

# **The Avifauna of Chacachacare Island**

**By R. P. French.**

The ornithological team consisted of R. P. & M. French. Additional observations were supplied by J. Darlington. A survey of the immediate area of La Tinta was carried out, and the checklist and mist-netting programme relate only to this area. It is likely that several other species could have been found around the Lighthouse and further east. An attempt to survey the Lighthouse valley like Grand Fond Valley, Monos, failed because of the impenetrable nature of the scrub around the dry stream bed. Hence the following observations were made from the existing well-kept paths.

1. The island's avifauna resembles that of Huevos more closely than that of Monos, probably mainly because of its lack of shady forested valley with large trees. Few trees are over 30 feet in height and the shallow valleys do not support enough luxuriant vegetation beside their streams to cater adequately for such birds as the Hairy Hermit. In addition the only really open spaces on Chacachacare are either near human habitation or on La Tinta beach itself, which offers an extremely limited habitat.

2. Ten species of flycatchers were found on the island, the commonest being typical of the scrub vegetation, the Smooth and Mouse-coloured Flycatchers.

3. The Allied Antwren was found to be common, and may well have been breeding, though no nests were found. The species is not found in Trinidad, nor on the other Bocas islands, but another race occurs in Tobago.

The Black-faced Grassquit was also found to be quite common, mainly on the edges of open areas.

4. The Venezuelan Wood-rail and Rufous Nightjar were heard, the former quite commonly; both these species have now been recorded on all three Bocas islands.

5. Occupied nests were found of seven species, Cayenne Nightjar, Scaly-breasted Ground-dove, White-fronted Dove, Yellow Oriole, Mockingbird, Grey-breasted Saltator and Bananaquit.

The ground-dove was incubating in a nest situated ten feet up in a tree. The Mockingbird's nest contained two newly hatched young and one egg, and was in a thorny bush a few feet from the sea edge. The saltator's nest contained one blue egg, while the bananaquit was feeding two almost fledged young.

The most interesting breeding record was that of a Cayenne Nightjar. This species appeared to be quite common, judging from the frequency of its high whistling call from dusk to dawn. A female bird was found to be brooding two extremely small downy young on the bare earth at the edge of the La Tinta jetty area. The mother bird flew only at the

last moment, sometimes putting on a distraction display when away from the nest. During the daytime she sat tight, beside rather than above the chicks, and her mottled plumage blended perfectly with the reddish-brown mud. Although the chicks were so small, probably only a day or two old when found, the mother bird contrived to move them some yards from the position where we first found them completely exposed to view, to a spot half hidden beneath a small bush.

6. Apart from the species mentioned above, song was frequently heard also from the Caribbean Vireo, Bare-eyed Thrush, Blue Tanager and Allied Antwren.

7. One rare bird for Trinidad was recorded, in addition to those species peculiar to Chacachacare, when a Small-billed Elaenia, *E. parvirostris*, was trapped on 30 May. The species has only been recorded twice before in Trinidad, when G. F. Mees (1958) collected two specimens at Tacarigua in 1953. It is a bird which could easily be confused in the field with either of the other two smaller elaenia flycatchers, *E. chiriquensis* or *Myiopagis*, or even with the Smooth Flycatcher. In the hand its long wing and tail, small size, olive-green upperparts, mainly white underparts — the lemon yellow confined to flanks and under-tail-coverts,— and narrow bill serve to distinguish it from the other species. Our bird had tarsus 19mm long and culmen 10mm. The mandible was pinkish-orange at the base, dark horn at the tip and above; its coronal patch was pale lemon, and it had a distinct yellowish eye-ring, also two whitish wing-bars.

Its presence at this time on Chacachacare may have no special significance. Plainly the species is rare in Trinidad and it is easy to miss it in the field. But Mees considered it a migrant from the South. This is a distinct possibility. Other southern migrants arrive in Trinidad about May or June. Chacachacare would probably be on one of the routes into Trinidad. Mees' specimens were taken in July and August. It is unfortunate that the various Elaenia flycatchers form probably the most confusing group of species in Trinidad — from the point of view of field identification —, and an understanding of their status and distribution will probably never be reached until a satisfactory diagnosis of their songs and call-notes has been made.

#### REFERENCE

G. C. A. Junge and G. F. Mees. 1958. *The Avifauna of Trinidad & Tobago*. Leiden.

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## Bird-Netting Programme Chacachacare 1966

Four net-sites were used, three simultaneously. Owing to the likelihood of interference from day-trippers and the undesirability of publicising this extremely efficient method of trapping, nets were removed when the excursion boats arrived at 10-45 a.m., and re-set when they left at 4 p.m. Thus nets 1-3 were set early on the morning of 29 May till 11-00 a.m.; 1, 2 and 4 from 4 p.m. to 6-15 p.m., and again next morning from 6 a.m. to 10-15 p.m., when heavy rain interrupted the proceedings. In a total of 34 net-hours 88 birds and 1 repeat of 23 species were trapped.

In addition an attempt was made on the night of 29 May to trap nightjars on the Lighthouse road, but it proved abortive; two bats, however, were taken, both *Glossophaga longirostris*.

Observations on the trapping data are as follows:—

1. The rate of capture compares very favourably with that on Monos and Huevos, where the rate remained somewhat less than one bird per net-hour. On Chacachacare the rate was 2.62 birds per net-hour. Nets 3 and 4, set actually alongside La Tinta beach caught at 3.25 and 3.5 respectively; net 2, set along a path adjoining Lighthouse road caught at 2.4, while net 1, set in a dry stream-bed in the light secondary forest, caught at 2.1.

The La Tinta isthmus, of course, affords an ideal spot for the trapping of birds crossing from one section of the island to the other.

2. The predominance of tyrannids, represented by eight of the 23 species trapped, indicates the suitability of the vegetation as supplying insect food more abundantly than flowers, fruits or seeds.

3. Although it was disappointing to catch so few Bananaquits, in view of the interesting observations made by Snow and Snow (1963) and by myself (French 1965), the weights of the four birds, averaging at 8.87gm, are in no way inconsistent with the situation indicated by earlier findings. It seems that the Bananaquits are smaller the farther one goes west through the Bocas from Trinidad. There is still, however, need for the analysis of a more comprehensive series.

In view of the Snows' capture on Chacachacare of 55 Bananaquits in October, during a visit comparable to our own, it is interesting that the species was not more common this time. In October large numbers were caught crossing the isthmus in what may have been migration or merely a feeding-movement.

4. 26 Caribbean Vireos showed an average weight of 15.4gm, all but one being taken before noon. This is also nearly a gram lighter than the Monos birds.

But sizeable series of Leotaud's Dusky Flycatcher taken on Chacachacare, Huevos and Monos show no significant variation from an average weight of 13.5gm.

5. Five Allied Ant-wrens, of the race *intermedia*, weighed an average

of 9.3gm, compared with 11.4gm averaged by four Tobago birds of the larger race *tobagensis*, taken by Mees in 1953-4.

6. There being no dwelling-houses in the immediate areas of La Tinta, it is perhaps not surprising that no House Wrens were caught, though some birds were seen and heard.

7. That insect food was in abundance, despite the fact that the wet season was only just starting, is perhaps indicated by the fact that a Mouse-coloured Flycatcher, first trapped at 7-10 a.m., had gained an increase of over 10% of its body weight, when trapped at 9-15 a.m. on the following day.

#### REFERENCES

- R. P. French. 1965 The Avifauna of Grand Fond, Monos. Journal of T. F. N. C. 1965.
- D. W. & B. K. Snow. 1963. Weights and Wing-lengths of some Trinidad birds Zoologica 1963.



TABLE OF MEASUREMENTS ETC. - CHACACHACARE

Species	Date	Time	Net	Age/Sex	Wt.	Wing	Tail	Moult
White-fronted Dove	30 May	0700	1	ad.	157	136	103	None
Common Emerald Hummingbird	"	0915	4	ad. m	5	50	26	None
Allied Antwren	29 May	0730	1	ad. m	9	56	50	Part of tail
"	"	"	1	imm. m	9	55	49	Head and tail
"	"	"	1	f. pl	9.5	51	51	None
"	30 May	0800	4	ad. m	9	57	55	None
"	"	0800	4	f. pl	10	54	49	None
Kiskadee	29 May	0830	3	ad.	63	113	84	Mantle
Rusty-tailed Petchary	"	0645	1	ad.	27	95	93	None
Leotaud's Dusky Flycatcher	"	0645	1	ad.	13	65	64	None
"	"	1815	2	ad. m	13	71	70	None
"	30 May	0700	1	ad.	14	66	62	None
"	"	"	2	ad. f	14	63	60	None
Stripe-breasted Petchary	29 May	0930	1	ad.	11	57	53	None
"	"	"	4	ad.	12	64	57	None
Yellow-billed Elaenia	30 May	0700	4	ad.	26	77	69	None
Small-billed Elaenia	"	0700	4	ad.	15.5	71	63	None
Smooth Flycatcher	"	0645	1	ad.	13	69	65	None

Species	Date	Time	Net	Age/Sex	Wt.	Wing	Tail	Moult
Smooth Flycatcher	30 May	0730	1	ad.	12	70	67	None
" "	" "	0800	4	ad.	15	70	67	None
" "	" "	1015	2	ad.	13	71	66	None
Mouse-coloured Flycatcher	29 May	0710	2	ad.	9	59	51	None
" "	30 May	0915	4		10			Retrap
" "	29 May	0930	1	ad.	10	59	57	None
" "	" "	0930	2	ad.	10	59	55	None
" "	" "	1045	2	ad.	9	53	47	Part of tail
" "	" "	1045	2	ad.	10	62	57	None
" "	" "	1115	1	ad.	—	55	51	None
" "	" "	1115	1	ad.	10	61	56	None
" "	" "	1800	4	ad.	10	56	46	None
" "	30 May	0800	4	ad.	12	57	52	Part of tail
" "	" "	0915	4	ad.	12	59	56	None
Rough-winged Swallow	29 May	0830	2	ad.	14	96	47	None
Mockingbird	" "	1800	4	ad.	53	108	120	None
Bare-eyed Thrush	" "	0730	1	ad.	63	110	88	None
" "	" "	1800	4	ad.	69	114	100	None
" "	30 May	0800	2	ad.	63	111	92	None
" "	" "	0800	4	ad.	57	110	92	None
" "	" "	0915	1	ad.	60	117	94	None
Caribbean Vireo	29 May	0730	1	ad.	14	75	55	None
" "	" "	0730	1	ad.	14	70	51	None
" "	" "	0810	2	ad.	14.5	69	48	None

Species	Date	Time	Net	Age/Sex	Wt.	Wing	Tail	Moult
Caribbean Vireo	29 May	0830	3	ad	17	75	53	None
"	"	0830	2	ad.	15	73	53	None
"	"	0930	1	ad.	15	72	51	None
"	"	0930	1	ad.	15	71	51	None
"	"	0930	2	ad.	16	73	52	None
"	"	0930	2	ad.	15	76	57	None
"	"	0930	2	ad.	16	71	53	None
"	"	0930	3	ad.	15	70	46	None
"	"	0930	3	ad.	15	70	48	None
"	"	0930	3	ad.	16	71	48	None
"	"	1045	2	ad.	15	74	52	None
"	"	1045	3	ad.	15	74	52	None
"	"	1045	3	ad.	16	72	53	None
"	"	1045	3	ad.	15	72	55	None
"	29 May	1045	3	ad.	15.5	73	51	None
"	"	1630	4	ad.	17	79	58	None
"	30 May	0800	2	ad.	15	74	54	None
"	30 May	0800	4	ad.	17	72	52	None
"	"	0915	2	ad.	15	71	50	None
"	"	0915	2	ad.	16	70	50	None
"	"	0915	4	ad.	16	70	52	None
"	"	0915	4	ad.	16	78	58	None
"	"	1015	2	ad.	15	72	49	None
Bananaquit	29 May	0930	3	ad.	9	53	—	None
"	"	1045	3	ad.	9.5	58	36	None
"	"	1045	3	ad.	8	54	32	None
"	30 May	0800	4	ad.	9	54	32	None
Blue Tanager	29 May	1045	3	ad.	32	93	72	None
"	30 May	0915	2	ad.	34	94	67	None

Species	Date	Time	Net	Age/Sex	Wt.	Wing	Tail	Moult
Parson	29 May	0730	2	ad. m	33	88	73	None
"	"	0730	2	f. pl	36	83	76	None
"	"	0930	2	f. pl	34	83	73	Black on sec. coverts
"	30 May	0700	4	ad. m	32	90	81	Nape
"	"	0800	1	f. pl	35	83	79	None
"	"	0800	2	ad. m	33	87	74	None
Streaked Saltator	29 May	0810	2	ad.	33	87	78	None
" "	"	0810	2	ad.	36	95	87	None
" "	30 May	0700	4	ad.	38	91	82	None
" "	"	1015	2	ad.	40	92	84	None
Black-faced Grassquit	"	0700	4	ad. m	9	50	37	Part of tail
" "	"	0800	4	ad. m	10	50	39	None
Yellow-bellied Seed-eater	29 May	1115	1	ad. m	8.5	53	43	None
" "	"	1115	1	f. pl	8.5	53	45	None
Small Red- bellied Finch	"	0730	1	f. pl	8	52	41	None
" "	"	0930	1	f. pl	9	51	42	None
Glossy Grassquit	"	0730	1	f. pl	8	47	44	None

(Note. Abbreviations and symbols as in the Huevos table.)