

First Report of The Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee

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For nearly four decades, reports of rare bird records for Trinidad and Tobago were compiled and evaluated single-handedly by Richard ffrench, who periodically published summaries of such records and incorporated those records into two editions of his comprehensive field guide to the country's birds (see ffrench 1973, 1991, and references therein). During this period many regional committees were established in the more developed countries to evaluate and compile records of rare birds within their jurisdiction. Consistent with this trend, ffrench's efforts to objectively compile and evaluate rare bird records culminated in the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee (TTRBC) in September 1995.

The TTRBC, which currently comprises seven volunteer members, is an independent organisation governed by a set of bye-laws. In addition to the authors, the initial TTRBC members included Richard ffrench, Davis Finch, Ian Lambie, William Murphy and Victor Quesnel. The primary functions of the TTRBC are to ascertain which records of rare birds in Trinidad and Tobago are acceptable beyond reasonable doubt, to publish periodic reports of TTRBC decisions, and to maintain an official list of birds for Trinidad and Tobago.

METHODOLOGY

The TTRBC solicits details for all reports of species on its review list. Observers are encouraged to submit written reports (accompanied by documentation, if possible, such as photographs, videotapes, tape recordings, etc.) to the TTRBC's secretary, who is responsible for assigning a number to and cataloging each report received, circulating the reports among TTRBC members, and compiling the decisions. Each TTRBC member evaluates whether the information provided in each report is sufficient to support the

identification. A record is accepted when a minimum of six members vote for it. For species whose origin is questionable (e.g., escaped cagebird), each member judges whether the bird more likely arrived under its own power or with the aid of humans; a minimum of six votes is required to accept the record as a natural occurrence.

Because the majority of records rejected by the TTRBC lacked sufficient details to support the identification, it is imperative that observers report as much information as possible regarding the record. Nevertheless, we encourage birders to submit records regardless of the amount of information available because rejected records provide information for possible occurrence. We encourage birders to always carry with them a small, hardbound field notebook in which details of unusual bird sightings may be written (Dittmann and Lasley 1992, available from us upon request) and subsequently prepared for submission to the TTRBC. A TTRBC Rare Bird Report Form may be used as a guide for submitting reports, but is not mandatory. Copies of the TTRBC Bye-Laws, Review List and Rare Bird Report Form are available upon request from G. White, the TTRBC Secretary, at the above address.

All records previously accepted by ffrench (1991) are accepted by the TTRBC. Nevertheless, all records remain subject to reconsideration. All records reviewed by the TTRBC are deposited in a permanent archive at the Department of Life Sciences, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, where they remain accessible to researchers seeking information beyond what is published in periodic TTRBC reports.

In addition to providing a concise overview of the TTRBC's history, objectives and methodology, this inaugural report is intended to provide the results for

the records circulated by the TTRBC during the period of 1996-1998. The highlights of accepted records have been briefly published elsewhere (ffrench and Hayes 1998, ffrench and White submitted).

RESULTS

This report includes 96 records extending from October 1981 to February 1998, based on reports submitted by 27 observers. Of these, 76 (79.2%) were accepted, 18 (18.8%) rejected, and two (2.1%) placed in a supplemental list of species whose identification was accepted but natural occurrence was rejected. The records included 52 (54.2%) from Trinidad, 38 (39.6%) from Tobago, two (2.1%) from the Bocas Islands, and four (4.2%) from St. Giles and Little Tobago.

The following species accounts are arranged in the taxonomic sequence of the American Ornithologists' Union (1998). Each record includes the locality, date(s), observer(s) who submitted a report (except for rejected records), and the TTRBC record number. Details for records published elsewhere are cited. Island abbreviations include: CHA=Chacachacare; LTO=Little Tobago; MON=Monos; STG=St. Giles Islands; TOB=Tobago; TRI=Trinidad; T&T=Trinidad and Tobago. For accepted and supplemental records, the initials of those who found and/or identified the bird and submitted a report are listed first, followed by a semicolon; the initials of others who submitted reports are listed alphabetically by surname (see Acknowledgements). For rejected records, the reason for the verdict is presented.

RECORDS ACCEPTED

Greater Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*. Single birds were seen: 1 km south of Carenage, TRI, 3 Jul 1994 (FH; 1996-2), representing the 1st for the Gulf of Paria (Hayes 1996); several km south of Crown Point, TOB, 3 Jul 1994 (FH; 1996-4), representing the 1st for TOB (Hayes 1996); and several km S of Crown Point, TOB, 29 Jun 1997 (FH; 1998-27), providing the 2nd for TOB.

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*. One was seen 19 km N of Grande Riviere, TRI, and 30 km WSW of Crown Point, TOB (11% 01'N, 61% 03'W), 23 Feb

1997 (FH; 1998-21), representing the 4th for TRI (nearest island).

Red-Billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*. One was seen 8 km N of Las Cuevas, TRI (10% 52'N, 61% 24'W), 3 Jul 1994 (FH; 1996-3), representing the 4th for TRI (see Hayes [1996], who overlooked the record by Morgan [1983]).

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*. At least one individual, possibly three adults, were seen at STG, 29 Sep 1995 (Rff; 1996-11). Four adults were seen about 1.5 km N of STG, 20 Feb 1996 (AC; 1996-12). These records constitute the 2nd and 3rd for T&T; the only previous record was from TRI (ffrench 1991).

Red-Footed Booby *Sula sula*. A light-phased adult was seen 17.5 km N of Matelot, TRI, and 35 km WSW of Crown Point, TOB (10% 59'N, 61% 07'W), 17 Mar 1996 (FH; 1998-14), representing the 1st for TRI (nearest island; Hayes 1998).

Cocoi Heron *Ardea cocoi*. Records for TOB include single birds at: Buccoo, 24 Mar 1996 (FH; 1998-16), and Turtle Beach, 12 Jan 1997 (FH; 1998-20), representing the 2nd (Hayes 1998) and 3rd for TOB.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*. Records include: one at Buccoo, TOB, 14 Aug 1990 (GW; 1996-34); one at Bon Accord (not Buccoo), TOB, 23 Dec 1993 (FH; 1996-1); one at Speyside, TOB, 7 Nov 1994 (FH; 1996-8); two at Buccoo, TOB, 20 Jan to 26 Mar 1995 (DF; FH; 1996-25, 1998-12); one at Nariva, TRI, 13 Jan 1997 (DF; 1998-1); one at Trincity, TRI, 14 Jan 1997 (DF; 1998-2); one at Buccoo, TOB, 18 Jan to 20 Mar 1997 (DF; FH; 1998-3); two at Trincity, TRI, 16-17 Jun 1997 (FH; 1998-24); one at Nariva, TRI, 31 Aug 1997 (PW; 1998-36); and one at Trincity, TRI, 4 Sep 1997 (PW; 1998-37). All records were of light-phased birds. Several TOB records were reported by Hayes (1996, 1998). This Old World species appears to be increasing in T&T, and may even be nesting. A breeding colony of up to 20 pairs was recently established on Barbados (Raffaele *et al.* 1998).

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*. An immature was photographed at Buccoo, TOB, 3 Nov 1986

(WS; 1996-19), representing the 1st for the New World. It was considered a natural vagrant rather than an escaped bird because: (1) it was a young bird unlikely to have spent any time in captivity; (2) the legs were unbanded; (3) no nearby zoos have kept the species; and (4) TOB is an unlikely destination for an escaped bird, but a likely landfall for a trans-Atlantic vagrant. A. James (pers. comm. to WS) stated that two birds had been present.

Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*. An adult was seen at LTO, 17 Jan 1997 (DF; 1998-5), providing the 1st record of natural occurrence for LTO. Previous LTO records up until 1972 were thought to represent birds released at TOB in 1959 (ffrench 1991).

King Vulture *Sarcoramphus papa*. Single adults were seen soaring above Trinity Hills, TRI, 20 Feb 1994 (GW; 1996-43), and Aripo Savannas, TRI, 14 Jan 1996 (PT; 1996-52). This species appears to be a sporadic vagrant to TRI.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*. An immature was seen at Waterloo, TRI, 7-21 Dec 1996 (Rff; GW; 1997-1). Up to four immatures were seen at Waterloo, TRI, 22 Jul 1997 to 26 Jan 1998 (GW; FH, IS, PW; 1998-28). These records represent the 3rd and 4th for TRI.

Black-Bellied Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna autumnalis*. A flock of over 50 birds, including a group of five chicks, was seen at Buccoo, TOB, 31 Dec 1985 (GW; 1996-41), representing the 1st confirmed record and 1st breeding record for TOB.

Ring-Necked Duck *Aythya collaris*. An immature male and two females were seen at Buccoo Swamp and Lowlands, TOB, 18 Jan 1997, with a female lingering as late as 20 Mar 1997 (DF; FH; 1998-6), representing the 2nd for TOB (the 1st is pending).

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*. A male was seen at Arena Reservoir, TRI, 14 Jan 1995 (DF; 1996-26). Another male was seen at Lowlands, TOB, 20 Dec 1995, representing the 2nd for TOB and 1st since the 19th century (Hayes 1998).

Masked Duck *Oxyura dominica*. Two adult males were seen at Pitch Lake, TRI, 30 Jan 1993 (GW; 1996-40). Two males and a female were seen at Buccoo, TOB, 15 Jan to 22 Feb 1993 (DF; GW; 1996-28), and a female at the same locality on 21 Jan 1995 (DF; 1996-27). These are the 1st records for TOB since the 19th century.

Yellow-Headed Caracara *Milvago chimachima*. An adult was seen at Bon Accord, TOB, 18 Jan 1997 to 11 May 1998 (DF; FH; 1998-10). In both 1997 and 1998 it was observed carrying nesting material, but a potential mate and the nest eluded detection; this is the 1st nesting attempt for TOB since it first appeared in 1987 (ffrench 1991).

Trinidad Piping-Guan *Pipile pipile*. Several birds were seen at Grande Riviere, TRI, 30 May 1997 to present (FH; 1998-23), where they have been seen regularly since 1985 (James and Hislop 1997).

Caribbean Coot *Fulica caribaea*. An adult was seen at Pointe-a-Pierre, TRI, 6 Mar 1994 (FH; 1998-29), which was present for some time before and after (M. Gaskin and K. Sheppard, pers. comm.). A pair was seen at Buccoo, TOB, 30 May to 21 Aug 1997 (BG; FH; 1998-30).

Double-Striped Thick-Knee *Burhinus bistriatus*. One was seen at Orange Grove, TRI, 14 Aug 1991 (GW; 1996-36), representing the 2nd for TRI (ffrench 1993); one was photographed at Petite Trou, TOB, 16 Aug 1995 (ER; 1996-14), representing the 1st for TOB; and one was seen and heard at Wallerfield, TRI, 8 Dec 1996 (Rff; 1997-2), representing the 3rd for TRI.

Wilson's Plover *Charadrius wilsonia*. An alternate plumaged adult was seen at Buccoo, TOB, 27 Apr 1996 (FH; 1998-17), representing the 1st for TOB (Hayes 1998).

American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus*. At Waterloo, TRI, records include two adults, 7 Oct 1995 to 11 Jan 1996 (GW; BO; 1996-48), and five adults, 9 Dec 1996 (Rff; 1997-3), representing the 3rd and 4th records for TRI.

Black-Necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus*. Two were seen along the beach at Buccoo, TOB, 19 Aug 1997 (FH; 1998-31), representing the 2nd record for TOB.

Spotted redshank *Tringa erythropus*. A basic plumaged bird was seen at Bon Accord Lagoon, TOB, 13 Feb 1983 (DFi; 1996-15), representing the 1st record of this Palearctic vagrant for T&T (Fisher 1998).

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*. One was seen at Buccoo, TOB, 18 Jan to 27 Feb 1997 (DF; FH; 1998-7), representing the 1st record of this Palearctic vagrant for T&T. The bird was found earlier in Jan 1997 and photographed (W. Petersen and D. McRae, pers. comm.), but details have not yet been submitted.

Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*. Individuals were seen at Caltoo Trace, Nariva, TRI, 15 Sep 1991 (GW; 1996-37) and at Caroni Rice Project, TRI, 27 Sep 1992 (GW; 1996-39). This species has since been removed from the Review List.

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*. Single birds were seen at Waterloo, TRI, 7-19 Oct 1995 and 10 Mar 1996 (GW; FH; 1996-47), and on 19 Oct 1996 (FH; 1998-19), with the 10 Mar date constituting the only spring occurrence for T&T (Hayes 1998).

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*. Two immatures were photographed at Buccoo, TOB, 11-14 Aug 1990 (GW; 1996-33), representing the 6th for TOB.

Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus*. At least two dark, probably immature birds were seen at Crown Point, TOB, 15-16 Jan 1996 (BO; 1996-50), providing the 2nd record for TOB.

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*. A pale, probably immature bird was seen at Crown Point, TOB, 16 Jan 1996 (BO; 1996-51), representing the 2nd for TOB.

Common Black-Headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*. A worn, alternate plumaged adult was photographed between Store Bay and Pigeon Point, TOB, 4-14 Jul

1994 (FH; 1996-5). Details were published by Hayes (1996).

Lesser Black-Backed Gull *Larus fuscus*. A subadult was photographed at the Port of Spain Sewage Ponds, TRI, 6 Oct 1985 (GW; 1996-31), an adult and an immature were seen at Waterloo, TRI, 26 Dec 1993 (GW; 1996-42), and a subadult was seen at Waterloo, TRI, 11 Jan 1996 (BO; 1996-49). These records provide the 5th, 6th and 7th records for TRI. A 1st-winter immature was seen at Buccoo Reef and Turtle Beach, TOB, 15 Jan to 20 Mar 1997 (DF; FH; 1998-4), and an adult was seen at Pigeon Point, TOB, 20 Mar 1997 (FH; 1998-22), representing the 3rd and 4th for TOB.

Black-Legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*. An immature was seen by many observers at Blanchisseuse, TRI, 17 Feb 1998 (FG; 1998-38), providing the 1st record for T&T and the southernmost for the western Atlantic (Raffaele *et al.* 1998).

Scaled Dove *Columbina squammata*. One was seen and videotaped at Nariva Swamp, TRI, 7 Dec 1996 (RMcN; 1997-4). The only previous record for T&T was from Toco, TRI, in 1929 (ffrench 1991).

Mangrove Cuckoo *Coccyzus minor*. Records for TOB include: one at Buccoo, TOB, 18-19 Jan 1992 (DF; 1998-9); one photographed at Buccoo, TOB, 9-10 Jul 1994 (FH; 1996-6), providing the 1st documented record for TOB (Hayes 1996); and up to three at Buccoo, TOB, 18 Jan to 3 Jul 1997 (DF; FH; 1998-8). The spate of recent records suggests a resident population on TOB, but breeding has yet to be confirmed.

Rufous-Shafted Woodstar *Chaetocercus jourdanii*. An immature female was seen along the Blanchisseuse Rd. (c. 10.25 mile post), TRI, 3 Aug 1995 (Rff; 1996-10). Previous records of this species were mostly immatures or females in the Northern Range (ffrench 1991).

Gray-Throated Leaf-tosser *Sclerurus albigularis*. Records for TOB include: a nesting female captured and photographed 2.1 km SSE of Castara, 21-22 Mar

1996 (FH; TG, WH; 1998-15); a heard bird 2.1 km SSE of Castara; an observed bird 2.0 km S of Englishman's Bay; and a heard bird 1.0 km SSE of Parrot Hall, all on 20 Aug 1997 (FH; 1998-32). These records provided the 1st for TOB since 1903 (Hayes *et al.* 1998).

Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia*. One was seen at Trincity, TRI, 1 Oct 1994 (FH; 1996-7), providing the earliest date for T&T (Hayes 1996).

Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*. One (not three, as in ffrench and Hayes [1998]) was seen at Trincity, TRI, and two at the Port of Spain Sewage Ponds, TRI, 17 Jan 1995 (DF; 1996-30), representing the 4th and 5th records for TRI.

Chestnut-Sided Warbler *Dendroica pensylvanica*. An immature was seen at Simla, TRI, 13 Jan 1995 (DF; 1996-29), representing the 6th for TRI.

Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra*. An adult male was seen and heard at Waterloo, TRI, 11 May 1994 (GW; 1996-44), providing the latest date for TRI (ffrench 1991).

Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea*. An adult male was seen at Edward Trace near Lagon Bouffe, TRI, 28 Apr 1983 (VQ; 1996-53), representing the 2nd for TRI (ffrench 1991). Another adult male was photographed at MON, unknown date in Apr 1995 (unknown observer, photo given to GG; 1996-13), representing the 1st for the Bocas Islands.

Rose-Breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*. A female was seen at CHA, 22 Apr 1995 (GS; 1996-16), providing the 1st record for the Bocas Islands. A male was seen at the Asa Wright Nature Centre, TRI, on 17 Jun 1997 (NN; 1998-11), representing the 3rd for TRI and latest date.

RECORDS REJECTED

Greater Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*. Five shearwaters were seen several km S of Crown Point, TOB, 23 Jun 1996 (1998-18), but the identification was rejected due to poor viewing conditions (see Hayes 1988).

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*. An all-dark shearwater was seen sitting on the water 1 km W of Port of Spain, TRI, 29 Jun 1997 (1998-26), but other dark *Pterodroma* sp. or a dark-phased Manx Shearwater *P. puffinus* were not eliminated. There is only one previous record of Sooty Shearwater for TRI (ffrench 1993).

Agami Heron *Agamia agami*. One was identified at Nariva Swamp, TRI, 14 Feb 1998 (1998-39), but the observers were not confident of its identification.

Green Ibis *Mesembrinibis cayennensis*. An ibis identified as this species was flushed from El Socorro Marsh, TRI, 9 Jun 1988 (1996-23), which would be the 1st for T&T. However, the brevity of observation precludes acceptance.

Blue-Winged Teal *Anas discors*. A female or immature teal was flushed from a puddle on LTO, 7 Nov 1994 (1996-9), which would have provided the 1st record for LTO (see Hayes 1996).

Hook-Billed Kite *Chondrohierax uncinatus*. A light-phased bird was reported from Las Lapas Trace, TRI, 12 Jan 1989 (1996-21), but may have been a misidentified immature Gray-headed Kite *Leptodon cayanensis*.

Rufous Crab-Hawk *Buteogallus aequinoctialis*. A subadult was photographed at Nariva Swamp, TRI, 10 Feb 1996 (1996-17). Two TTRBC members felt that other *Buteogallus* spp. could not be eliminated. However, the record is currently being reconsidered.

Crested Caracara *Caracara plancus*. An adult was seen at the Aripo Livestock Farm, TRI, 26 Apr 1992 (1996-38), but no description was provided.

Rufous-Necked Wood-Rail *Aramides axillaris*. One was reported from the Port of Spain Sewage Ponds, TRI, 29 Mar 1986 (1996-32), but was rejected due to inadequate description. One was briefly seen flying across the road at Pointe Gourde, TRI, 20 Jun 1997 (1998-25), but was rejected due to brevity of observation.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*. A basic plumaged bird was seen at the Port of Spain Sewage Ponds, TRI, 5 Oct 1992 (1996-24). Although the bird was well described and initially accepted, the circumstances regarding the observation were questioned, resulting in rejection during a 2nd round.

Yellow-Billed Tern *Sterna superciliaris*. A basic plumaged adult was seen at Buccoo, TOB, 23 Aug 1997 (1998-33), which would have represented the 1st for TOB. It was rejected due to possible confusion with Least Tern *S. albifrons* on the basis of its bill colouration.

Red-Shouldered Macaw *Ara nobilis*. An individual was reported from Waterloo, TRI, 20 Oct 1994 (1996-46), but the description did not eliminate the White-eyed Parakeet *Aratinga leucophthalmus*.

Blue-Tailed Emerald *Chlorostilbon mellisugus*. A female was reported from Tunapuna, TRI, 16-17 Sep 1994 (1996-45), but no description was provided.

Rufous-Shafted Woodstar *Chaetocercus jourdanii*. A male was seen at Arena Forest, TRI, 11 Jan 1989 (1996-22), but the circumstances regarding the observation were questioned.

Long-Billed Gnatwren *Ramphocaenus melanurus*. A pair was reported from Englishman's Bay, TOB, 31 Dec 1996 to 6 Jan 1997 (1997-5), which would have been the 1st for TOB. However, the calls were not described, suggesting possible confusion with House Wren *Troglodytes aeodon*.

Prairie Warbler *Dendroica discolor*. An adult male was glimpsed from a boat as it flew past Buccoo Reef, TOB, 4 Oct 1981 (1996-20), which would have represented the 1st for TOB. However, the brevity of observation precludes acceptance.

Sooty Grassquit *Tiaris fuliginosa*. An adult male was seen at Speyside, TOB, 15 Feb 1996 (1996-18), which would have represented the 1st for TOB. However, the underwing linings and calls were not described, suggesting possible confusion with Blue-black Grassquit *Volatinia jacarina*.

SUPPLEMENTARY LIST

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*. Four were seen at Orange Grove, TRI, 18-30 Sep 1990 (GW; 1996-35), providing the 1st record for TRI. A feral population of at least 40 appears to be growing (ffrench 1998).

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. A pair was photographed at Caroni, TRI, 28 May 1997 (BG; 1998-35), providing the 1st record for TRI. The origin of the birds is unknown, but it is rapidly colonising South America, with the nearest known locality at La Guaira, near Caracas (Sharpe *et al.* 1997).

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