

LIVING WORLD

Journal of the Trinidad and Tobago
Field Naturalists' Club

admin@tffnc.org

ISSN 1029-3299



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

Tenth Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee: Rare Birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2012

Martyn Kenefick

Kenefick, M. 2013. Tenth Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee: Rare Birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2012. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2013, 77-82.

Kenefick, M. 2013. Tenth Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee: Rare Birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2012. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2013, 77-82.

Tenth Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee: Rare Birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2012

Martyn Kenefick

36 Newalloville Ave., San Juan, Trinidad and Tobago.

martynkenefick@hotmail.com

The abundance and status of our avifauna, especially the common species, are comparatively well-known and described in the available guides (French 2012; Kenefick *et al.* 2012). Of the rarer species, our knowledge is less complete yet rare species comprise 44% of our bird species richness. For these rare species, it takes years of accumulated records to assess status or changes in abundance. Without formal review and archiving, records would be haphazard and confidence in them low, making trends difficult to detect or interpret. The Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee (TTRBC) was established to assess, document and archive the occurrence of rare or unusual birds in Trinidad and Tobago and thus enable reliable long-term monitoring of our less known species. Archived records including photographic submissions number 937 at the end of 2012.

The Committee has now assessed 104 records submitted during 2012, representing 58 different species. One additional species has been added to the official list of birds of Trinidad and Tobago and two further species have been documented from Tobago for the first time. Of the submissions assessed, in only ten cases did the Committee find the identification inconclusive. The records presented below follow the nomenclature and taxonomic order of the American Ornithologists Union South American Checklist, December 2012.

The Committee comprises the following members: Martyn Kenefick (Secretary), Geoffrey Gomes, Floyd Hayes, Bill Murphy, Kris Sookdeo and Graham White. Records are held at 36 Newalloville Ave., San Juan. Previous reports of this Committee were prepared by Hayes and White (2000), White and Hayes (2002) and Kenefick (2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012).

The list of species considered by the TTRBC, together with the Official List of the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago, and details of all accepted records by the Committee can be accessed from our new website at <http://rbc.ttfnc.org>. We urge finders to document and report their sightings to us.

RECORDS ACCEPTED

Four **White-faced Whistling-Ducks**, *Dendrocygna viduata* were photographed at Caroni Rice Project on 9 September, 2012, with two birds remaining until 19 September (NL *et al.*). This record forms part of an established pattern of occurrences for this austral wanderer both in

terms of site and date.

A **Green-winged Teal**, *Anas crecca* in non-breeding plumage was found associating with a small flock of Blue-winged Teal, *A. discors* at Lowlands, Tobago on 5 November, 2012 (GW). This is the second documented record for Tobago. There have been no records from Trinidad for 14 years.

Three **Lesser Scaup**, *Aythya affinis* in immature or female plumage were photographed on Caroni Rice Project on 29 November, 2011 (JD, TD). This migrant from North America has been seen on several occasions in recent years from Tobago, but this is the first Trinidad sighting since 2003.

Two **American Flamingo**, *Phoenicopterus ruber* were photographed on the tidal mudflats at Orange Valley on 25 February, 2012 (NL). By early July five birds were present and three remained until at least 17 July. This species has now been observed on the west coast in six of the last nine years.

A sub-adult **Gray Heron**, *Ardea cinerea* was found at Bon Accord sewage ponds on 12 March, 2012 (MK). An individual with almost identical plumage was photographed at the same locality on 19 November, 2011. However, the absence of sightings during the interim period at this very well watched site suggests a different individual. There have now been sightings of this wanderer from Eurasia in seven of the last 12 years.

At least two **Little Egret**, *Egretta garzetta* were seen and photographed along the Diego Martin River on 25 March, 2012 (FO, SP) with one bird present at least until 21 December. An additional bird was photographed in a canal close to Piarco Airport on 29 December, 2012 (FO). These are the first documented sightings in the last four years.

A pair of **Glossy Ibis**, *Plegadis falcinellus* was photographed and observed mating on 8 September, 2012 in a flooded field at Caroni Rice Project (NL). They were regularly observed flying across the highway to roost in Caroni Swamp and were last seen on 29 September. This species is an occasional wanderer from mainland South America, and has been recorded in Trinidad in eight of the last 17 years.

There are indications of a small population of **Hook-billed Kites**, *Chondrohierax uncinatus* in the forested areas of Cat's Hill. One was photographed on both 1 and 12 August, 2012 and up to three birds were found between

26 and 31 December, 2012 (KS). Two birds were seen separately on 17 and 27 June, 2012 at Point Gourde (KS, MK, FO) indicating a possible resident pair (MK, KS, FO) and a further individual was photographed soaring over Chacachacare on 16 September, 2012 (KS *et al.*). This raptor remains a scarce and localised resident in Trinidad and a casual wanderer to Tobago.

An adult **White-tailed Hawk**, *Geranoaetus albi-caudatus* was photographed close to Kernahan Village in Nariva Swamp on 4 January, 2012 (FO, MR) (Plate). This is a rare wanderer to freshwater marsh from mainland South America and only the fifth documented record in the last 12 years.

Historically, **Rufous-necked Wood-Rail**, *Aramides axillaris* was thought to be restricted to the Caroni Swamp mangrove together with small isolated populations on the Bocas Islands. Following a sighting north of Manzanilla in 2009 (Kenefick 2010), one was found in coastal mangrove at Guayaguayare on 21 November, 2012 (GW) and three birds were seen close to Point Fortin, loosely in association with Gray-necked Wood-Rail, *A. cajaneus*, on 22 December, 2012 (KS).

Following a request in our eighth report (Kenefick 2011), documentation for three **Paint-billed Crakes**, *Neocrex erythrops* photographed close to the Aripo Agriculture Station on 5 July, 2010 has been submitted (MC, DR *et al.*). Two birds were seen in watercress beds on Sellier Rd. whilst a third was picked up, uninjured but exhausted, from the roadside on Eastern Main Road. This completes our understanding of an unprecedented arrival of this species, together with other austral wanderers in 2010. Previously, only two live birds and one roadside corpse had ever been documented for Trinidad.

An adult **Azure Gallinule**, *Porphyrio flavirostris* was found on a vegetated sewage pond at Lowlands, Tobago on 10 February, 2012 (MC, NG) (see plate). This is the first record for Tobago.

A **Yellow-breasted Crane**, *Porzana flaviventer* was seen at Lowlands, Tobago on 16 January, 2012 (MKe, FO). This species is widespread in suitable habitat in Trinidad but this is just the second record for Tobago.

Two **Killdeer**, *Charadrius vociferous* were photographed feeding in a vacant lot within a housing development at Carapichaima late on 9 February, 2012 (SP) and they were gone by first light the following morning (see plate). This is a very rare visitor to Trinidad and Tobago from North America, with just three previous sightings in the last 17 years, all January - March.

Three **Double-striped Thick-knee**, *Burhinus bistriatus* were found sheltering in a lightly wooded grove at Trincity Golf Course on 13 July, 2012 (RN). They remained until 29 July at least. A further individual was

found feeding along a dusty track on Caroni Rice Project on 2 September, 2012 (MK). An occasional wanderer from mainland South America, there are just six documented records in the last 17 years.

Two **Buff-breasted Sandpipers**, *Tryngites subruficollis* were found in a flooded grassy field on Caroni Rice Project on 3 October, 2012 (MK, FO) (Plate). Three days later, they had increased to a flock of eight birds, the largest number ever observed in Trinidad and Tobago.

A juvenile **Wilson's Phalarope**, *Phalaropus tricolor* was photographed amongst a mixed flock of shore birds in a flooded field on Caroni Rice Project on 8 September, 2012 (MK, RA). Less than a week later, on 13 September, another juvenile was found feeding in a sewage pond at the Lowlands complex, Tobago (MK). These are just the fifth and sixth records of this migrant from North America in the last 17 years. Their usual migration route is far to the west of Trinidad and Tobago.

A juvenile **Pomarine Jaeger**, *Stercorarius pomarinus* was taken into care at Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust in March 2012 and subsequently released after veterinary care (PaPWT). Whilst there is a stable wintering population of this deep water migratory sea bird between St. Lucia and St. Vincent, this is just the fourth documented report in the last 17 years.

A first winter plumaged **Franklin's Gull**, *Leuco-phaeus pipixcan* was photographed amongst the roost of Laughing Gulls, *L. atricilla* at Orange Valley from 26-28 January, 2012 (NL). A total of ten have now been identified in the last 17 years. However their close similarity to and association with the Laughing Gulls on the west coast of Trinidad undoubtedly means that they are under-recorded.

A winter plumaged, adult **Gull-billed Tern**, *Gelochelidon nilotica* was seen foraging over the entrance lake at Lowlands, Tobago on 24 October, 2012 (BM *et al.*). This sighting is the first documented record for Tobago.

During the review period, we received numerous reports of **Scaly-naped Pigeons**, *Patagioenas squamosa* from both Little Tobago and the adjacent scrub forest at Batteaux Bay, Tobago. The only documented sighting was of a single bird on Little Tobago on 9 July, 2012 (GW, MK). It is estimated that up to a dozen birds have now settled on the island.

Up to three **Scaled Doves**, *Columbina squammata* likely to be a pair and offspring were photographed on 24 September, 2012 (KS) close to the Pitch Lake at La Brea, in the same area that they were seen in November 2011 (see plate). This is the first documentary evidence of the species breeding on mainland Trinidad.

A **Striped Owl**, *Pseudoscops clamator* was found on the evening of 3 March, 2012 along the leeward road close to Bloody Bay (MKe). It was then seen on several

occasions during the month. This species is the scarcest and certainly the most elusive of Tobago resident birds. It has never been documented from Trinidad.

A **Short-eared Owl**, *Asio flammeus* was photographed in a recently ploughed field on Caroni Rice Project on 26 May, 2012 (NL, SP) (see plate). This is the third documented record of this species for Trinidad. All three were of the race *pallidicaudus* from northern South America, all found at the same general location and all within the last 10 years.

A **Fork-tailed Palm-Swift**, *Tachornis squamata* was observed over Lowlands Golf Course, Tobago on 14 September, 2012 (MK). This is just the second documented record for Tobago in the last 17 years of this common Trinidad resident.

A **Brown Violetear**, *Colibri delphinae* was photographed visiting sugar water feeders in Speyside, Tobago on 24 November, 2012 (NG, BW). This is just the second documented record for Tobago.

Six different **Apomado Falcons**, *Falco femoralis* were identified during 2012 as follows: single birds were seen at the Caroni Rice Project on 19 June (NL, SP) and 14 August present until 19 September at least (FO); Demerara Road, Arima on 16 August (CC); close to Golconda on 30 August (VJ); Caltoo Trace on 24 September (MK, GW); and finally at Waterloo on 20 December (SP). This is the highest number on record for this seasonal visitor from mainland South America. It has been recorded almost annually during the last 15 years with most records falling between mid-June to late October coinciding with the passage of small shorebird migrants through the islands.

The number of **Small-billed Elaenias**, *Elaenia parvirostris* found in Trinidad continues to increase. There were no sightings in 2011, but 11 birds were documented during the review period as follows: up to four birds were feeding on Black Sage berries at South Oropouche from 2 June, 2012 for several weeks (KS *et al.*); one was found on the ridge above La Pastora Village, Lopinot Valley on 10 June, 2012 (GW); up to five present in Mouville wetland, Guayaguayare on 19 August (GW); and a late individual seen in South Oropouche on 28 October (BM *et al.*). This species was observed in 2007 after many years of absence. Since then 20 birds have been documented. Whilst increased observer awareness has obviously contributed to the situation, there appears to be a genuine northward movement in the non-breeding range.

Individual **Variiegated Flycatchers**, *Empidonomus varius* were found at Asa Wright on 22 July, 2012 (AS, FM), Aripo Agriculture Station on 14 August, 2012 (FO) and Talparo on 17 August, 2012 (MK). Of the ten sightings of this austral migrant in the last 12 years, nine have been during the period 8 June - 17 August.

An adult **Southern Rough-winged Swallow**, *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis* was identified amongst a mixed flock of Caribbean Martin, *Progne dominicensis* and Bank Swallow, *Riparia riparia* hawking insects over Bon Accord sewage ponds on 3 February, 2012 (BM *et al.*). Some eight months later, on 24 October, a single bird was found at the same site by the same observer. It is possible, if rather unlikely, that both sightings refer to the same individual bird at this well watched birding site. These are the second and third sightings in Tobago for the past 17 years.

For the third year running, **Lesson's Seed eaters**, *Sporophila bouvronides* has been found in suitable breeding habitat in south Trinidad. Throughout August 2012, up to five singing males and a similar number of birds in female or immature plumage were photographed in forest edge (KS *et al.*). Due to inevitable pressure from bird catchers, precise details of the location are being withheld.

At least ten adult male and several female or immature plumaged **Lined Seed eaters**, *Sporophila lineola* were photographed feeding on an area of guinea grass at South Oropouche, 21 July, 2012 (MK, SP, FA). This austral wanderer has been found annually in the agricultural and freshwater marshland of south-west and eastern Trinidad since it was first recorded in 2007.

There has been a steady increase in the number of **Yellow-bellied Seed eaters**, *Sporophila nigricollis* across north-west and north-central Trinidad over the past few years. Documented sightings during the review period included pairs at Sellier Road, Aripo on 1 February, 2012 (KG); Mt. St. Benedict on 17 February, 2012 (PC); and upper Lopinot Valley on 2 June, 2012 (GW, MK). Single males were photographed north of Caroni Swamp on 29 March, 2012 (FO) and Surrey Village, Lopinot on 5 March, 2012 (GW), whilst at least four birds were found on Monos Island on 26 June, 2012 (FO). Finally, at least three males and two females were found on Chacachacare on 16 September, 2012 (KS).

An unprecedented six sightings of **Summer Tanagers**, *Piranga rubra* were documented during 2012 and there was a late report from 2009. One adult male at Las Lapas track was found preening on the same tree and by the same observer (FO) on 2 January and 30 December, 2012. A female or immature was photographed on the Blanchisseuse Road above Paria Junction on 8 January, 2012 (FM, AS). An adult male was seen from the Bloody Bay lookout, Tobago on 2 April, 2012 (PD, WB) and a further two males were photographed along Lalaja Trace on 11 November (SP) and Morne Bleu on 23 December (FO). Additionally, a female was extensively photographed from Surrey Village, Lopinot, initially on 22 December, 2009 (GW). There have been seven records of this migrant from continental North America in the past 12 years, most

within the period November to April.

An immature or adult female **Scarlet Tanager**, *Piranga olivacea* was photographed along the Blanchisseuse Road, close to Morne la Croix, on 2 November, 2011 (JD,TD). Whilst almost annual on its northbound migration, this is just the second occasion one has been found travelling southwards, the previous occasion being at Crown Point, Tobago in November 2006.

An adult male **Orchard Oriole**, *Icterus spurius* was photographed at Carli Bay on 28 February, 2012 (CF) and remained until at least 6 March, 2012 (see Plate). There was one prior record of this migrant from North America for Trinidad in December 2006.

A male **Golden-winged Warbler**, *Vermivora chrysoptera* in non-breeding plumage was seen on Little Tobago island on 10 June, 2012 (NG). Coincidentally, the only other record for Tobago was equally late for a migrant in June 2001.

A male **Cerulean Warbler**, *Dendroica cerulean* was identified in Arena Forest on 29 November, 2012 (AB, KC MRo). This is the second record for Trinidad and Tobago of this globally threatened migrant from North America. The first was in November 2000.

A male **Cape May Warbler**, *Dendroica tigrina* was photographed within the grounds of Blue Waters Inn, Tobago on 25 November, 2012 (BW). This species is an extremely rare migrant from North America with just three records in the last 17 years.

An adult female **Bobolink**, *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* flew over an area of freshwater marsh in South Oropouche on the exceptionally late date of 24 June, 2012. All previous documented sightings of this migrant from North America have occurred between early October and early May.

An immature female **Great-tailed Grackle**, *Quiscalus mexicanus* was photographed at Carli Bay on 22 July, 2012 (FA). It loosely associated with a resident flock of Carib Grackles and was present until the year end (see plate). Its known range is the western USA, Central America, western Caribbean islands and is gradually spreading along the Venezuelan coastline. This is the first record for Trinidad and Tobago. Its origin in Trinidad is possibly ship assisted.

ADDITIONAL RECORDS

Acceptable records were also received for a further 24 sightings of the following species whose status has already been established: **Masked Duck**, *Nomonyx dominicus*; **Rufescent Tiger-Heron**, *Tigrisoma lineatum*; **Crane Hawk**, *Geranospiza caerulescens*; **Rufous Crab-Hawk**, *Buteogallus aequinoctialis*; **Great Black-Hawk**, *Buteogallus urubitinga*; **Black Hawk-Eagle**, *Spizaetus*

tyrannus; **Crested Caracara**, *Caracara cheriway* and **Black-whiskered Vireo**, *Vireo altiloquus*.

INTRODUCED SPECIES

A small colony of **House Sparrow**, *Passer domesticus* was identified within the Port of Point Lisas complex on 19 November, 2011 (FA). At least four active nests were discovered during 2012. The Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division is monitoring the containment of this invasive species.

ESCAPED CAGE AND AVIARY SPECIES

During the review period, a number of reports were received of **White-eyed Parakeets**, *Aratinga leucophthalma* from Port of Spain, Paramin and Couva; **Red-and-green Macaws**, *Ara chloropterus* from localities on the south-west peninsula; and a **Village Weaver**, *Ploceus culcullatus* from Caroni Rice Project.

INCONCLUSIVE RECORDS

Submissions of the following species were deemed inconclusive: **Crane Hawk**, *Geranospiza caerulescens*; **Great Black-Hawk**, *Buteogallus urubitinga*; **American Coot**, *Fulica americana*; **Scaly-naped Pigeon**, *Patagioenas squamosa*; **Amazon Kingfisher**, *Chloroceryle amazona*; **Caribbean Martin**, *Progne dominicensis*; **Indigo Bunting**, *Passerina cyanea* and **Black-and-white Warbler**, *Mniotilta varia*.

NOMENCLATURE CHANGES

Part of the mission statement of the SACC is to create a standard classification, with English names, for the birds of South America. This is subject to constant revision by the proposal system to allow incorporation of new data. As a result, the following nomenclature change was made in 2012:

***Gray-lined Hawk**, *Buteo nitidus* (formerly Gray Hawk)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Records and contributions were received from the following: Faraaz Abdool, Rashid Ali, Alan Baxter, Claire Bowler, Walter Burns, Kenny Calderon, Paul Clark, Mike Coleman, Cyril Coomansingh, Peter Cox, Stanislaw Czyz, Kester d'Arneaud, Janet Davie, Tim Davie, Peter Dunn, Cornelius Felican, Newton George, Geoffrey Gomes, Keith Grant, Patrick Harnarayan, Stacy Harnarayan, Vanessa Jodhan, Matt Kelly (MKe), Martyn Kenefick, Imran Khan, Nigel Lallsingh, Brent Langley, Fayard Mohammed, Bill Murphy, Roger Neckles, Feroze Omardeen, Sanjiv Parasram, Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust, Dave Ramlal, Michelle Rochford, Mark Rolfe (MRo), Mark Sandoval,

Anushka Seemungal, Dave Smith, Charles Sookdeo, Di-anna Sookdeo, (DSO), Kris Sookdeo and Graham White.

REFERENCES

- Hayes, F.E. and White, G.** 2000. First report of the Trinidad and Tobago rare birds committee. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2000: 39-45.
- Kenefick, M.** 2005. Third report of the Trinidad and Tobago rare birds committee: rare birds in Trinidad and Tobago in 2001-2003. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2005: 56-61.
- Kenefick, M.** 2007. Fourth report of the Trinidad and Tobago rare birds committee: rare birds in Trinidad and Tobago in 2004 and 2005. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2007: 79-81.
- Kenefick, M.** 2008. Fifth report of the Trinidad and Tobago rare birds committee: rare birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2006 and 2007. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2008: 70-74.
- Kenefick, M.** 2009. Report of the Trinidad and Tobago rare birds committee: rare birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2008. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2009: 46-49.
- Kenefick, M.** 2010. Seventh report of the Trinidad and Tobago rare birds committee: rare birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2009. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2010: 78-83.
- Kenefick, M.** 2011. Eighth report of the Trinidad and Tobago rare birds committee: rare birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2010. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2011: 80-85.
- Kenefick, M.** 2012. Ninth report of the Trinidad and Tobago rare birds committee: rare birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2011. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2012: 96-100.
- White, G. and Hayes, F.** 2002. Second report of the Trinidad and Tobago rare birds committee. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2002: 51-56.

Legends to Plate

- a. White-tailed Hawk, Kernahan Village, Nariva Swamp, 4 January, 2012. Photo: M. Rochford.
- b. Azure Gallinule, Lowlands, Tobago, 10 February, 2012. Photo: M. Coleman.
- c. Killdeer, Carapichaima, Trinidad, 9 February, 2012. Photo: S. Parasram.
- d. Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Caroni Rice Project, 3 October, 2012. Photo: N. Lallsingh.
- e. Scaled Dove, La Brea, 24 September, 2012. Photo: K. Sookdeo
- f. Short-eared Owl, Caroni Rice Project, 26 May, 2012. Photo: N. Lallsingh.
- g. Orchard Oriole, Carli Bay, 6 March, 2012. Photo: G. White.
- h. Great-tailed Grackle, Carli Bay, 24 August, 2012. Photo: G.White.

