

THE HOSPITABLE HOG PLUM

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In my garden at Pointe-a-Pierre one tree dominates the scene. It is a full-grown Hog Plum, *Spondias mombin*, well-known to Trinidadians and beloved by small children for its tasty orange fruits. Our tree is about 50 feet tall and its spreading branches cover a rough circle with a diameter of 30 yards. It is well festooned with bromeliads (wild pines) and there are sizeable clumps of bird-vine, *Phthirusa*, in the upper branches.

We have always found numbers of birds using the tree, for food in the nectar, fruit and insects, and for rest and shelter; but we were most interested during 1971 in the number of different birds using the tree for nesting. Altogether eight species nested in the tree during the year.

In February the Trinidad Euphonia or Cravat, *Euphonia trinitatis* began prospecting as the tree lost its leaves at the beginning of the dry season. It built a nest within the leaves of a large bromeliad, high on a horizontal branch. Few nests of this species have ever been recorded, but I have found three in consecutive years in this tree.

During March we found a nest with eggs being incubated by the Black-throated Mango hummingbird, *Anthracothorax nigricollis*. It was saddled on a small branch about 25 feet above ground, one of the lowest nests found. Later a Tropical Mockingbird, *Mimus gilvus*, built its untidy stick nest, cleverly concealed in the huge crotch at the main fork of the tree. Also at about this time a group of Smooth-billed Anis or Merle Corbeaux, *Crotophaga ani*, built a large structure in a tangle of vines and small branches well up in the tree. As this cuckoo nests communally I was looking forward to observing the progress of this nesting; but something must have happened, for after a few days the anis abandoned the site.

In May the Tropical Kingbird, *Tyrannus melancholicus*, built its open stick nest high in the topmost branches. Though it is an aggressive species, it showed little interest in the smaller birds around. The Yellow Oriole or Cornbird, *Icterus nigrogularis*, now constructed its hanging basket from the tip of a high branch. It was to build three of these nests, all close together, but only used the third, built in June. Why it found the first two unsatisfactory I do not know, but this was to the advantage of the Saffron Finch, *Sicalis flaveola*, which took over the orioles' first nest and successfully used it for its own brood. The Saffron

Finch evidently borrows nests frequently from the orioles, but there was none of the piracy and aggression which one finds with that other nest-robber, the Piratic Flycatcher, *Legatus leucophaeus*, a notorious stealer of orioles' nests.

Lastly, the Blue Tanager or Blue Jean, *Thraupia epiacopua*, nested during June, concealing its nest amongst the high branches where leaves were now abundant. It was well into July before all the young birds had left the tree.

In 1972 two more species nested in the tree; the Yellow-bellied Elaenia, *Elaenia flavogaster*, and the White-lined Tanager or Parson, *Tachyphonus rufus*, in addition to several of 1971's birds nesting again. It would be of interest if other members of the Club could find examples of several bird species nesting in one tree. Can anyone beat eight in one year?