
More records of rare birds in Trinidad and Tobago

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EVERY year significant numbers of foreign visitors come to Trinidad and Tobago to look for birds. Many come in tour groups, led by experienced observers, mostly from North America, but now increasingly from Europe. Although the purpose of these visitors is to find our indigenous birds, which they have not seen before, inevitably they also see visiting migrant species, with many of which they are themselves quite familiar. So it is not surprising that the number of avifauna recorded in our islands continues to grow yearly.

In the second edition of my book on the birds of Trinidad and Tobago (1976) I included many recent records added since the first edition went to press. I also recorded several more species in this journal (1977), and in a recent quarterly bulletin referred to records of Hook-billed Kites, Black-headed Gulls and a Scarlet Tanager. There are now yet more interesting records to add, some of them reported to me by visitors. They include two species new to our islands and one first breeding record.

Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*. Four nests of this beautiful large heron were found in the Caroni Swamp Sanctuary on 25 July 1978. Each contained fair-sized young, in clutches of two, three and four; indications are that the eggs were laid in June. Though the Great Egret is quite a commonly seen species in suitable habitat, no nests had been recorded since 1926. This is therefore a most welcome development.

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus*. An adult bird was seen on 8 November 1977 by Goran Blidberg and Stefan Samuelsson of Sweden. It was in company with a flock of Scarlet Ibis *E. ruber* flying in to the Caroni roost. This is only the third record for Trinidad.

Black Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus tyrannus*. There are very few records of this beautiful eagle in Trinidad. So I was very pleased to find one in adult plumage amidst lowland forest near Moruga on 11 April 1977. It called loudly and repeatedly from its high perch, a series of 8 — 10 notes on the same pitch — *whew — whew — whew* etc. — in a tone somewhat reminiscent of the Amazon parrot. Possibly the same bird was seen in the same place on 27 August 1978 by Bill Clark, John Lamey and Susan Ennett of U.S.A. This species is much more rarely seen than its congener, *S. ornatus*, which has been found so regularly in recent years, especially in the Northern Range, that it seems quite likely to be breeding in Trinidad.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*. In the course of botanical investigations in the northeast of Aripo Savannah Victor Quesnel found this species in circumstances suggesting breeding. Subsequently, on 1 July 1978 I found an adult bird there performing its elaborate distraction display, known as "high lure". This involved a peculiar fluttering and wheeling about on the ground, with the tail fanned and erect, showing the bright chestnut and buff tail-feathers. I was, however, unable to find nest or young, which must have been nearby on the marshy ground. A nest with two eggs was found by David Rooks near this site on 17th Sept. 1978 with the female incubating. The nest was merely

a depression in a slight tuft of grass at the base of a small shrub. The eggs were pyriform in shape, averaging approximately 43 x 31 mm, and were warm brown covered with blackish blotches and hair-streaks. Very few nests of this race of the snipe have been found in Trinidad.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*. An adult of this Old World species was seen at Claxton Bay on 25 and 26 August 1978 by Bill Clark, John Lamey, Susan Ennett and myself. Conditions were excellent, allowing little doubt as to the bird's identity. It was resting on the mudflat and occasionally flying around or swimming in the sea. It was watched at distances down to 70 metres with binoculars and 40x telescope. The bird was still present on 9 September, when it was seen vainly trying to catch a four-eyed fish, *Anableps*.

Although the Greater Black-backed Gull *L. marinus* is more likely to be found in our area, the clear yellow (not pink) legs, the contrast of black outer primaries to the blackish gray of the mantle and upper wings, and the size of this bird (by comparison with Laughing Gulls *L. atricilla* and other birds close by) indicated the smaller species. Moreover, the colour of back and wings was much too dark for the dark-backed form *atlantis* of the Herring Gull *L. argentatus*, which breeds in the islands of the eastern Atlantic, but has never been recorded in this area.

Although *L. fuscus* has been recorded rarely on the east coast of North America, I can find no previous records from the Caribbean area or South America. The closely related Dominican or Kelp Gull *L. dominicanus* is not recorded further north than the coast of southern Brazil, and seems a much less likely visitor. *L. fuscus* regularly migrates from Europe south to the Nigerian coast, and at this time of year birds may occasionally be affected by tropical storms and find their way to our area. Nevertheless, this remains a most interesting first record.

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougalli*. On 20 April 1978 I watched many of these terns fishing off the western shore of Crown Point, Tobago. Several carried fish to a rocky area nearby, where they fed their mates and in some cases copulated. Also seen feeding each other — a typical breeding activity — were individuals of the Royal Tern *S. maxima* and Sandwich Tern *S. sandvicensis*. No eggs or young were found, however, and a return visit on 14 May 1978 produced no further evidence of breeding at that site. However, on the latter date Royal Terns were seen regularly flying from Store Bay northwards into the mangroves of the Pigeon Point lagoon carrying fish. It seems only a matter of time before the breeding of these three species in Tobago is confirmed.

Striped Owl *Asio clamator*. The first authentic breeding for the endemic race *oberi* of this owl on Tobago was obtained on 22 February 1978 at Prospect Estate. First discovered by a farm worker, it was verified by J. Thorpe, J. Wolfe, P. Feinsinger and L.A. Swann of U.S.A. The nest was on the ground under a shrub surrounded by tall dried grass, and contained three white
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eggs. The female was photographed as she incubated.

White-tailed Goldenthrout *Polytmus guainumbi* — A nest of this hummingbird was found in typical habitat at Aripo Savannah by Victor Quesnel on 11 June 1978. The two eggs, averaging 12.6 x 9.1 mm, were abandoned by the parent for some reason. This is only the third nest found in Trinidad. It closely resembled those in previous records, being cone-shaped and situated two feet above ground in a small *Byrsonima* shrub.

Rufous-shafted Woodstar *Chaetocercus jourdanii* — One was seen in May 1978 by John and Uta Beesley of Britain at the Asa Wright Nature Centre. The deeply forked tail of this rarely seen species was particularly noticeable.

Northern Parula *Parula americana* — A female was seen clearly on Little Tobago island on 1 November 1977 by Goran Blidberg and Stefan Samuelsson. This constitutes only the second record of this species for Tobago.

Blackburnian Warbler *Dendroica fusca* — A male in transitional plumage was seen at Lalaja Road by Russell Brockett on 3 January 1978. This is only the second record for Trinidad of

this northern migrant.

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea* — A male in full breeding plumage seen on 17 March 1977 by D.H. Baldwin, Jack Satterly and Ira F. Weigley is the first record of the species for Trinidad. It was feeding near the perimeter fence of the Textel Station beside the Arima-Blanchisseuse Road at 1900 feet above sea-level, and was watched from close quarters for about ten minutes. This North America species migrates chiefly to Central America, but has been recorded in the West Indies south to the Virgin Islands and rarely in western Venezuela and Curacao.

REFERENCES

- FFRENCH, R.P. 1976. A Guide to the birds of Trinidad and Tobago (second edition). Harwood Books, Pennsylvania. 470 pp.
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