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## **Fourth Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee: Rare Birds in Trinidad and Tobago in 2004 and 2005**

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# Fourth Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee: Rare Birds in Trinidad and Tobago in 2004 and 2005

**Martyn Kenefick**

36 Newalloville Ave., San Juan, Trinidad and Tobago

E-mail: [martynkenefick@hotmail.com](mailto:martynkenefick@hotmail.com)

The Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee (TTRBC) was established in 1995 with the principal aim to assess, document and archive the occurrence of rare or unusual birds in Trinidad and Tobago. The Committee has now assessed all records submitted during 2004 and 2005. In all, 75 records were adjudged, representing 52 different species. As a result of these submissions three additional species have been added to the Official List of Birds of Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, a further six species have been found on Tobago for the first time. Of those assessed, in only seven cases (9%) did the Committee feel that the identification had been inconclusive. The records tabulated below follow the nomenclature and taxonomic order of the American Ornithologists Union South American checklist; 10<sup>th</sup> version February 2006.

The Committee comprises the following members: Martyn Kenefick (Secretary), Richard French, Geoffrey Gomes, Floyd Hayes, Bill Murphy, Courtenay Rooks and Graham White.

We are aware that a number of other rare birds are found each year in Trinidad and Tobago and urge finders not only to report their sightings to us but to document same. A recently revised list of those species considered by the TTRBC can be accessed, together with our Photo Gallery, from the home page of the TTFNC at [www.wow.net/ttfnc](http://www.wow.net/ttfnc)

## RECORDS ACCEPTED

An immature male **American Wigeon**, *Anas americana*, was present on Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago from 21-24 February, 2005 (MK). There have now been three records since 1995, all in Tobago.

A female **Northern Pintail**, *Anas acuta*, was seen briefly at Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago on 14 November, 2004 (MK). Only added to the Trinidad and Tobago list in 2001, this is the fifth bird found.

A female **Ring-necked Duck**, *Aythya collaris*, was found on Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago on 14 November, 2004 (MK) and a male was at Lowlands, Tobago on 19 February, 2005 (DMcC *et al.*). All nine birds found since 1995 have been in Tobago.

Up to eight **Masked Ducks**, *Nomonyx dominicus*, including two adult males in breeding plumage, were present at a small pond within Caroni rice project from 6 October, 2002 - 25 January, 2003 at least (CR, MK *et al.*). On 19

June, 2005, two males in breeding plumage were found at the Pitch Lake (RN). Their secretive nature may well belie the true abundance of this rarely seen species.

At least two **Trinidad Piping-Guans**, *Pipile pipile*, were found close to the TSTT station at Morne Bleu on 24 March, 2005 (GW, MK). This is the first documented record away from the traditional viewing area at Montevideo since 1995.

A single **Cory's Shearwater**, *Calonectris diomedea*, was seen close offshore from Grafton Beach, Tobago on 7 March, 2005 (RH). Only the second record since 1998, this remains an elusive species in Trinidad and Tobago waters.

A single **Greater Shearwater**, *Puffinus gravis*, flew offshore from Little Tobago on 13 June, 2004 (NH). This sighting ties in well with the documented annual passage of large shearwaters passed Guadeloupe each June, and is the first record since 1997.

A single **Neotropic Cormorant**, *Phalacrocorax brasilianus*, found at Bon Accord sewage ponds on 14 November, 2004 (MK) represents the first record for Tobago.

An adult **Rufescent Tiger-Heron**, *Tigrisoma lineatum*, was found in shallow freshwater marsh at Waller Field on 27 January, 2005 (KC, BM *et al.*) and an immature was photographed inside Bush Bush Reserve on 21 June, 2005 (RN). Whilst this species is a rare resident to the Nariva Swamp area, this is the first documented record for Waller Field.

A sub adult **Gray Heron**, *Ardea cinerea*, was found in fields beside the highway at Trincity on 27 January, 2005 (KC, BM *et al.*) and a first winter plumaged bird was found at the Aripo Agriculture Research Station on 12 February, 2005 (MK *et al.*). This brings to four the number of birds found in the last six years; prior to that, the last documented record was back in 1959.

An adult **King Vulture**, *Sarcoramphus papa*, was seen soaring over the upper Arima Valley on 11 February, 2004 (DL). A true rarity in Trinidad, this brings to just five the number found in the last 12 years.

A flock of at least 85 **Greater (Caribbean) Flamingoes**, *Phoenicopterus ruber*, were found feeding at low tide immediately south of Carli Bay on 5 July, 2005 (MK). The only other large flock recorded in Trinidad (137 birds in August, 2003) was at the same locality.

A female **Hook-billed Kite**, *Chondrohierax uncinatus*, soared over Waller Field on 3 November, 2005 (MK, GW). Possibly still resident in south Trinidad, but very scarce; this is just the seventh record for Trinidad and Tobago since 1995.

A single **Swallow-tailed Kite**, *Elanoides forficatus*, was seen flying over Gilpin Trace, Tobago on 8 June, 2005 (NG). This is only the second ever documented record for Tobago, the last being in 1963.

Two **Crane Hawks**, *Geranospiza caerulescens*, likely to be a pair, were found at Waller Field on 18 June, 2004 (KC, BM *et al.*). In the same general area, one was seen on 12 February, 2005 (BM, DR *et al.*) and two seen together on 28 May, 2005 (MK, GW). Elsewhere, one was seen on several dates from 29 November, 2004 at Carlsen Fields (NL). Whilst the very first sighting of this species was as recent as January 2001, there is now every likelihood that it will soon be added to the list of species known to breed in Trinidad.

An adult **Common Black-Hawk**, *Buteogallus anthracinus*, seen soaring over Gilpin Trace, Tobago on 26 October, 2005 (DS, MG) is the first documented record for the island in the last 10 years.

An adult **Black Hawk-Eagle**, *Spizaetus tyrannus*, seen perched beside a small farm at San Francique on 28 December, 2003 (HK) may well have been the same bird found in the same area on 26 June, 2004. Elsewhere, adults were found flying over Sangre Chiquito on 12 March, 2004 (MK) and at Waller Field on 28 July, 2005 (MK). Whilst still undoubtedly rare in Trinidad, this brings to 10 the number of birds documented since 1995.

Two adult **Crested Caracaras**, *Caracara cheriway*, were seen along the coast road at Manzanilla Bay on 7 August, 2005 (GW). Still a rare visitor to Trinidad from mainland South America, this brings to seven the number of birds found since 2000.

Single adult **Aplomado Falcons**, *Falco femoralis*, were observed hunting the high tide shorebird roost at Brickfields on 1 January, 2004 (AM) and perched on a small tree on the track in Bush Bush, 15 April, 2004 (MK). Two records is an average return in recent years. Sadly none were reported in 2005, the first blank year since 1999.

A **Bat Falcon**, *Falco ruficularis*, found on the coast road at Bloody Bay, Tobago on 29 October, 2005 (NG) is the first documented record for Tobago.

A **Spotted Rail**, *Rallus maculatus*, was found dead at Warren Road, Caroni on 15 June, 2004 (GW). Sadly, the only two records of this extremely secretive species since 1995 have both been road kills.

Two adult **Black-necked Stilts**, *Himantopus mexicanus*, found at Bon Accord sewage ponds on 13 August,

2005 (MK) are just the second record for Tobago.

A single **Upland Sandpiper**, *Bartramia longicauda*, was found on Caroni rice project on 17 April, 2004 (MK). This species remains a decidedly rare passage migrant with just seven found in the last 10 years.

A juvenile **Buff-breasted Sandpiper**, *Tryngites subruficollis*, found at Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago on 20 September, 2005 (SR) was shortly followed by a further two birds at Caroni rice project on 6 October, 2005 (MK, GW). Despite a blank year in 2004, this brings the total found in the last 10 years to 29 birds.

An adult **Pomarine Jaeger**, *Stercorarius pomarinus*, seen from a fishing boat offshore Little Tobago on 18 March, 2005 (NH) is only the sixth bird found in the last 10 years.

A **Ring-billed Gull**, *Larus delawarensis*, in first winter plumage was photographed at Waterloo on 12 November, 2004, (RN). Close by at Orange Valley, a bird initially in second winter moulting into adult winter plumage was found on 6 August, 2005 and remained until the year end at least. This latter bird is the first record of over-summering in Trinidad and Tobago. Hitherto, its status was of a scarce winter visitor.

An adult **Franklin's Gull**, *Larus pipixcan*, was found at Orange Valley on 14 February, 2005 (MK *et al.*). This is the seventh record for Trinidad; all previous birds were in first winter plumage.

An adult **Caspian Tern**, *Hydroprogne caspia*, recorded at Orange Valley on 24 November, 2005 (NL) is only the second record for Trinidad, the last being in 1953. Coincidentally, an adult was found in Barbados three days later; their first for 40 years.

A party of five **Black Skimmers**, *Rynchops niger*, were found at Bon Accord sewage ponds on 12 September, 2004 (MK). This is the first documented record for Tobago.

An adult **Scaly-naped Pigeon**, *Patagioenas squamosa*, seen and photographed at Speyside, Tobago on 2 January, 2005 (HB) is the first record of this species for Trinidad and Tobago. A second bird, again in Tobago, but at the opposite end of the island, was seen at Mt. Irvine on 18 June, 2005 (GW). This species is a common resident throughout the Lesser Antilles as far south as Grenada.

A **Dark-billed Cuckoo**, *Coccyzus melacoryphus*, was found at a small farm in San Francique on 30 July, 2004 (HK), where it stayed for at least five days. This is just the second record in the last 10 years.

A **Fork-tailed Palm-Swift**, *Tachornis squamata*, seen flying over a residential area in Mt. Irvine on 2 March, 2005 (DH) constitutes the first record for Tobago.

A **Scaled Antpitta**, *Grallaria guatimalensis*, found on a steep forested slope on the Blanchisseuse Rd. on 1 Feb-

ruary, 2004 (MK, AM, GW) is only the third documented record for Trinidad in the last 10 years.

A pair of **Lesser Elaenia**, *Elaenia chiriquensis*, was seen attempting to nest at Waller Field from 20 May, 2005 (MK, GW). Confusion over the identification of Elaenias may contribute to the very few documented reports of this species.

One **Variiegated Flycatcher**, *Empidonomus varius*, was found beside the Cunapo River near Sangre Grande on 30 June, 2004 (MK) and two were seen together on Morne Catherine 25 June, 2005 (MK, GW). Four of the seven birds documented in Trinidad in the last 10 years have been found in June.

One **Yellow-throated Vireo**, *Vireo flavifrons*, seen at Buccoo Marsh, Tobago on 28 January, 2005 (NG, BM *et al.*) constitutes only the fourth record for Trinidad and Tobago and the first seen since 1971.

Single **Black-whiskered Vireos**, *Vireo altiloquus*, found at Buccoo Marsh on 16 October, 2000 (FH, MK) and at Gilpin Trace on 24 November, 2005 (DS, MG) represent the first and second records for Tobago.

An adult male **Caribbean Martin**, *Progne dominicensis*, was seen at the Marianne River estuary on 7 February, 2004 (DL). All previous records of this species had come from the extreme northeast corner of Trinidad.

Two different **Cliff Swallows**, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*, found on 1 September, 2005 at Turtle Beach (SR) and Bon Accord on 18 September, 2005 (ST) constitute the first and second records for Tobago. This species remains a rare passage migrant through Trinidad with just seven records in the last 10 years.

Two **Scarlet Tanagers**, *Piranga olivacea*, seen and photographed at Crown Pt., Tobago on 3 November, 2004 (NG *et al.*) constitute the first south bound migrants recorded in Trinidad and Tobago.

At least five **Grassland Yellow-Finches**, *Sicalis luteola*, were studied at the Aripo Agriculture Research Station on 26 February, 2004 (MEC *et al.*) and constitutes the first record of this species in Trinidad and Tobago. This site had just re-opened its gates to visitors after a period of at least two years. Up to 25 birds have been ever present at this site until 31 December, 2005 at least.

During the review period, three **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks**, *Pheucticus ludovicianus*, have been documented from Grafton Sanctuary, Tobago, as follows: an adult male on 26 March, 2004 (JS); an immature female on 31 March, 2004 (DH) and a female on 5 March, 2005 (RH).

Additionally, an adult male was seen and photographed at Asa Wright Nature Centre on 5 April, 2005 (RN).

A male **Dickcissel**, *Spiza americana*, found at Speyside on 15 October, 2005 (DS, MG) represents just the second record for Tobago. Interestingly, this was found at exactly the same locality as the first record back in 1998.

A male **Blackburnian Warbler**, *Dendroica fusca*, was found along the forested ridge towards Morne Bleu on 24 March, 2005 (GW, MK, NL). Whilst probably under-recorded, this is just the second documented record in the last 10 years.

Three separate **Black-and-white Warblers**, *Mniotilta varia*, were found during the review period, all from Las Lapas Trace, as follows: 28 March, 2004 (MK); 26 December, 2004 (GG, MK, GW) and 16 October, 2005 (NH, MK).

An adult male **Baltimore Oriole**, *Icterus galbula*, was found at Montevideo Trace, Grande Riviere on 18 February, 2005 (MK *et al.*). This is the first documented record since 1981.

Up to nine **Lesser Goldfinches**, *Carduelis psaltria*, were repeatedly watched going to roost on Mt. St. Benedict during the period 11-17 February, 2005 (MK *et al.*). This is the first record of this species for Trinidad and Tobago.

## INCONCLUSIVE RECORDS

Records considered inconclusive were of American Wigeon, *Anas americana*, Hook-billed Kite, *Chondrohierax uncinatus*, Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*, Amazon Kingfisher, *Chloroceryle amazona*, Euler's Flycatcher, *Lathrotriccus euleri*, Mangrove Swallow, *Tachycineta albilinea* and House Martin, *Delichon urbica*.

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