
Some recent additions to the Avifauna of Trinidad and Tobago

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THE latest edition (1980) of my book on local birds contains most of the records of new and unusual species up to late 1978; but for reasons of economy it was not possible to add full accounts of new records in our islands. Two of these, the Lesser Black-backed Gull and Indigo Bunting, were mentioned in the last issue (1978 — 1979) of this journal.

I here present further data collected during 1979 — 1980, including one species new to Trinidad and three new to Tobago, with additional notes on the status of eight others.

American Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*. There have been occasional reports during the last 20 years of sightings of this species. However, none has to my knowledge been documented and confusion with the Scarlet Ibis, *Eudocimus ruber*, locally known also as Flamingo, has led me to be wary of any but properly authenticated records. Such has now come to hand in an extremely careful and well-produced account sent to me by a teenager, Louise White of Tunapuna, who saw the bird while in company with five other people, all of whom knew well the distinction between a flamingo and an ibis.

This was evidently an immature bird, seen at Balandra Bay at midday on April 12, 1980. There had been much rain earlier in the morning, and the bird looked exhausted and attempted to land on the beach without, however, actually doing so. It was observed over a period of ten minutes. This is the first record in Trinidad of this species, which is known along the coasts of western Venezuela and Guyana, as well as the offshore Venezuelan islands of Los Roques and La Orchilla. It is not very surprising that the occasional bird should occur here, situated as we are between the Venezuelan and Guyanese populations. But there is no evidence that these two populations do in fact mingle. Incidentally, no escapes have been reported from the Port of Spain Zoo, where a small group of this species is kept captive.

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*. This spectacular plover continues to thrive in Trinidad, and is evidently now well established since its first record in 1961. In addition to the sizeable breeding colony at Waller Field, birds are now occurring on a regular basis at Pointe-a-Pierre and in the marshes adjoining the Caroni and Nariva swamps, especially during the middle months of the year. As the call-note is so noticeable, I should add to the description in my book by saying "it is a penetrating, high-pitched series of similar notes, *tew-tew-tew*, etc. repeated sometimes for long periods in an excitable fashion."

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*. Four individuals of this large shorebird species were seen at Pointe-a-Pierre on September, 25 and 27, 1980. Observers included myself, my wife Margaret, and two visiting Swedish ornithologists. The birds were resting at high tide on the mud-flats in company with large numbers of other shorebirds and seabirds; they associated mostly with Whimbrels *Numenius phaeopus*. This species can be distinguished from its congener *L. haemastica* by its larger size, generally buffy brown appearance, cinnamon underwings, and the absence of

contrasting black and white patterning on the wings and tail. The bill is also very long, appearing straight in the field, with the basal half pinkish. These birds were examined from a 50-metre distance through x 10 binoculars, and were seen well as they walked about on the mud, and also in flight.

Though the congeneric Hudsonian Godwit has been found occasionally in Trinidad in recent years, occurring in the course of its migration to southern South America, usually in September/October, the Marbled Godwit has not been reliably recorded here during this century. Leotaud (1866) collected a specimen in Trinidad, and it was also reported by Kirk (1883) from Tobago; however, the latter record's authenticity was doubted by me in a previous article in this journal (1973). Bond (1978) states that the species winters mainly on the west of the continent and in Central America. It is a rare transient in the West Indies, with records from the Greater Antilles and from Grenada and Carriacou. The above records of this striking species are therefore of exceptional interest to students of shorebird migration, being the furthest south on the eastern side of South America.

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*. This seabird has been reliably recorded off Trinidad several times. The first record for Tobago came when Chip and Linda Weseloh from Canada saw and photographed an adult bird at Pigeon Point on January 8, 1980. The bird landed on the beach and allowed a close approach.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*. I recorded in the last issue (1978 — 1979) of this journal a bird seen in August and September 1978 at Claxton Bay. Two similar birds were seen in September and October 1979 at Pointe-a-Pierre in company with Laughing Gulls *L. atricilla* and terns. However, in a letter James Bond, the eminent American authority on West Indian birds, has warned me against assuming that these birds are in fact *L. fuscus*, which has rarely been found in the western hemisphere. He says there may be confusion with the Band-tailed Gull *L. belcheri*, a South American species which resembles *fuscus* in many ways; this latter has been recorded in Florida and so might turn up here. I am, nevertheless, inclined to believe that our birds are *fuscus* for the following reasons:— (a) all our birds have been adults and have *not* shown the broad subterminal black tail band of adult *belcheri*. (b) *belcheri* is not recorded on the eastern coast of South America north of Uruguay. The Pacific race breeds north to Peru and wanders up to Panama, so the Florida records probably pertain to this race. (c) Apart from the Trinidad records *fuscus* has been reported four times from Aruba during 1973 — 75, and a specimen was taken on St. Martin in 1966 (Voous 1977).

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*. On May 14, 1980 Tim Manolis of the U.S.A. noticed a few individuals of this species at Waterloo, in company with other terns. There are no other "spring" records for Trinidad of this northern breeding species.

Striped Owl *Asio clamator*. Following the recent discovery at Prospect of the first recorded nest of the endemic Tobago race, it is gratifying to discover that this owl is known from more than one area of Tobago. Reports have come in of owls in the scrubby hill country near Hillsborough Dam. As this habitat is not uncommon on Tobago, the bird may be less rare than has been feared.

White Bellbird (*Procnias alba*). The unmistakable call of this species was heard by myself and my wife over a period of six hours on September 1, 1980 in the Caura Valley. The male bird was calling from a patch of thick forest on the west side of the valley near La Plata. It was not seen, but the musical two-syllabled call, resembling *aahn — king*, is well known to both of us.

This is only the fourth record for Trinidad, and the first since 1969, of this spectacular cotinga. The species is known in the tropical rain-forests of Venezuela, the Guianas and northern Brazil, but it has not yet been recorded from that part of Venezuela adjacent to Trinidad. This fact has led James Bond (in litt.) to query my statement (1980) that the species is a rare visitor to Trinidad. He feels that it is more likely to be a rare resident. However, my discussions on the subject with David and Barbara Snow, probably the world's experts on the cotinga family, tend to confirm my theory. It seems most unlikely that such a conspicuous bird — both as regards appearance and sound — if resident, should have escaped the notice of interested observers in Trinidad, who since 1965 have numbered many hundreds. Moreover, our knowledge of bird dispersal within the South American continent is still extremely sketchy. All recent evidence leads us to believe that dispersal, both local and international, is much more extensive than was hitherto thought.

Piratic Flycatcher *Legatus leucophaeus*. This flycatcher is quite a common breeding bird in Trinidad, probably migrating to the mainland between September and February. Its habit of stealing the nests of icterids, especially the "cornbirds", is well known. It has not yet been authentically recorded from Tobago, though I did hear the characteristic call once near Charlotteville in April 1963; the record lacked corroboration. Again I heard the call, this time of two birds answering each other, near Hillsborough Dam, Tobago on April 16, 1980. My wife and I scanned the area for nearly half an hour, but were unable to locate the singers. However, the habitat was right for this species, and several Yellowtails *Psarocolius* were about.

Crested Doradito *Pseudocolopteryx sclateri*. Birds seen in June and July 1979 by Tim Manolis appear to be of this species, very rarely recorded in Trinidad. I have never seen it. Manolis, in a carefully documented account, reports that this tiny flycatcher resembles the northern kinglet *Regulus*. It frequents low vegetation in freshwater marshes bordering Caroni Swamp; all records are from the mid-year months, suggesting migration from southern South America.

Red-breasted Blackbird *Leistes militaris*. This species, first

recorded from Lowlands, Tobago in November 1974, seems to be holding its own. A recent report mentions one seen at Crown Point Airport in February 1980. Black-and-White Warbler *Mniotilta varia*. Sharon Goldwasser of the U.S.A. saw an immature bird of this species in forested country by the Roxborough — Bloody Bay road on January 31, 1980. This is the first record for Tobago of a species that might have been expected before, since there are now about a dozen records for Trinidad where, however, observers in the area of the Asa Wright Nature Centre are much more numerous than in Tobago.

Additional note. I will also briefly allude to three other first records for species in Trinidad and Tobago, which have already been fully documented in international publications. These are:—

Azure Gallinule *Porphyryla flavirostris*. An adult bird seen at the edge of Nariva Swamp on July 2, 1978 (S. Quinn, F. Sibley et al.).

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*. J. Bull (1978) reported the first occurrence in Tobago (and the whole Caribbean region) of this Old World wader on July 7, 1977. In the same article Bull reported a first record, also from Tobago, of the nominate Eurasian subspecies of the Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*.

Prairie Warbler *Dendroica discolor*. An immature seen at the edge of Caroni Swamp on March 21, 1978 (A. Keith).

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