

Fourteenth Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Birds Status and Distribution Committee Records Submitted during 2016

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INTRODUCTION

The abundance and status of most of our bird species, especially the common ones, are 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 45% 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 2016. In all 129 records were adjudged, representing 67 different species. This is the highest total of sightings submitted since the formation of the Committee and illustrates the growth and popularity of birdwatching nationally. Of the submissions assessed, in only four cases did the Committee deem the identification inconclusive. A major review of the systematic order of species was undertaken during 2016 by the South American Classification Committee and the records presented below follow the revised nomenclature and taxonomic order as at November 2016.

The Committee comprises the following members: Martyn Kenefick (Secretary), Geoffrey Gomes, Floyd Hayes, Nigel Lallsingh, Bill Murphy, Kris Sookdeo and Graham White. Floyd tendered his resignation from the Committee during the year, having been a founder member. We wish to acknowledge both his contribution and expertise and thank him for his sterling work over the last 21 years. There are instances where we need supporting international expert knowledge to assist us with identification. We wish to acknowledge the valuable assistance provided by James Smith (USA), David Cooper, Richard Fairbank and Robin Restall (UK) during 2016.

Archived records including photographic submissions number 1,346 at the end of 2016. 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, 2016).

The Official List of the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago, the list of species considered by the TTBSDC (TTRBC)

and details of all records accepted by the Committee can be accessed, from our website at <http://rbc.ttfnc.org>. We urge finders to document and report their sightings to us.

During 2016, Eurasian Wigeon, Slender-billed Kite and Audouin's Gull were accepted as new species for the country. However following an in-depth review, the South American Classification Committee has re-assessed Caribbean Coot, *F. caribea* as being conspecific with American Coot, *F. americana*. As a consequence the Official List total now stands at 482.

RECORDS ACCEPTED

A flock of nine **White-faced Whistling-Duck**, *Dendrocygna viduata* were photographed in Caroni Rice Project on 30 May 2016 (CC). Several remained throughout the summer months with two still present until 2 October. These wanderers from mainland South America occur in Trinidad almost annually between mid May – mid October.

Two **American Wigeon**, *Anas americana*, which were first found on 27 November 2015 (see Kenefick 2016) were still present at Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago until at least 16 January 2016 (many observers).

An immature/female plumaged **Northern Shoveler**, *Anas clypeata* was photographed amongst a feeding group of Blue-winged Teal at Icacos on 24 October 2015 (DH). This is the second documented sighting of this winter visitor from continental North America in the last 22 years.

A sub-adult male **Eurasian Wigeon**, *Anas penelope* was found at Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago on 2 January 2016 in the company of both American Wigeon mentioned above (see plate). It remained until 16 January at least (TJ *et al.*). This constitutes the first record for Trinidad and Tobago of this predominantly old world duck. However in recent years, it has become much more regularly found along the north-west coast of continental North America.

A female, or immature, plumaged **Green-winged Teal**, *Anas crecca* was photographed at Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago on 2 January 2016 (TJ *et al.*). There have now been six documented sightings of this species in the last 22 years. Its similarity in this plumage from the more common migrant Blue-winged Teal may have masked its true abundance.

A pair of **Ring-necked Duck**, *Aythya collaris* were

found on Canaan sewage ponds, Tobago on 30 November 2016 (MKe). Whilst still a rare winter visitor from continental North America, this species has now been found in ten of the last 22 years, all sightings from south-west Tobago.

A drake **Lesser Scaup**, *Aythya affinis* was found on 23 December 2016 at Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago and remained until the year end. (MKe, JR, SPo). In the last 22 years, 20 of these migrant ducks have been found between November-February and all but two from Tobago

Three adult **American Flamingo**, *Phoenicopterus ruber* were photographed on the tidal mudflats at Orange Valley on 29 March 2016. One was seen intermittently until 8 August at least (JF,NL). This species is hard to overlook and this is the first documented sighting in the last three years.

Blue Ground Dove, *Claravis pretiosa* is one of our rarest resident species. Three or four males were seen and heard calling in the Granville area on 17 February 2016 (SP). Elsewhere, a male was found along Caltoo trace, Plum Mitan on 17 July (LJ,KM) and seen by many observers. It is a testament to their shy and elusive behaviour that these are the first documented sightings for five years and only the sixth in the last 22 years.

A moulting male **Amethyst Woodstar**, *Calliphlox amethystine* was photographed at Yerette, Maracas St Joseph on 26 July 2016, and present briefly the following morning (TF). A species first recorded in Trinidad and Tobago in 2015, we have now documented four birds all during the period late May – late July.

The fresh corpse of a **Paint-billed Crake**, *Mustelirallus erythropus* was found at Palmiste on 30 June 2016 (JW). This species remains an extremely rare wanderer from mainland South America and this occurrence is the first for six years. Almost all records are from late June – mid September.

The two **American Coot**, *Fulica americana*, which were first found at Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago in November 2015 (see Kenefick 2016) remained in the area until at least 15 March 2016 (many observers).

Two **Double-striped Thick-Knee**, *Burhinus bistriatus* were found just before sunrise at Caroni Rice Project on 7 July 2016 (NL). Of the 13 birds documented in the last 22 years, of this crepuscular species, all but two have occurred between 7 July – 2 September.

A **Marbled Godwit**, *Limosa fedoa* was photographed on the tidal mudflats at Brickfield on 25 March 2016 and was seen for a further four days at least (NL). Sightings of this migrant shorebird have become increasingly scarce. Indeed this was the first documented record for eight years.

An immature male **Ruff**, *Calidris pugnax* was found on the Trincity river on 21 November 2016 (MK) and

remained until 28 November at least (see plate). This remains an extremely rare wanderer to Trinidad and Tobago from Eurasia and is only the second documented sighting in the last 10 years.

An immature **Curlew Sandpiper**, *Calidris ferruginea* was photographed on the tidal mudflats at Brickfield on 18 September 2016, and remained present until 21 September at least (JF,NL) (see plate). This is just the second documented sighting of this migrant Eurasian shorebird, the previous being an adult found in May 2002.

A juvenile **Pomarine Jaeger**, *Stercorarius pomarinus* was carefully studied flying close to the coast of south-west Tobago on 27 December 2015. The waters between St Lucia and St Vincent are a common wintering ground for this species, yet there have been just seven documented sightings in the last 22 years, most during January to March.

Two winter-plumaged **Black-headed Gulls**, *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* were found in Tobago on 16 February 2016. One at Milford Bay (MKe) and one further north at Castara (GW). This species is a rare winter migrant from the north with 16 documented sightings in the last 16 years.

Once considered a major rarity, we now understand **Franklin's Gull**, *Leucophaeus pipixcan* to be a scarce but regular winter visitor to the west coast of Trinidad. However it's close resemblance to the ever present Laughing Gulls continue to mask their true abundance. Up to six birds, an adult and five in first-winter plumage were present at the beginning of the year commuting between Brickfield and Orange Valley (NL *et al.*) with at least one remaining until 23 April. During the second winter period, at Brickfields, an adult was found on 27 November (NL) and a first-winter plumaged bird on 4 December (MK). Both birds remained until the year end.

An immature **Audouin's Gull**, *Ichthyaetus audouini* moulting from first-winter to first-summer plumage was well documented and photographed on 10 December 2016 amongst the Laughing Gulls at the high tide roost at Brickfield (NL) (see plate). This is not only the first documented record for Trinidad and Tobago, it is also the first ever sighting for "the Americas". Its breeding range is restricted to the Mediterranean basin and winters along coastal north-west and west Africa

A first-winter plumaged **Ring-billed Gull**, *Larus delawarensis* was found at the Brickfield high tide roost on 25 November 2016 (NL). Over the course of the next two weeks, two more were seen, an adult and a first-summer plumaged bird (MK, GW). Once almost annual, these are the first documented records for five years.

A first-winter plumaged **Lesser Black-backed Gull**, *Larus fuscus* was photographed amongst the fishing boats

moored beside Milford Bay, Tobago on 30 November 2016 (MKe). Single birds have been found in three of the last four years at this site. Interestingly, all were in first-winter plumage.

An immature **Wood Stork**, *Mycteria americana* was found feeding in a shallow lagoon at Fullerton on 17 April 2016 (FO *et al.*). It remained in the area until 19 April at least. Despite five birds being documented in 2015 (see Kenefick 2016) this is still a rare wanderer from mainland South America with only two other sightings in the last 22 years.

Gray Heron, *Ardea cinerea*, was once considered an extreme rarity in Trinidad and Tobago. However in recent years, documented records of this species have become much more frequent with eight sightings in the last five years. During 2016, an adult was found at Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago on 27 January (BM *et al.*); and immatures were photographed at Brickfield on 18 December (NL) and again at Bon Accord on 28 December (MKe). Both of these latter birds remained until the years end at least. Whilst adult *ardea* herons are straightforward to identify, immature birds can be frustratingly similar. The situation is further compounded as Trinidad and Tobago is probably the only country in the world where all three "gray *ardea* herons" can realistically be found.

The dark morph **Western Reef-Heron**; *Egretta gularis* first found at Bon Accord, Tobago in December 2014 and seen intermittently throughout 2015 (see Kenefick 2016) was last reported from Lowlands, Tobago on 17 February 2016 (GW).

The **Little Egret**, *Egretta garzetta* first found on 9 December 2015 at Bon Accord (see Kenefick 2016) remained until 21 April 2016 at least. Another remained loyal to a stretch of the Trincity river on 19 September 2016 (MK *et al.*). It was joined by a second bird on 12 December with both remaining until the years end. Back in Tobago, another bird was photographed at Lowlands on 30 November (MKe), before moving to Canaan sewage lagoons on 28 December. The status of this species in Trinidad and Tobago fluctuates dramatically. Several birds were almost ever present between 1995-2001. There followed an absence for 11 years. However there have now been nine documented sightings in the last four years

The two **Glossy Ibis**, *Plegadis falcinellus* seen at Bon Accord, Tobago on 27 November 2015 (see Kenefick 2016) remained in the area throughout the year. Additionally an adult was photographed at Lowlands, Tobago on 15 March 2016 (MKe). On Trinidad, a flock of 18 birds were seen flying over Rahamut Trace, South Oropouche on 9 January 2016 (KA,WR). This is the largest group documented for the islands. Finally on 2 July 2016, three birds were photographed at Caroni Rice Project (LJ).

Despite its abundance in Trinidad, **Black Vulture**, *Coragyps atratus* is an extremely rare sight in Tobago. One seen soaring over St Giles rocks on 5 December 2014 (KP) is just the third documented sighting in the last 22 years.

A **White-tailed Kite**, *Elanus leucurus* was seen and heard flying over the mangrove at Carli Bay on 10 November 2016 (NL). Whilst this species is widespread in Venezuela, this is the first documented record for at least 25 years.

An adult **Black-collared Hawk**, *Busarellus nigricollis* was photographed perched beside Cocos Bay Road, adjacent to Nariva Swamp on 31 December 2015 (AB, MR). This species is not uncommon in similar habitat along the coasts of mainland South America adjacent to Trinidad, but this is the first documented sighting from Nariva Swamp since 1998.

A male **Snail Kite**, *Rostrhamus sociabilis* was first observed just east of Southern Main Road, Caroni on 24 March 2016 (GW) (see plate). Subsequent visits to the area yielded a second male and a female which were regularly seen until the end of April. One male then moved to Caroni Rice Project where it was intermittently seen by many observers until at least 11 August 2016.

An adult **Slender-billed Kite**, *Helicolestes hamatus* was photographed soaring over Los Blanquizales swamp on 5 March 2016 (RG) (see plate). This constitutes the first documented record in Trinidad and Tobago of this wanderer from mainland South America.

An adult **White-tailed Hawk**, *Geranoaetus albicaudatus* was photographed close to Kernaham settlement on 1 October 2016 (KM). This is the fourth documented sighting of this species in the last eight years and all from the same general area. It is conceivable that the same individual is involved, hunting over this vast area of marshland

Applomado Falcon, *Falco femoralis* is no longer the rarity it once was. There has, in recent years, been a change in their status and distribution in Trinidad. A total of eight birds were photographed and reported during 2016 as follows :- an adult at Aripo Livestock Station 31 December 2015 (TJ,EH); an adult at Caltoo trace 6 February 2016 (KM); an adult flying over Rochard Rd, Penal on 4 April 2016 (NH); three immatures together at Cedros on 20 August 2016 (JF); an adult at Sudama Steps on 27 August 2016 (SB) and an immature over Orange Grove on 17 November 2016 (SB). Historically these falcons arrived in Trinidad to prey upon the shorebird passage during July-October, indeed some 55% of all records still support this trend. However the species has now been documented in every month of the year except May.

For the third year running, a pair of **Brown-throated Parakeet**, *Eupsittula pertinax* have been seen entering

and exiting a hole in a termite nest close to the Aripo savannah (see Kenefick 2015,2016) (many observers). The small population residing near Princes Town (see Kenefick 2016) increased to at least 17 birds on 6 August 2016 (RG). Successful breeding is yet to be proven.

Further sightings of **White-eyed Parakeet, *Psittacara leucophthalmus*** continued through Trinidad during 2016. A feeding group of five were found in Arouca on 31 January (BM) and a single bird was photographed at la Brea on 17 December (RG). The feral flock in St Anns, POS was regularly reported throughout the year (many observers).

Despite being an abundant Trinidad resident, the occurrence of **Great Kiskadee; *Pitangus sulphuratus*** in Tobago is exceptional. One found on the outskirts of Scarborough on 15 March 2016 (MKe) may have journeyed by ferry.

Three **Caribbean Martins, *Progne dominicensis*** were photographed soaring over El Tucuche on 21 February 2016 (FO) and a single male at L'Anse Noir on 6 March 2016 (GW). Whilst an abundant breeding visitor to Tobago, this remains a rare passage migrant through Trinidad with just five documented sightings in the last 21 years. The whereabouts of their wintering grounds remains largely unknown. Almost all have left Tobago and islands to the north in their thousands by the end of October, returning early February. However there are very few sightings in Venezuela, Guyana and Brazil.

A **Bank Swallow; *Riparia riparia*** was seen feeding at the Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago on 2 January 2016 (TJ *et al.*), and continued to be seen until 4 January at least. Whilst a regularly seen migrant over Trinidad wetlands, this is just the third documented sighting for Tobago in the last 22 years.

An unseasonal **Cliff Swallow; *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*** was found at Bon Accord sewage ponds on 2 January 2016 (TJ *et al.*). Of the 18 documented sightings in the last 22 years, only four have occurred away from the traditional migration months of March to April and September to October.

A juvenile **Yellow-bellied Seedeater, *Sporophila nigricollis*** was photographed on Chacachacare on 25 August 2016 (KM). Seedeaters are nomadic and eruptive in nature. After bumper years in 2011 and 2012 where multiple birds were found on the Bocas Islands and the dry southern slopes of the Northern Range, this is the first documented record for four years.

An adult male **Summer Tanager, *Piranga rubra*** was photographed at Carli Bay on 13 February 2016 (NL,RJ). This is a rare but regular winter visitor with 12 documented sightings in the last five years.

A non-breeding plumaged male **Scarlet Tanager,**

Piranga olivacea was photographed at Cuffie River, Tobago on 13 November 2004 (MG). There have only ever been three documented, south-bound migrant sightings in Trinidad and Tobago, two of which were from Tobago, and both were in November 2004.

An adult male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak, *Pheucticus ludovicianus*** was photographed at Asa Wright Nature Centre on 14 April 2016 (JP) and an immature male at Carli Bay on 11 November 2016 (NL). There have now been 15 documented sightings in the last 22 years, with all but one during the period November – April.

A **Black and White Warbler; *Mniotilta varia*** was recorded in the mangrove close to Carli Bay on 7 November 2016 (NL). It is presumably the same individual that overwintered in the same stand of trees during the winters of 2014 and 2015 (see Kenefick 2015, 2016). This is a rare species, with only ten other individuals recorded in the past 22 years, all form the Northern Range.

An adult **Tennessee Warbler, *Leiothlypis peregrina*** was photographed at Gran Couva on 5 March 2016 (NL) and another at Brickfield on 3 December 2016 (NL). This species was first recorded in 2014 and already six individuals have been documented. This may represent a change in their known migration route.

The increase in sightings of **Bay-breasted Warbler; *Setophaga castanea*** continued throughout the Review Year with basic plumaged birds being found as follows :- 28 December 2015 at Gran Couva remaining until 5 March 2016 at least (NL); Millennium Lakes, Trincity on 12 December 2016 (MK, NL) and Carli Bay on 18 December 2016 (NL). Whilst it is still possible that the recent upsurge in sightings represents a subtle change in migration route for this species, it is known that the presence of their preferred food source in their breeding grounds, Spruce Budworm, *Choritoneura sp.*, has increased dramatically in recent years.

An adult female **Blackburnian Warbler, *Setophaga fusca*** was photographed at Gran Couva on 6 March 2016 (NL,MK) and a basic plumaged male at Bon Accord, Tobago on 15 December 2016 (TM). Whilst this species is still considered to be a rare migrant through Trinidad and Tobago, there have now been three documented sightings in the last three years. They are closely related to Bay-breasted Warbler, *S castanea* and are likely also benefiting from the dramatic population increase in Spruce Budworm

An immature **Chestnut-sided Warbler, *Setophaga pensylvanica*** was seen briefly at Asa Wright Nature Centre on 29 December 2015 (TJ). Additionally, an adult in alternate plumage was photographed at Grande Riviere on 6 April 2015 (BAh). There have now been eight documented sightings of this migrant warbler in the last 22 years; all during the period mid-December to early April.

An adult male **Black-throated Blue Warbler**, *Setophaga caerulescens* was found feeding beside the Guacharo trail at Asa Wright Nature Centre on 15 October 2016 (RD). This is the third documented record for Trinidad and Tobago and the first since 1992.

An immature female **Baltimore Oriole**, *Icterus galbula* was photographed at Asa Wright Nature Centre on 13 May 2016 (CW). This is the first documented record for 11 years.

A loose flock of at least ten **Bobolink**; *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* was photographed feeding on tall dry grass seeds on 1 October 2016 at Caroni Rice Project (LJ). This species should be considered a passage migrant as three-quarters of sightings have been in October.

We received an old report of a pair of **Red-breasted Meadowlark**, *Sturnella militaris* from Crown Point Airport, Tobago on 6 December 2007 (TMu). Historically, this species appeared occasionally in Tobago during the latter part of the 20th century, but reports thereafter are extremely rare.

ESCAPED CAGE AND AVIARY SPECIES

We are aware of a reintroduction project involving **Muscovy Ducks** *Cairina moschata* from Point a Pierre Wildfowl Trust. Sightings of this species from the south-west peninsula of Trinidad may involve these birds.

Elsewhere, exotic parrot species continue to be reported. **Painted Parakeet**, *Pyrrhura picta* has been photographed in both Princes Town and Port of Spain and **Red and Green Macaws**, *Ara chloropterus* from La Brea, Palo Seco, Santa Flora, Cumuto and Moka.

The provenance of seedeater and seed-finch species continues to be a problem. The Committee has taken a decision that, unless there is supporting evidence to the contrary, all sightings will be considered under this category and that assessment will be based on identification alone. A **Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch**, *Oryzoborus angolensis* was reported from South Oropouche and Carli Bay and an adult male **Lesson's Seedfinch**, *Sporophila bouvronides* from Nariva.

A **Chestnut Munia**, *Lonchura atricapilla* was photographed at Caroni Rice Project and a Venezuelan **Troupial**, *Icterus icterus* in Carlsen Fields.

ADDITIONAL RECORDS

Acceptable records were also received for a further 55 sightings of the following species whose status has been established but who's distribution continues to be monitored by the Committee. **Rufous-necked Wood-Rail**, *Aramides axillaris*; **Rufescent Tiger-Heron**, *Tigrisoma*

lineatum; **Hook-billed Kite**, *Chondrohierax uncinatus*; **Black Hawk-Eagle**, *Spizaetus tyrannus*; **Rufous Crab-Hawk**, *Buteogallus aequinoctialis*; **Crane Hawk**, *Geranospiza caerulescens*; **Crested Caracara**, *Caracara cheriway*; **Scaled Dove**, *Columbina squammata*; **Striped Owl**, *Asio clamator*; **Variegated Flycatcher**, *Empidonomus varius* and **Black-whiskered Vireo**; *Vireo altiloquus*.

INCONCLUSIVE RECORDS

Submissions of the following species were deemed inconclusive :- Great Black Hawk *Buteogallus urubitinga*, Blue-chinned Sapphire *Chlorestes notata*, Gray Heron *Ardea cinerea* and Hook-billed Kite *Chondrohierax uncinatus*.

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LEGEND TO PLATE

- a. Snail Kite, Caroni Rice Project, March 2016, photographed by Wendell Reyes.
- b. Slender-billed Kite, Slender-billed Kite, Los Blanquizales Swamp, 5 March 2016, Photographed by Rishi Goordial.
- c. Eurasian Wigeon, Bon Accord sewage ponds, Tobago, 2 January 2016, photographed by Sataish Rampersad
- d. Audouin's Gull, Brickfield Mudflats, 10 December 2016, Photographed by Nigel Lallsingh
- e. Ruff, Trincity River, 21 November 2016, photographed by Nigel Lallsingh
- f. Curlew Sandpiper, Brickfield Mudflats, 18 September 2016, Photographed by Nigel Lallsingh

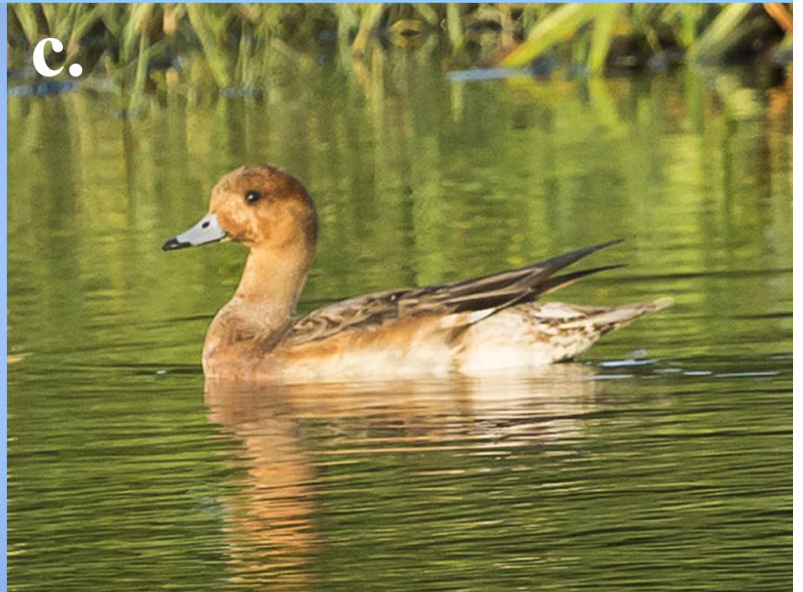
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