

ENVIRONMENT

Observing local birds

TROPICAL kingbird
(Tyrannus melancholicus)
PHOTO BY KAMAL MAHABIR



WHILE it is all too often the case that the citizens of our country do not take the time to observe our native plants and animals, one bird that most Trinidadians will be familiar with is the kiskadee.

More formally known as the great kiskadee (Pitangus sulphuratus), this bird is a true generalist, being able to survive in a wide range of habitats including forests, swamps, urban and even coastal habitats.

The kiskadee is a member of the flycatcher family, a huge family of birds which, as their name suggests, are often partial to insects as food.

However, part of the reason for the kiskadee's wide distribution is their omnivorous diet which allows them to



GREAT KISKADEE
(Pitangus sulphuratus)
PHOTO BY NIGEL LALLSINGH

adapt to the available food sources and includes fruit, small fish, reptiles, mammals

and even table scraps such as bread or cheese. Despite this adaptability and

the presence of suitable habitat, kiskadees are not normally found on Tobago.

Some birds, however, were released on the island in the vicinity of Speyside many years ago.

Far from being a good thing, the introduction of a foreign species is not something to be encouraged as the effect of this introduction on native plant and animal life cannot be predetermined.

Outside of Trinidad, the kiskadee is found throughout South America into parts of the southern United States.

These birds build large ball shaped nests out of grass and small twigs, and are located atop trees or even utility poles and buildings.

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NOTICE

Nominations are invited from members who are willing to serve on the Statutory Committees of COPOS Credit Union Co-operative Society Limited at its 51st Annual General Meeting in 2014

THE COMMITTEES ARE:
Board of Directors
Supervisory Committee
Credit Committee

Members offering themselves for election must have competencies in positions for which they are seeking and they must be willing to access training in the relevant areas.

Nomination forms can be obtained at any of the locations below during the hours of 8:00 am to 3:00 pm or requested via email.

Requests for nomination forms should be sent to wcrichie@coposcreditunion.com.

Please note that all persons accepting nomination to serve will be required to undergo an orientation training session prior to the Annual General Meeting.

Completed forms MUST be returned to our offices by FRIDAY 21st FEBRUARY 2014

Marilyn Scott – Secretary
For and on Behalf of the Board of Directors

POS: - 36 Pembroke St, Port of Spain, Trinidad, Tel: (868) 625-4605, 623-0514 Fax: (868) 623-8135
ARIMA: - O'Meara House, 24E Pro Queen St, Tel/Fax: (868) 667-5949
MARABELLA: - 235 Southern Main Road, Tel: 658-2305
TOBAGO: - Corner Main & Cuyler Streets, Scarborough Tel/Fax: (868) 639-3642

ENVIRONMENT

Tropical Kingbirds widespread on both islands

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In urban areas it is not uncommon for nests to include human trash such as ribbons or packaging.

The ability of the kiskadee to live in close association with people is not the only reason for its familiarity. The kiskadee is known for its charismatic behaviour.

Its call is a familiar sound everywhere on Trinidad and is the source of its name, being rendered as an excited "kiss-ka-dee".

It is also quite an aggressive species, defending its territory from birds of prey and other threats.

They also have a tendency to monopolise food sources and will routinely chase other birds from birdfeeders.

The appearance of the kiskadee is yet another reason for its familiarity.

It is boldly marked with a bright yellow underside and lovely brown wings while contrasting bands of black and white mark its face.

Sometimes, especially when two birds call to one another, they raise a yellow crest atop

their head. Male and female birds are very similar in appearance.

Their appearance, however, makes it easy to confuse the kiskadee with another common bird – the tropical kingbird (Tyrannus melancholicus).

The tropical kingbird is also a member of the flycatcher family and, although similar to the kiskadee, it lacks the black and white facial markings, having a grey face instead.

Another distinguishing feature is its wing, which is much duller.

Like kiskadees, male and female tropical kingbirds are very similar in appearance.

Tropical kingbirds are quite widespread but show a preference for open environments are a common sight on telephone wires and exposed branches. From these perches, the tropical kingbird will fly out to catch passing insects – a behaviour known as "hawking".

These birds will also feed on some fruit but are less diverse in their diets than kiskadees.

While perched they can be heard uttering their excited

twittering call which is quite different from that of kiskadees.

Tropical kingbirds are found on both Trinidad and Tobago. Beyond our islands, they can be found from Mexico in the north, down to Argentina in the south.

Unlike the kiskadee, they build simple cup-shaped nests in the tree tops; they rarely, if ever, use human structures as nesting sites.

Now, next time you see one of these charming little birds on your way to work, or while sitting in your garden, hopefully you will feel a little enlightened. Both species are charismatic representatives of the wildlife of our islands and we should all be sure to appreciate sharing our gardens and urban areas with such vibrant and interesting characters.

Today's feature was written by Kris Sookdeo and Amy Deacon. For more information on our natural environment, you can contact the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club at admin@tfn.org or visit our website at www.tfn.org.