

Thirteenth Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Birds Status and Distribution Committee Records Submitted During 2015

Martyn Kenefick

36 Newalloville Ave, San Juan, Trinidad
martynkenefick@hotmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The abundance and status of our bird species, especially the common ones, are reasonably well known and described in the available 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 they 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 our rarer species. Now re-named the Birds Status and Distribution Committee, we have assessed all records submitted during 2015. In all 105 records were adjudged, representing 55 different species. Of the submissions assessed, in only eight 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; February 2016 (Rensen *et al.* 2016).

The Committee comprises the following members: Martyn Kenefick (Secretary), Geoffrey Gomes, Floyd Hayes, Nigel Lallsingh, Bill Murphy, Kris Sookdeo and Graham White. There are instances where we need supporting international expert knowledge to assist us with certain identification issues. We wish to acknowledge the valuable assistance provided by both Richard Fairbank (UK) and James Smith (USA) during 2015.

Archived records including photographic submissions number 1,217 at the end of 2015. 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, 2013, 2014, 2015).

The list of species considered by the TTBSDC (formerly 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.

During 2015, Amethyst Woodstar was accepted as a new species for the country, the Official List total now stands at 481.

RECORDS ACCEPTED

Two **White-faced Whistling-Ducks**, *Dendrocygna viduata* were photographed at Caroni Rice Project on 25 June 2015 (SR) and were seen intermittently until 27 September at least. The dates and location fall within the known occurrence in Trinidad

An adult male **Muscovy Duck**, *Cairina moschata* was photographed, swimming in freshwater marsh close to Icacos on 18 May 2015 (DH). There have been 11 sightings of this wanderer from mainland South America in the last seven years; almost all, understandably, from the south-west peninsula of Trinidad. Of these, eight have been during the period May - September.

An immature/female **American Wigeon**, *Anas americana* was found at Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago on 27 November 2015 (MK, NG *et al.*). A second bird was subsequently found two days later. Both remained until the year's end. This brings to eight, the number of documented records of this migrant duck in the last 20 years, all from Tobago.

An immature/female **Lesser Scaup**, *Aythya affinis* was found at Bon Accord sewage ponds on 27 November 2015 (MK). Close by, and on the same day, another three birds in similar plumage were present on the large lake at Tobago Plantations (MK). There have now been 19 birds documented in the last 20 years; all but one of them from south-west Tobago and all sightings have been between 16 November and 15 February.

Up to three breeding plumaged male **Masked Ducks**, *Nomonyx dominicus* and at least one female were present at either end of the year at a known breeding location (SL, MK *et al.*).

During the year there was one documented sighting of an adult **White-tailed Tropicbird**, *Phaethon lepturus* flying alongside the seabird cliffs on Little Tobago island on 11 June 2015 (GP). Whilst suspected, breeding remains unproven.

Single **Jabirus**, *Jabiru mycteria* were photographed at Icacos on 11 June 2015 (KS) remaining until 21 June, and at the Caroni Rice Project on 26 July 2015 (FO, WR *et al.*). This latter bird was present for a further three days at least. Once considered exceedingly rare, this species has now been documented in five of the last seven years with all sightings being during the period June - September.

Two immature **Wood Storks**, *Mycteria americana* were seen flying west over Trincity ponds on 15 March

2015 (ASh,IT,PW). However they were never relocated. Another immature was photographed at Sudama Steps on 10 May 2015 (WR). Five days later, three birds were present, with one remaining until 24 May (RG *et al.*). A further bird found close to Icacos on 17 June 2015 (DH) and remained until at least the 24 June. This may well have been one of the May trio. There have been only two other documented sightings in the last 20 years.

A sub-adult **Masked Booby**, *Sula dactylatra* was photographed flying over Penal on 27 January 2015, at least 10km from the coast (RG) (see plate). This species, formerly present year round on St Giles Rocks off of the NE coast of Tobago, is now a rare visitor to Trinidad and Tobago. This is the first documented occurrence of one flying over mainland Trinidad.

The **Western Reef-Heron**, *Egretta gularis* first found on 19 December 2014 (Kenefick 2015) remained near Bon Accord, Tobago, until the years end (MW, GP MKe *et al.*) (see plate).

Single **Little Egrets**, *Egretta garzetta* were found at both Bon Accord and Canaan sewage ponds on 9 December 2015, one remaining until the year end (MKe). Historically, one or two could be regularly found in SW Tobago. In recent times, they are seen less than annually.

Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus* is no longer the rarity it was ten years ago. It is now becoming truly difficult to know how many individuals were present during 2015. Documented sightings were as follows :- eight flying over Caroni swamp on 10 February (MK); a single bird at Kernaham Settlement on 24 August (NHa); three photographed at Satnurine Trace, Penal on 29 August (RG, NHa, WR); one at Caroni Rice Project 12 September (CC) increasing to five birds there on 24 September. Finally one at Bon Accord, sewage ponds on 17 September 2015 (NB, NBa). The Bon Accord bird was seen on many occasions afterwards, increasing to two birds on 27 November (MK), and they remained until the year's end. Additionally there are numerous undocumented sightings and it may well be that a number of individuals have been present year round.

A **Roseate Spoonbill**, *Platalea ajaja* was photographed in a small lagoon close to the highway at Caroni Swamp on 9 February 2015 (FM, AS). On the following day, three were found and these were seen by numerous observers until 18 May, with one bird still showing up until 3 August (see plate). This is only the fourth occurrence in the last 20 years, and the first since a one day sighting back in 2008.

The **Black Kite**, *Milvus migrans* first found on 26 November 2014 at Point a Pierre (Kenefick 2015), was seen intermittently during 2015 until early October.

Two **Crane Hawks**, *Geranospiza caerulescens*

were documented during the year with single birds photographed near Penal on 11 June 2015 (KS) and flying over Piparo on 24 December 2015 (RG). Since first being discovered in Trinidad back in 2000, multiple birds have been documented in every month since, bar one.

Caribbean Coot, *Fulica caribaea* has always been considered a fresh water marshland species. It came as some surprise therefore for one to be photographed close to the shoreline at Bloody Bay, Tobago on 17 April 2015 (PN,FS). Another individual was found, this time at Bon Accord sewage ponds on 26 September 2015 (KS). These are just the third and fourth documented records for Tobago in the last 20 years. In Trinidad on 8 August 2015, a single bird was well documented on a flooded field within Caroni Rice Project (FO). This constitutes the first acceptable record for the island. This species breeds as close as Grenada, two separate sightings in one year may well be the precursor of range expansion.

An **American Coot**, *Fulica americana* was found on 27 November 2015 at Bon Accord sewage ponds (MK). Two were photographed there the following day (SR) and they remained until the year end. This is just the sixth documented record of this species, all from Tobago.

Two **Hudsonian Godwits**, *Limosa haemastica* were photographed at Bon Accord sewage ponds on 2 October 2015 (KP). Whilst a regular but scarce migrant to freshwater marshes in Trinidad, this is just the second documented record for Tobago.

A loose flock of 13 **Buff-breasted Sandpipers**, *Tryngites subruficollis* was found on a wet, partly grassed field on the Caroni Rice Project on 3 October (MK, NL) with four remaining until 10 October at least. These dates fall within the known migration period of 17 September - 28 October observed over the last 20 years.

A **Wilson's Phalarope**, *Phalaropus tricolor* was present on Caroni Rice Project for three days from 24 September 2015 (NL) (see plate). On Tobago, at least two birds were found at Bon Accord sewage ponds on 26 September 2015, present until at least the following day (KS). There have now been 10 of these migrant shorebirds found in Trinidad and Tobago during the last 20 years all seen between 3 August and 1 October.

Pomarine Jaegers, *Stercorarius pomarinus* winter in southeastern Caribbean waters and many young birds remain in their "winter quarters" during their first year. An immature was photographed in the Gulf of Paria. on 20 July 2015 (IK) and we belatedly received photographic evidence of a winter plumaged adult from the same area on 13 January 1996 (BM).

On 20 December 2014, a first-winter plumaged **Black-headed Gull**, *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* was photographed at Pigeon Point, Tobago (SL) and an adult was

picked out amongst the gull roost at Brickfields on 10 October 2015 (NL). This latter bird remained in the area well into December. Once a major rarity, this species has now been found in six of the last eight years, the majority of sightings being from November - March.

Finding a **Franklin's Gull**, *Leucophaeus pipixcan* amongst the large west coast roost of Laughing Gulls is now becoming almost an annual event thanks to increased observer awareness of the subtle identification separation features between the two species. A first-winter plumaged bird first found on 29 December 2014 at Brickfield (NL), remained until 3 March 2015 at least. At the same site, two first-winter plumaged birds were found on 24 December 2015 (NL) and remained until the year's end.

Nesting **Lined Quail-Doves**, *Geotrygon linearis* were photographed high in the Northern Range on 26 April 2015 (CF). This is possibly the first occasion that this extremely rare and localised resident species has been photographed at a nest site.

Scaled Dove, *Geotrygon linearis* is now firmly established as a resident species in Trinidad, with sightings from five separate locations. Two were found on the Chaguaramas Peninsula on 27 June 2015 (KA) and have been regularly seen since. Elsewhere in south Trinidad, there were three birds together at Icacos on 30 May 2015 (KS, CQ); five at the Pitch Lake on 4 July 2015 (RG) and one photographed at Los Iros on 23 August 2015 (RJ). Finally, two were observed at the Toco Lighthouse on 13 September 2015 (GW).

Two **Fork-tailed Palm-Swifts**, *Tachornis squamata* were seen flying amongst a feeding group of Short-tailed Swifts over the Tobago Plantations estate, Tobago on 27 November 2015 (MK). This species is now quite regularly seen over the wetlands of SW Tobago (NG pers comm).

A **Rufous-shafted Woodstar**, *Geotrygon linearis* spent a few hours feeding on a flowering Vervain bush, seen from the Main House at Asa Wright Nature Centre on 3 May 2015 (BR *et al.*). This is just the fourth documented report of this tiny hummingbird in the last 20 years.

The highlight of the birding year in Trinidad and Tobago was the discovery of no less than three **Amethyst Woodstars**, *Calliphlox amethystine*. An immature male was found at Surry Village, Lopinot on 26 May 2015 (GW) (see plate). This was followed by another young male at Asa Wright Nature Centre on 17 June 2015 (RP, GP, BR) and an unsexed immature bird at Yerette, Maracas St. Joseph on 30 June 2015 (TF, WR). This now brings to 18, the number of hummingbird species found in Trinidad and Tobago.

An immature **Aplomado Falcon**, *Falco femoralis* was seen flying high over the Aripo Savannah on 22 November 2014 (NL). Elsewhere, Caroni Rice Project continues

to be a favourite hunting ground. During 2015, an immature was photographed on 25 June (SR) and an adult was watched in an aerial tussle with a Crested Caracara on 27 July (NL). Whilst it is recognised that the majority of this species visit Trinidad to prey on migrating shorebirds, they have in fact now been recorded in 10 months of the year.

A pair of **Brown-throated Parakeets**, *Eupsittula peritinx* were photographed at an active nest site in the Aripo Livestock Station on 20 July 2015 (see plate). In south Trinidad, a group of five birds were noisily feeding close to Princes Town on 17 August 2015 (RG).

A **White-eyed Parakeet**, *Psittacara leucophthalmus* was found close to Arena forest, near Talparo on 13 September 2015 (KM, FO). This is the second year in a row that the species has been found away from the known small feral flock in north Port of Spain.

Discussion over the status of **Variiegated Flycatcher**, *Empidonomus varius* in Trinidad has been gathering momentum in recent years. Further evidence that this species is present year round was documented with the following sightings of single birds: at Brasso Seco on 28 December 2014 (FO), in Caura Valley on 29 December 2014 (RN), at Gran Couva on 30 December 2014 (NL), at Talparo on 13 September 2015 (KM) and at the Aripo Livestock Station on 15 November 2015 (KM).

A **Bank Swallow**, *Riparia riparia* was found amongst a mixed feeding flock of hirundines over Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago on 20 October 2015 (KP). This species is found annually in small numbers on passage feeding over freshwater marshes in Trinidad. However this is only the second documented record for Tobago. We are aware of several undocumented sightings of at least one further individual, again from Bon Accord, during late December.

Single **Cliff Swallows**, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* were photographed at Brickfields on 4 October 2015 (NL) and over Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago from 20-22 October 2015 (KP). Whilst still considered a rare migrant from continental North America, careful study of feeding hirundine flocks has now produced 27 individuals in the last 20 years.

As documented in previous reports, an adult male **Lesson's Seedeater**, *Sporophila bouvronides* was seen, and at least four other birds were heard, from a known breeding site in South Trinidad on 7 June 2015. This location is withheld (KS).

Just two adult male **Summer Tanagers**, *Piranga rubra* have been documented during the year. One at Gran Couva on 20 February 2015 (NL) and one at Goodwood Park on 22 December 2015 (CG). However we are aware of other anecdotal sightings. This species is no longer the rarity it once was deemed to be, with at least 25 records since 1995.

An immature male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, *Phaeucticus ludovicianus* was photographed at Asa Wright Nature Centre on 20 April 2015 (CW, FM) (see plate). Of the ten spring migrant birds documented in the last 20 years, seven have been found during the period 26 March - 22 April.

An **Ovenbird**, *Seiurus aurocapilla* was mist-netted in the Aripo Savannah on 7 March 2015 (DN). This is just the second documented record of this migrant warbler in the last 20 years, the last being from Tobago in November 2006.

A **Black-and-White Warbler**, *Mniotilta varia* first found on 24 December 2014 at Carli Bay (Kenefick, 2015) remained in the area until 27 January 2015 (NL). On 7 November 2015, presumably the same individual re-appeared in exactly the same stretch of mangrove, and was seen until 25 December (NL).

A first-winter plumaged male **Cerulean Warbler**, *Setophaga cerulean* was photographed at Flagstaff Hill, Tobago on 25 October (FA) (see plate). This is the first documented sighting for Tobago and only the third for Trinidad and Tobago. The world population of this migrant warbler is declining at a rapid rate, due to its winter habitat in the northern Andes dwindling. It is cited as "possibly threatened or endangered" by Audubon (Audubon 2016).

A basic plumaged **Bay-breasted Warbler**, *Setophaga castanea* was found feeding in a Silk Cotton tree at Carli Bay on 22 February 2015 (NL). On 8 March 2015, a male bird advancing into alternate plumage was photographed at Chaguaramas (FO). This brings to 12, the number of documented records in just the last three years. Whilst a clearer understanding of basic plumage identification features has obviously helped an increase in sightings, this may indicate a slight change in wintering/migrating distribution.

A **Bobolink**, *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* was found at the Aripo Livestock Station on 12 October 2015 (DR, DRo). On 1 November 2015, a feeding flock of at least 25 birds were photographed at Penal (RG). Of the 17 documented sightings of this species in the last 20 years, all but four have been during the period 1 October to 1 November.

ESCAPED CAGE AND AVIARY SPECIES

At least one **White-throated Toucan**, *Ramphastos tucanus*, was reported from the Talparo area; a **White-winged Dove**, *Zenaida asiatica* was found in a park at Westmoorings; **Red and Green Macaws**, *Ara chloropterus* have been occasionally seen near Freeport and between Maracas and Las Cuevas and a **Festive Parrot**, *Amazona festiva* was photographed in Port of Spain. A male **Gray Seedeater**, *Sporophila intermedia* was found at Carli Bay and several reports of a male **Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch**, *Sporophila angolensis* came from the

same areas, well known as a gathering for cage-bird lovers. The small flock of **Village Weavers**, *Ploceus culcullatus* are still seen in the Caroni Rice Project.

We are also aware of a reintroduction project involving Muscovy Ducks from the Point a Pierre Wildfowl Trust. We cannot exclude the possibility that sightings of this species from the south-west peninsula of Trinidad may involve birds from this scheme

Finally, small groups of **Blue -and-Yellow Macaws**, *Ara ararauna* from the reintroduction project are occasionally being documented from the Plum Mitan area.

ADDITIONAL RECORDS

Acceptable records were also received for a further 19 sightings of the following species the statuses of which have already been established: **Rufescent Tiger-Heron**, *Tigrisoma lineatum*, **Hook-billed Kite**, *Chondrohierax uncinatus*, **Black Hawk-Eagle**, *Spizaetus tyrannus*, **Rufous Crab Hawk**, *Buteogallus aequinoctialis*, **Rufous Nightjar**, *Antrostomus rufus* and **Crested Caracara**, *Caracara cheriway*.

INCONCLUSIVE RECORDS

Submissions of the following species were deemed inconclusive: **Striated Heron**, *Butorides striata*; **Gray Heron**, *Ardea cinerea*; **Crane Hawk**, *Geranospiza caerulescens*; **White-tailed Hawk**, *Geranoaetus albicaudatus*, **Lesser Elaenia**, *Elaenia chiriquensis*; **Variiegated Flycatcher**, *Empidonomus varius*; **Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch**, *Sporophila angolensis* and **Bobolink**, *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*.

SPECIES REVIEW

Under the terms of our constitution, any committee member can request a review of a single record or indeed records of one or more species. During the year, a review was undertaken of all documented sightings of both **American Coot**, *Fulica americana* and **Caribbean Coot**, *Fulica caribaea*. Its purpose was to ensure that the supporting documentation, either written and/or photographic, satisfied the now known identification separation features of these two extremely similar species. As a consequence, four historic reports of Caribbean Coot have now been deemed inconclusive. The current status of both species in our twin islands is stated in the respective individual species comments above.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Records and contributions were received from the following :- Faraaz Abdool, Kerry Ahow, Brent Bain, Nick Baldwin, Nicola Baldwin (NBa), Detta Buch, Cyril Coomansingh, Paul Dykta, Theo Ferguson, Carl

Fitzjames, Rishi Goordial, Charles Gruny, Nigel Hacking, Nicholas Hassanali (NHa), David Huggins, Rodney Jagai, Imran Khan, Lawrence James, Martyn Kenefick, Matt Kelly (MKe), Nigel Lallsingh, Stephen Lorenz, Kamal Mahabir, Fayard Mohammed, Jameel Mohammed, Bill Murphy, Darshan Narang, Phil Naylor, Roger Neckles, Feroze Omardeen, David Peppar, Karl Phillips, Greg Prelich, Rich Prelich, Clint Quintal, Barry Ramdass, Dave Ramlal, Sataish Rampersad, Wendell Reyes, Derek Rogers (DRo), Patsy Russo, Fred Schumann, Anushka Seemungal, Clifmond Shameerudeen, Andy Shand (ASh), Roma Singh, Kris Sookdeo, Ian Tulloch, Caleb Walker, Pete Walliss, Mike Weaver and Graham White.

REFERENCES

- Audubon** 2015. Cerulean Warbler, Online Field Guide. [Online] Available at <http://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/cerulean-warbler>. Accessed 1 September 2016.
- 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.
- 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.** 2014. Eleventh report of the Trinidad and Tobago rare birds committee: rare birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2013. *Living World, Journal of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2014: 59-63.
- Kenefick, M.** 2015. Twelfth report of the Trinidad and Tobago rare birds committee: rare birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2014. *Living World, Journal of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2015: 56-61.
- Remsen, J.V., Jr., J.I. Areta, C.D. Cadena, A. Jaramillo, M. Nores, J.F. Pacheco, J. Perez-Emen, M.B. Robbins, F.G. Stiles, D.F. Stotz, and K. J. Zimmer.** Version 22 February 2016. A classification of the bird species of South America. American Ornithologists' Union. [Online]. Available at <http://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SAC-CBaseline.htm> (Accessed February 2016).
- 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.

LEGEND TO PLATE

- a. Western Reef-Heron, Bon Accord, Tobago, June 2015, photographed by Greg Prelich
- b. Wilson's Phalarope, Caroni Rice Project, September 2015, photographed by Nigel Lallsingh
- c. Roseate Spoonbill, Caroni swamp, February 2015, photographed by Nigel Lallsingh
- d. Masked Booby, Penal, January 2015, photographed by Rishi Goordial
- e. Brown-throated Parakeet, Aripo Livestock Station, July 2015, photographed by Nigel Lallsingh
- f. Amethyst Woodstar, Surrey Village, Lopinot, June 2015, photographed by Graham White
- g. Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Asa Wright, April 2015, photographed by Fayard Mohammed
- h. Cerulean Warbler, Flagstaff Hill, October 2015, photographed by Faraaz Abdool

