the same field.

Single **Small-billed Elaenias**, *Elaenia parvirostris*, were photographed at Rousillac on 15 August, 2010 (KS) and east of Woodland Settlement on 5 September, 2010 (KS, MK, DS). With observers now more confident with the identification separation features of "the smaller Elaenias" and found in three of the last four years, this species may not be the extreme rarity previously considered.

Three pairs of **Crested Doraditos**, *Pseudocolaptes sclateri*, were extensively studied in freshwater marsh east of Woodland Settlement. First found on 24 July, 2010 (MK, GW *et al.*), all remained until 18 August with at least one male remaining until 18 September (See Plate). All three pairs were observed carrying nesting material indicating a breeding attempt, however there was no evidence of success, presumed due to rising water levels. This is the first sighting in Trinidad since 1984, and the first away from the marshes bordering Caroni Swamp.

Single **Black-whiskered Vireo**, *Vireo altiloquus*, were recorded during the year as follows: Asa Wright, 7 March, 2010 (MK *et al.*); Aripo Agriculture Station, 8 March, 2010 (MK); Grande Riviere, 13 March, 2010 (MK *et al.*) and Morne Bleu, 14 November, 2010 (BM *et al.*). All are thought to be of the duller plumaged subspecies *bonairensis*. This brings to 24, the number seen this decade with all sightings during the period October - May.

A group of three **Southern Rough-winged Swallows**, *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*, were found flying along the tide-line at Castara, Tobago on 26 March, 2010 (MK_e). This is the first documented record from Tobago for many years.

An adult **Cliff Swallow**, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*, was found feeding with a group of Barn Swallows low over Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago on 18 - 19 April, 2010 (MK *et al.*). This brings to 20, the number found this decade, 12 of which have occurred between 3 March - 22 April.

A flock of 30 **Lined Seedaters**, *Sporophila lineola*, were found at Sudama Steps on 14 August, 2010 (KS, DSm) with at least 12 still present on the 18 August. These birds attracted the attention of local bird-catchers and there were no further sightings. A short distance away, closer to Woodland Settlement, a male and a fe-

male were seen on 22 August (MK). Elsewhere an adult male was found north of Kernaham on 9 October, 2010 (KS, MK). Since first being found in south-west Trinidad in 2007, this species has been seen annually between mid August and early October. Many additional sightings of unidentified birds in non-breeding plumage were either this species or the near identical Lesson's Seedeater, *Sporophila bouvronides*.

An adult male **Large-billed Seed-Finch**, *Oryzoborus crassirostris*, was photographed in South Oropouche on 17 July, 2010 (KS, MK, DSm, TM). This record falls within the pattern of post-breeding dispersal from the mainland by several species of Seedeater and Seed-Finch, but is the first documented sighting for many years.

An immature male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, *Pheucticus ludovicianus*, was photographed close to the textel station at Morne Bleu on 14 November, 2010 (BM *et al.*). This is the first southbound migration sighting in the last 15 years; almost all records this decade have been in March and April.

A **Magnolia Warbler**, *Dendroica magnolia*, was photographed at Castara, Tobago on 7 January, 2010 (ZL) (See Plate). This was followed by a second bird found along Gilpin Trace on 15 March, 2010 (DG, MK *et al.*). These are just the third and fourth records for the country; the previous being in 1966 and 1967.

An adult female **Black-and-White Warbler**, *Mniotilta varia*, was seen briefly, loosely attached to a roving bird flock along the Blanchisseuse Rd., above Paria junction on 9 March, 2010 (MK *et al.*). There have now been nine records of this striking warbler in the last decade with sightings ranging from 10 October - 28 March.

An adult female **Bobolink**, *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*, was photographed at Bon Accord, Tobago on 11 May, 2010 (TM). This is the first northbound migrant documented in T&T for 45 years. On 3 October, 2010, groups totalling 12 birds were seen, and one photographed on Caroni Rice Project (KS, MK, DSm). Finally, five birds were photographed east of Woodland Settlement on 31 October (KS, DS). Of the 13 records documented in the last 15 years, 10 have been in October.

INTRODUCED SPECIES

A flock of up to 30 **Tricolored Munia**, *Lonchura malacca*, including many juveniles, were present throughout the year in South Oropouche, having first been photographed there back in 2007 (KS, MK, DSm). Whilst

originally from the Indian sub-continent and south-east Asia, there are now resident populations in Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador.

INCONCLUSIVE RECORDS

The following submissions were considered inconclusive: **Curlew Sandpiper**, *Calidris ferruginea*, (Tobago); **Blue-headed Parrot**, *Pionus menstruus*, (Tobago); **Lesser Elaenia**, *Elaenia chiriquensis*; **Summer Tanager**, *Piranga rubra* and **Large-billed Seed-Finch**, *Oryzoborus crassirostris*. Additionally, a submission of **White-eyed Parakeets**, *Aratinga leucophthalma*, whilst correct in identification, was known to have related to an escaped flock of birds from a collection north of Port of Spain.

SOUTH AMERICAN CLASSIFICATION COMMITTEE

For ornithological classification, Trinidad and Tobago are considered part of South America and, consequently, we contribute to the Official South American Checklist compiled and maintained by the above group. Their criteria for record acceptance of a new species to the region is far stricter than that adopted by the TTRBC, insisting on photographic or specimen evidence.

Currently, there are seven species accepted to the "T&T list" but not documented elsewhere in South America, where no such photographic evidence has been archived. The species involved are as follows:

Snow Goose, *Chen caerulescens*: sightings Dec. 1975 and Dec. 1984.

Northern Gannet, *Morus bassanus*: seen off north-east Tobago Nov. 1991 and again Aug. 2009.

Common Ringed Plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*: single bird mist netted in Oct. 1962.

Spotted Redshank, *Tringa erythropus*: single bird in Tobago Feb. 1983.

Common Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia*: two different sightings; south-west Tobago July 1977 and Wallerfield early 1987.

White-eyed Vireo, *Vireo griseus*: single record, Buccoo Marsh, Tobago Jan. 1998.

Red-winged Blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus*: one close to Caroni Swamp from June 1980 to mid 1981.

If anyone has photographic evidence of any of the above, the Committee would be delighted to hear from you.

NOMENCLATURE CHANGES

Part of the mission statement of the SACC is to create a standard classification, with English names, for the birds of South America. This is subject to constant revision by the proposal system to allow incorporation of new data. As a result, the following nomenclature change was made in 2010:

- * **Green-backed Trogon, *T. viridis***, (formerly White-tailed Trogon)
- * **Guianan Trogon, *T. violaceus***, (formerly Violaceous Trogon)

REVIEW OF THE DECADE

During the first decade of the 21st century, TTRBC has accessed a total of 610 submissions of 181 rare or unusual species found in Trinidad and Tobago. These observations have been submitted by 135 different contributors. Of those submitted, only 52 (14.8%) were determined inconclusive.

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