

# Bird Observations in Tobago December 1985 to November 1987

by David Rooks

Heale House, Speyside, Tobago

## New records for Tobago

*Catharacta skua*, Great Skua

When I was fishing on the north-east coast of Tobago 1.5 km outside of Bloody Bay on 7th March 1986, accompanied by five other persons of company executive status, this bird arrived alongside our boat at a distance of 8 m and stayed around for half an hour. I requested all persons present to observe it closely and memorize a description. On returning to shore I gave each "A guide to the birds of North America" and had each one find and identify the bird seen without assistance or prompting. Each person identified the bird as *Catharacta skua*, which confirmed my identification.

Description: A big, brown, chunky bird with white patches on the primary feathers of each wing, bigger and very different from the jaegers which I see in the area regularly.

*Oceanites oceanicus*, Wilson's Storm-Petrel

I first saw this species off Toco in 1975. In Tobago my first sighting was outside of Scarborough on 12 April 1986. I have since seen it regularly all around the island, usually far offshore, the nearest sighting to shore being approximately 1 km outside Charlotteville. In April 1987, one of these birds fed around my stationary boat for 4 hr, several times coming as close as 3 m. Careful observation was eminently possible. The bird had only one leg. It appeared to stand on tip-toe while "hover-fluttering" over the wave tops and pecking into the water. Its food, being very small, remained unseen.

Description: A generally brown bird about 15 cm long. Wings appear longer than the body. Pale to light buff wings with white run bars; tail convex; feet yellow.

*Milvago chimachima*, Yellow-headed Caracara

One was seen on the Claude Noel Highway at 4.30 p.m. on 15th November 1987. I drove up to it and it flew into a coconut tree. I got so close to it I could have hit it with the truck.

Description: See French (1973)

## General observations

*Haematopus palliatus*, American Oystercatcher

As reported earlier (Rooks 1984), I observed a bird of this species on the rocks at Amos Vale in 1982. From February to March 1986, small groups of two or three were regularly observed on the rocks of Man O' War Bay and Speyside. The bird has a startlingly red beak: it reminds one of a traffic light.

*Tachybaptus dominicus*, Least Grebe

Frequently seen in dams and any reasonably large body of water.

*Puffinus lherminieri*, Audubon's Shearwater

Seen as often feeding in the night as in the day. Though they feed far offshore in the day, they feed around the boat when we fish near the St. Giles islands at night using a bright lantern to attract fish. They can be seen close up in holes in the bank of the track leading up to the rest house on Little Tobago during

their breeding season.

*Buteogallus urubitinga*, Great Black Hawk

Widespread and frequently seen in forested areas along Main Ridge.

*Falco peregrinus*, Peregrine Falcon

Seen regularly from October to April, especially in the presence of seabirds which they have been observed attacking.

*Sterna dougallii*, Roseate Tern

Nested in May and June 1986 and 1987 on Booby Island, Man O' War Bay. Nests with eggs and nestlings were visible from 7 m in indentations in the sheer rock face. Yellow-crowned Night Herons (*Nyctanassa violacea*) and Little Blue Herons (*Florida caerulea*) also use this island for nesting.

*Anous stolidus*, brown Noddy Tern

*Sterna fuscata*, Sooty Tern

*Sterna anaethetus*, Bridled Tern

All arrive in Tobago at the same time and nest at the same time, at the end of April, as the Roseate Tern but they use all the coastal islands and rocks for nesting as long as these are big enough to have some vegetation. They do not appear to nest on those that have no vegetation. They also nest in Alexander Bay, Little Tobago.

*Sterna maxima*, Royal Tern

These arrive in March. They nest on the Sisters with the nest being visible from the sea. I suspect that they also use the St. Giles Islands but I haven't seen any nests yet.

*Larus atricilla*, Laughing gull

Laughing Gulls arrive and nest at the same time as the Royal Terns. They nest on the St. Giles Islands and the outside face of Little Tobago.

*Cailliploperus ensipennis*, White-tailed Sabrewing

This species has made a marked come-back from its near extirpation by hurricane Flora in 1963. I have observed it in the Louisd'Or valley and regularly in Main Ridge Forest Reserve.

*Chiroxiphiapareola*, Blue-backed Manakin

Widespread, even quite common, in all forested areas.

*Cyanerpes cyaneus*, Red-legged Honeycreeper

One of the most common birds feeding around Forestry Division's look-out hut, Main Ridge. Also commonly seen at the water trough near the rest house on Little Tobago during the dry season of 1987.

*Forpus passerinus*, Green-rumped Parrotlet

Now common on the western end of the island.

*Thraupis palmarum*, Palm Tanager

This species, unrecorded from Tobago before 1982 (Rooks 1982), is not plentiful but is widespread. It was first observed at Speyside and it has now been seen in Charlotteville.

## References

French, Richard (1973). A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago. Livingston Publishing Co., Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, 470 pp.

Rooks, David (1982). Tobago field trip - 9th - 13th June 1982. Bull. Trin. Tob. Field Nat. Club. Fourth Quarter.  
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