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Twelfth Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Birds Status and Distribution Committee: Records Submitted in 2014

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The abundance and status of most of our bird species, especially the common ones, are reasonably well known and described in the available field guides (French 2012; Kenefick *et al.* 2012). Our knowledge of the rarer species is less complete. Rare species comprise 44% of our bird species richness, and since these species are rare, years of accumulated records are needed to assess status or changes in abundance. Without formal review and archiving, records would be haphazard and confidence low, making trends difficult to detect or interpret. The Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee was established in 1995 to assess, document, and archive the occurrence of rare or unusual birds in Trinidad and Tobago and thus provide reliable long-term monitoring of rarer species. Now renamed the Trinidad and Tobago Birds Status and Distribution Committee (TTBSDC), we have assessed all records submitted during 2014. In all, 85 records were adjudged, representing 49 different species. Of the submissions assessed, in only six cases did the TTBSDC find the identification inconclusive (see Inconclusive Records, below). In several instances, documented sightings were submitted as photographic evidence alone which can be difficult to assess with no supplementary written account. An excellent example of this is shown in Plate 1(a). This bird is clearly a medium sized, unfamiliar shorebird, yet expert opinion differs as to its identity. The Committee would welcome further comment. The records presented herein follow the taxonomic order and nomenclature of the American Ornithologists' Union's South American Classification Committee (<http://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCBaseline.htm>), version of 18 February, 2015. All sightings were made in 2014 unless otherwise stated.

In terms of excitement and extreme rarity, 2014 will be remembered not only for the unprecedented number and variety of New World warbler sightings, but also for the addition of Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Black Kite, Red-tailed Hawk, White-eyed Parakeet, Eastern Kingbird, and Tennessee and Kentucky Warblers as new species to the Official List of the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago, bringing the running total to 480 species.

As of 31 December, 2014, the TTBSDC comprised the following members: Martyn Kenefick (Secretary), Geoffrey Gomes, Floyd Hayes, Bill Murphy, Kris Sookdeo and Graham White. Some instances require us to consult international experts to assist with difficult identification

issues. In that regard we wish to acknowledge the valuable assistance provided in 2014 by William C. Clark, Dave Cooper, Dick Forsman, John Marchant, Richard Porter and David Rosair.

Archived records, including photographic submissions, numbered 1,112 at the end of 2014. TTBSDC records are held at 36 Newalloville Avenue, San Juan, Trinidad. 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, 2013, 2014).

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

RECORDS ACCEPTED

Two adult **Jabirus** (*Jabiru mycteria*) were photographed as they fed in a shallow lagoon at Fullerton Swamp on 4 June, 2014 (CK); they remained until at least 8 June. An adult found on 5 August, 2014 (DR) in the freshwater marsh east of the Bush Bush Reserve in Nariva Swamp was joined by a second, slightly younger bird on 20 August (LE). The adult remained in the general area and was seen intermittently at Kernaham through at least 19 October, 2014 (FO). In 2013, two birds were seen regularly in the same area from June through November (see Kenefick 2014). Nariva Swamp is a huge area in which even a species as large as a Jabiru could hide, so it is conceivable that these birds were present all along.

A group of six **White-faced Whistling-Ducks** (*Dendrocygna viduata*) were found at the Caroni Rice Project on 9 August, 2014 (NL), two of which remained until at least 16 August. A flock of 26 were found at the same site on 8 October, 2014 (MK). Whilst seen annually at this site, the species has been documented elsewhere in Trinidad only twice in the last 19 years. All sightings have been between late May and early October.

A male **Muscovy Duck** (*Cairina moschata*) was photographed at Fullerton Swamp on 14 June, 2014 (KM). Of the ten documented sightings since 1995, seven have been from the tip of the southwestern peninsula.

An adult **White-tailed Tropicbird** (*Phaethon lepturus*) was found amongst the numerous Red-billed

Tropicbirds (*P. aethereus*) on Little Tobago Island, Tobago, on 14 January, 2014 (DL). Several other undocumented reports were received during the year, as in prior years; breeding was suspected but unproven.

Belated but still exciting, the TTBSDC received a photographically documented report of an adult **Fasciated Tiger-Heron** (*Tigrisoma fasciatum*) taken beside the Shark River, Matelot on 26 April, 2005 (HB, RK, ER, DS) (Plate 1e.). This is the first definitive record of the species for Trinidad and Tobago. Unlike the similar Rufescent Tiger-Heron (*T. lineatum*) which inhabits lowland swamp forest and freshwater marsh in Trinidad, Fasciated Tiger-Heron prefers running water in dense forests. The true identity of several undocumented reports involving immature Tiger-Herons beside streams in the Arima Valley over the years is likely to be this species.

A sub-adult **Grey Heron** (*Ardea cinerea*) was photographed at the Caroni Rice Project on 27 December, 2014 (MK, LJ). Once considered extremely rare in Trinidad and Tobago, 14 sightings of the species have been documented in as many years.

An adult **Cocoi Heron** (*Ardea cocoi*) was photographed along the Richmond River, Tobago on 11 February, 2014 (MKe). Only seven sightings in Tobago have been documented during the last 20 years. This sighting may pertain to the individual found at the same locality the previous year (March 2013) (see Kenefick 2014).

A sub-adult **Western Reef-Heron** (*Egretta gularis*) was photographed in the marshy fields adjacent to the Bon Accord sewage lagoons, Tobago; the bird was present at least 19-28 December, 2014 (SL). This sighting constitutes the second record for Tobago and only the third record for Trinidad and Tobago. Previous sightings were in January 1986 and December 2000. All three individuals have been of the dark colour morph, which is much more prevalent in West Africa than is the white colour morph. Elsewhere in South America, vagrants have also been found in Brazil and Ecuador.

An adult **Little Egret** (*Egretta garzetta*) was photographed at Bon Accord, Tobago on 18 January, 2014 (QQ). Once a traditional site for this species, this was the first Little Egret documented from Tobago for 14 years.

An adult **Scarlet Ibis** (*Eudocimus ruber*) was photographed in the mangroves alongside Bon Accord Lagoon, Tobago on 24 January, 2014 (MKe). This is only the second documented sighting for Tobago in the last 20 years.

Two **Glossy Ibises** (*Plegadis falcinellus*) were photographed at Kernaham on 11 January, 2014 (KM), and two were well observed at Bon Accord, Tobago on 20 January, 2014 (DK, MKe). Neither of the Tobago birds resembled the individual photographed at this latter site in November 2013 (see Kenefick 2014). Finally, a group of three were

photographed feeding at the Caroni Rice Project on 9 August (NL), with one remaining in the area until at least 14 October, 2014 (MK).

An adult male **Green-winged Teal** (*Anas crecca*) was photographed flying over the sewage ponds at Lowlands, Tobago on 16 February, 2014 (FM). Two birds in non-breeding plumage present at this site in November 2013 (see Kenefick 2014) were not seen subsequently. This is a well watched site, so it is highly likely that this was a different individual.

A **Black Kite** (*Milvus migrans*) was photographed at the Petrotrin Pointe-à-Pierre dam on 26 November, 2014 (NHa, JM) (Plate 1f.). It was seen on two further occasions through 3 December, 2014. This is the first documented record of Black Kite for Trinidad and Tobago and indeed for South America. Whilst this species usually is found in Europe, Africa and Asia, this individual was of the highly migratory race *M. m. migrans*, which has been found as far afield as Iceland. Of interest, a Black Kite was reported (unconfirmed) in Barbados on 4 February, 2015.

Single **Crane Hawks** (*Geranospiza caerulescens*) were photographed at Sangre Chiquito on 21 February, 2014 (KM), North Manzanilla on 30 May, 2014 (KM) and Guapo, Point Fortin on 17 June, 2014 (DH). Documented in every year bar one since first being discovered in 2000, almost all sightings continue to come from either eastern or southwestern Trinidad.

A sub-adult **Red-tailed Hawk** (*Buteo jamaicensis*) was photographed from the roadside in the Main Ridge Forest Reserve, Tobago on 24 February, 2014 (NG, TT) (Plate 1b.). This is the first documented record of Red-tailed Hawk for Trinidad and Tobago. The Nearctic distribution of this species is unclear. The normal wintering grounds for boreal migrants extend south along the Central American land bridge to Panama, with single sight records from Colombia and Venezuela. Some authorities consider Red-tailed Hawk part of a superspecies that includes the sister taxa Rufous-tailed Hawk (*B. ventralis*), native to Argentina and Chile.

A basic-plumaged male **Ruff** (*Philomachus pugnax*) was found on the beach at Charlotteville, Tobago on 9 September, 2014 (NH). Whilst there were a flurry of sightings between 2000 and 2003, this was the first documented report of this Eurasian shorebird in nine years.

A **Pomarine Jaeger** (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) was photographed feeding at the mouth of the Caroni River on 24 January, 2014 (HD). Whilst this species is regularly found wintering in the waters of the Lesser Antilles to our north, this is only the fourth documented sighting in the last 20 years.

An alternate-plumaged **Black-headed Gull** (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) was found amongst numerous

Laughing Gulls (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) at Orange Valley on 13 May, 2014 (NL). This species has now been seen in eight of the last 14 years. All sightings have been from either the west coast of Trinidad or southwestern Tobago.

A first-winter **Franklin's Gull** (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) was photographed at Orange Valley on 14 January, 2014 (NL). It was widely reported until 4 February. At the same site, a basic-plumaged adult was found on 18 January, 2014 (MK). At nearby Brickfields, another first-winter individual was found on 9 November, 2014 (NL). The increase in documented reports in recent years reflects enhanced observer awareness of identification criteria.

A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** (*Larus fuscus graellsii*) in first-winter plumage was photographed off Store Bay, Tobago on 24 January, 2014 (MKe). By coincidence, a similarly aged bird was found at the same locality in February, 2013 (see Kenefick 2014). Prior to that, the species had not been reported from Tobago for 10 years.

An adult **Caspian Tern** (*Hydroprogne caspia*) was found amongst the high tide roost at Brickfields on 22 October, 2014 and remained until 9 November, 2014 (NL). This was only the third record of the species in 19 years; all sightings have been 22 October - 24 November.

At least two **Scaled Doves** (*Columbina squamata*) were documented feeding in a garden on Gasparee Island on 16 March, 2014; and had been seen regularly before and continued to be seen after this date (EA, MF, MK). Elsewhere, four individuals were photographed in Tucker Valley, Chaguaramas on 15 September, 2014 (IK, FO), and another four at the Pitch Lake on 26 November, 2014 (DH). These sightings are further indications of a significant change in the status and distribution of this species. None were documented during the 70 years from 1926 (when first discovered in Trinidad) to 1996 (when one was documented from Nariva Swamp). A further 15 years passed before birds were found on Monos Island (2011). They have been found at La Brea annually since 2011 (see Kenefick 2012, 2013). Scaled Dove has a highly distinctive vocalisation, so it is unlikely that the species could have remained undetected if present during the intervening years.

A **Short-eared Owl** (*Asio flammeus*) favoured three overgrown fields at the Caroni Rice Project 10-23 August, 2014 (MK, GW). All four documented sightings from Trinidad and Tobago, involving five birds, have been at this site.

An adult **Aplomado Falcon** (*Falco femoralis*) was found in the fields to the north of Kernaham Village on 14 January, 2014 (DL). This possibly was the same individual documented during November 2013 (see Kenefick 2014). Elsewhere, three immature Aplomado Falcons were found hunting over Fullerton Swamp on 8 June, 2014 (KS).

A flock of at least 12 **White-eyed Parakeets** (*Psittacara leucophthalmus*) were seen close to the Arena Dam on 25 February, 2014 feeding on a flowering immortal tree (FO) (Plate 1c.). A flock of six were photographed at Granville, Cedros on 27 June, 2014 (SP). Whilst we are aware of a small feral population that escaped from captivity a number of years ago in north Port of Spain, there is every reason to believe that the reports in 2014 are of wandering wild birds from the South American mainland. This species is common in Guyana, Venezuela and Colombia.

A pair of **Brown-throated Parakeets** (*Eupsittula pertinax*) was found at the entrance to the Aripo Agriculture Station avidly exploring a hole in the side of a termites' nest on 4 March, 2014 (KC, MR); they continued to be seen regularly throughout the month. Whilst unproven, breeding is suspected.

A **Variegated Flycatcher** (*Empidonomus varius*) was photographed at Fishing Pond on 1 March, 2014 (KM). Long considered a scarce austral migrant, this species has now been documented in Trinidad in all months except April and September. It is hoped that breeding may be proven in the near future.

The TTBSDC received documentation in 2014 of an immature **Eastern Kingbird** (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) photographed inside the Aripo Agriculture Station on 6 October, 1984 (CT *et al.*). This record constitutes the first record for Trinidad and Tobago of this migrant from North America. However, its similarity to an immature Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*T. savana*) may have hindered other potential submissions.

For the past five years there has been evidence of suspected breeding of **Lesson's Seedeaters** (*Sporophila bouvronides*) in a south Trinidad forest during June 2014 (KS). In view of the susceptibility of this species to bird catchers, no further details are being published at this time.

An adult male **Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch** (*Sporophila angolensis*) was photographed at Carli Bay on 8 December, 2014 (NL). Whilst the identification is proven, wild provenance, especially in an area known for cage-bird activity, is doubtful.

A (presumed) pair of **Hepatic Tanagers** (*Piranga flava*) was photographed at Gran Couva on 15 December, 2014 (NL). Regularly seen at much higher elevations on the upper Blanchisseuse Road, this is the first documented record elsewhere in Trinidad.

It is now recognised that **Summer Tanager** (*Piranga rubra*) is one of the more regular wintering migrants in Trinidad, yet it is still decidedly rare in Tobago. During the last 20 years, the species has been documented at least 23 times. In 2014, sightings were as follow: 9 January, an adult male at Gran Couva (NL); 15 January, an immature

male at Carli Bay (NL, FM); 29 January, an immature male at Las Lapas Trace (MK); and 4 March, what might have been the same male but now in full adult plumage (MK, GW).

Single **Black-and-White Warblers** (*Mniotilta varia*) were found at Las Lapas Trace on 29 January, 2014 (MK) and at Carli Bay on 24 December, 2014 (NL). Of the 12 documented sightings in the last 20 years, six have been from Las Lapas Trace.

A basic-plumaged **Tennessee Warbler** (*Leiothlypis peregrina*) was found actively feeding in flowering trees in the park at Carli Bay on 4 January, 2014 (NL), joined on 1 February, 2014 by a second bird, partly moulted into alternate plumage (MK, NL). One bird remained until at least 17 February. This constitutes the first documented sighting of the species for Trinidad and Tobago. On 25 February, 2014 two alternate-plumaged birds were found in trees bordering a cocoa plantation at Gran Couva (MK) (Plate 1d.).

A female **Kentucky Warbler** (*Geothlypis formosa*) was mist-netted in the Aripo Savanna on 12 October, 2014 (RA, CF, DN) (Plate 1g.). This is the first record for Trinidad and Tobago of a species whose migration path and wintering grounds are, for the most part, through the Central American land bridge.

An adult male **Hooded Warbler** (*Setophaga citrina*) was found along the Blanchisseuse Road on 13 February, 2014 (CR, TT). This is only the third sighting for Trinidad and Tobago of this normally secretive North American migrant, the others being in December 1978 and January 2006.

An adult male **Northern Parula** (*Setophaga americana*) was photographed adjacent to a cocoa plantation at Gran Couva on 20 February, 2014 (NL, FO). This is the seventh documented record of this North American migrant for Trinidad and Tobago and the first record in Trinidad since 1998.

Continuing the increasing trend in **Bay-breasted Warbler** (*Setophaga castanea*) occurrences, no fewer than six birds were photographed in 2014 as follows: one at Morne Catherine, Chaguaramas on 4 February (RN), two at Gran Couva on 17 February (NL), two at Erin Savanna on 30 March (NL), and one again at Gran Couva on 9 December (MK, NL). Previously there were only 11 documented records for Trinidad and Tobago (of which four were in 2013 - see Kenefick 2014). It is unclear whether this cluster of sightings represents a true widening of the migration route of this species or if their similarity to Blackpoll Warbler (*S. striata*) has historically obscured their true status in Trinidad and Tobago.

A **Yellow Warbler** (*Setophaga petechia*) of the rufous-capped form, known colloquially as Golden Warbler,

was found close to the Diego Martin River on 29 April, 2014 (FO). Whilst its subspecific identification is impossible to determine from the photographic evidence provided, it was likely either *S. p. petechia*, resident in Barbados, or *S. p. alsiosa*, found on Carriacou and The Grenadines; both subspecies look extremely similar to each other.

A breeding-plumaged **Chestnut-sided Warbler** (*Setophaga pensylvanica*) was photographed along the upper Blanchisseuse Road on 4 March, 2014 (DR, RS). This is the sixth documented sighting of this North American migrant in the last 20 years. All sightings have been in the Northern Range.

A flock of 25 **Bobolinks** (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) was found at the Caroni Rice Project on 8 October, 2014 (MK). Of the 17 documented sightings of this species since 2000, all but two have been from October through December.

ESCAPED CAGE AND AVIARY SPECIES

A feral flock of as many as nine **Village Weavers** (*Ploceus cucullatus*) were reported regularly from the Caroni Rice Project during 2014. A **Java Sparrow** (*Lonchura oryzivora*) was photographed at Carli Bay in November 2014. Additionally, there will always be the thorny question of provenance when it comes to many seedeater and seed-finch sightings; therefore, the TTBSDC has decided to restrict assessment to identification only.

ADDITIONAL RECORDS

Acceptable records also were received for 18 sightings of the following species whose status already has been established: **Rufescent Tiger-Heron** (*Tigrisoma lineatum*); **Hook-billed Kite** (*Chondrohierax uncinatus*); **Rufous Crab Hawk** (*Buteogallus aequinoctialis*); **Black Hawk-Eagle** (*Spizaetus tyrannus*); **Crested Caracara** (*Caracara cheriway*); and **Black-whiskered Vireo** (*Vireo altiloquus*).

INCONCLUSIVE RECORDS

Documentation of sightings of the following species were deemed inconclusive: **Glossy Ibis** (*Plegadis falcinellus*); **Aplomado Falcon** (*Falco femoralis*); **Curlew Sandpiper** (*Calidris ferruginea*); **Venezuelan Flycatcher** (*Myiarchus venezuelensis*); **Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch** (*Sporophila angolensis*); and **Black-and-White Warbler** (*Mniotilta varia*).

NOMENCLATURE CHANGES

Part of the mission statement of the South American Classification Committee is to create a standard classification, with English names, for the birds of South America. This classification is subject to constant revision by the proposal system to allow incorporation of new data.

As a result, the following nomenclature changes were made in 2014 that affect the Official List of the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago: Mangrove Rail (*Rallus longirostris*), formerly Clapper Rail; Red-breasted Meadowlark (*Sturnella militaris*), formerly Red-breasted Blackbird.

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Legend to plate

- a. Mystery Sandpiper, Brickfield, December 2014.
Photo: Nigel Lallsingh
- b. Red-tailed Hawk, Main Ridge Forest Reserve, Tobago, February 2014. Photo: Tat Taylor
- c. White-eyed Parakeet, Arena Forest, February 2014.
Photo: Feroze Omardeen
- d. Tennessee Warbler, Gran Couva, February 2014.
Photo: Cyril Coomansingh
- e. Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Shark River, April 2005.
Photo: Dean Schuler
- f. Black Kite, Gasparillo, December 2014.
Photo: Jameel Mohammed
- g. Kentucky Warbler, Aripo Savanna, October 2014.
Photo: Darshan Narang

