

Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Birds Status and Distribution Committee, Records Submitted during 2023

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The Trinidad and Tobago Birds Status and Distribution Committee (TTBSDC) was established in 1996 as the official adjudicator of rare bird records in Trinidad and Tobago. The list of species considered by the committee, together with the Official List of the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago can be accessed from our website at <http://ttbsdc.ttfnc.org>. The TTBSDC publishes annual reports containing details of all accepted records by the Committee, in *Living World*, the Journal of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club.

The committee has assessed all records submitted during 2023. In all, 109 records were adjudged, representing 61 species. One species was recorded in the country for the first time. Additionally, the committee is satisfied that there now exists a sustainable feral population of Red-and-green Macaws in Trinidad and this species has been added to the Official Checklist of Trinidad & Tobago. This brings the current list to 496 species.

Highlights from 2023 included Trinidad's first Eastern Wood Pewee; a male Indigo Bunting, a Crested Doradito, the first Orange-breasted Falcon since 1975 and record numbers of Upland and Buff-breasted Sandpipers. Of the submissions assessed, in only three cases did we find the identification inconclusive. Most of the records are accompanied by high quality photographs and the committee commends the photographers.

Records presented below follow the revised nomenclature and taxonomic order of the South American Classification Committee (SACC) as of December 2023 (Remsen *et al.* 2024).

The Committee comprises the following members: Martyn Kenefick (Secretary), Faraaz Abdool, Geoffrey Gomes, Nigel Lallsingh, Bill Murphy, Kris Sookdeo and Graham White. Again, there are instances where we have benefited from supporting international expert knowledge to assist us with certain identification issues. We wish to acknowledge with thanks the valuable assistance provided by Bill Clark and James Smith.

Archived records including photographic submissions number 1,958 at the end of 2023. This report is the twenty-first report of this committee. All reports were published in *Living World* and are available at <https://ttfnc.org/livingworld/index.php/lwj/issue/archive>.

Records accepted

On 8 June, three **White-faced Whistling-Ducks** *Dendrocygna viduata* were found on Caroni Rice Project (NL); two remaining until 1 September 2023. This austral duck appears annually on inland wetlands and meadows, almost all from mid May to mid October.

An eclipsed-plumaged drake **Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata* was photographed in a flooded field within Caroni Rice Project on 20 December 2023 (NL). Historically a very rare winter migrant duck from continental North America, there have now been six documented sightings in the last nine years.

Four **American Wigeon** *Mareca americana*, including a male in eclipse plumage were found on the eastern lagoon on Caroni Rice Project closest to the highway on 28 December 2023 (NL, RJ, LJ), three of which remained until the year's end. There have now been fourteen sightings of these wintering ducks in the last 28 years, however these are the first since 2017.

An immature or female plumaged **Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta* was photographed on Centre Street ponds, Canaan, Tobago on 24 November 2023, remaining until 2 December at least (MKe). This remains a rare wintering visitor to T&T with just seven bird sightings in the last 28 years, including a group of three in 2003.

An adult male **Green-winged Teal** *Anas crecca* was photographed on Centre Street ponds, Canaan, Tobago on 27 March 2023 (JR *et al.*). Another male appeared at the same site on 27 December and remained until the year's end. (MKe). There have now been documented sightings of this North American migrant duck in six of the last eleven years.

An immature or female plumaged **Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* was found on Centre Street ponds, Canaan, Tobago on 8 December (JC, BJS, HS) and remained until the year's end. Despite sightings in five of the last 10 years, this winter duck remains an uncommon visitor to Tobago. There have been no documented sightings in Trinidad.

Of the group of **Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* found at Centre Street ponds, Canaan, Tobago on 9 December 2022, two birds remained until 11 March 2023 with one female still present until at least 6 July (many obs). Southbound migration brought up to 10 birds arriving on 13 November 2023 varyingly located between Centre Street ponds and Lowlands (MKe, JD *et al.*) remaining until the year's end.

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* is a scarce winter visitor to both islands and very localised rare resident in Trinidad. During the last week of the year, single birds were found at La Vega (MK) and Centre Street ponds, Canaan, Tobago (MKe) whilst a party of eight were on Caroni Rice Project (NL), this latter sighting being the largest grouping recorded.

Just one **Dark-billed Cuckoo** *Coccyzus melacoryphus* was documented this year from Orange Grove farmland on 8 August 2023 (JF). All sightings of this wanderer from mainland South America are within the window of 12 July to 11 October.

Three **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** *Coccyzus americanus* were seen and photographed along Innis Road, Moruga on 2 May 2023 (FA). Additionally, there is anecdotal evidence of several small groups of this species in the vicinity during the preceding few days. Whilst this is a scarce southbound migrant mainly found in T&T during October-December, sightings of northbound birds are extremely infrequent.

A moulting male **Amethyst Woodstar** *Calliphlox amethystine* briefly fed on vervain flowers at Bajnath Estate on 15 March 2023 (JB). There have now been 14 documented sightings of this tiny hummingbird since first being found in 2015. This is by far the earliest record with all others occurring between 19 April and 26 July.

An **American Coot** *Fulica americana* was photographed at Bon Accord lagoons on 14 May 2023 (RJ, PW), and was present until 27 May at least. All but two of the 13 documented sightings of this species since 1995 have occurred in south-west Tobago wetlands.

A female **Sungrebe** *Heliornis fulica* was found at La Vega on 14 October 2023 (DG, CS) (Fig.1). It remained until 11 November at least being regularly seen in the early morning but becoming very elusive as the day heated up. This is the first documented sighting of this, generally secretive, member of the finfoot family for at least 32 years.

For the seventh consecutive year, a **Double-striped Thick-knee** *Hesperoburhinus bistriatus* appeared on the Queens



Fig. 1. Sungrebe, La Vega, October 2023. Photo Nigel Lallsingh.

Park Savannah, Port of Spain on 8 July 2023 (Bd'A) and still present the following day. Elsewhere two birds were photographed on Millennium golf course on 28 August (BR, CR). There have now been 20 documented sightings in the last 16 years, all but two occurring between 28 June and 7 September.

A total of seven **Upland Sandpipers** *Bartramia longicauda* were recorded during southbound migration as follows: one in farmland at Orange Grove on 3 September 2023 (JF); up to five birds on Caroni Rice Project intermittently between 16 September and 15 October 2023 (NL, MH, AS *et al.*) (Fig.2.) with two birds seen again on 4 November. Elsewhere, one flushed from fields at Waterloo Secondary School on 21 October 2023 (NL).



Fig.2. Upland Sandpiper, Caroni Rice Project, September 2023. Photo Nigel Lallsingh

At least 15 **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** *Calidris subruficollis* were found in wet, short grassy fields on Caroni Rice Project between 18 and 25 September 2023 (NL *et al.*) (Fig. 3.). In addition, six birds were seen on Waterloo Secondary School fields on 21 October 2023 (NL). September and October remain key months for seeing this delightful “grasspiper”.



Fig. 3. Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Caroni Rice Project, September 2023. Photo Nigel Lallsingh.

A recent re-examination of historical photos of *Tringa* shorebirds has revealed the second documented sighting of a **Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* for Tobago, photographed at Centre Street ponds, Canaan on 17 February 2020 (MKe) (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Wood Sandpiper, Canaan, February 2020, Photo Matt Kelly.

Careful scanning of the gull flock on the Waterloo mudflats produced Trinidad’s second ever **Audouin’s Gull** *Ichthyaeus audouinii* on 9 December 2023 (NL) (Fig. 5).

In recent years, there have been several sightings along the coast of both Suriname and French Guiana. Nevertheless, the species is still regarded as Vulnerable by IUCN with its breeding population restricted to islands in the Mediterranean Sea and wintering off of coastal north-west Africa.



Fig. 5. Audouin’s Gull, Waterloo mudflats, December 2023. Photo Nigel Lallsingh

Two first-winter plumaged **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** *Larus fuscus* were found at Milford Bay, Tobago on 26 January 2023 and another at the same location on 2 December 2023 (both MKe). Whilst birds of all ages are regularly found on the tidal mudflats on the west coast of Trinidad, we are yet to understand why each of the seven birds documented from Tobago in the last 10 years have been juveniles.

A moribund **Great Shearwater** *Ardenna gravis* was photographed on the coastline at Mayaro on 27 June 2023 (AR). All four previous records this century have been in June and July. This species breeds on the South Atlantic islands and undergoes a huge circular post-breeding migration up each coast of the ocean.

An adult **Striated Heron** *Butorides striata* was photographed at Bon Accord lagoons on 12 September 2023 (Bd’A). Whilst abundant in Trinidad, this species is only very occasionally sighted in Tobago.

Adult **Cocoi Herons** *Ardea cocoi* were photographed at Bon Accord sewage lagoons on 4 June 2023 (JF) and along the river at Plymouth on 2 December 2023 (MKe). Whilst this species is a regular visitor to Trinidad from mainland South America, there have only been six documented sightings for Tobago in the last 10 years.

A juvenile dark morph **Reddish Egret** *Egretta rufescens* was found at Otaheite Fish Market on 22 November 2023 (SS) (Fig. 6.) where it remained until the year's end. It was extremely confiding and anecdotally had been present for "several months". Whilst an uncommon resident to both the northern coast of South America and off-shore islands, this is just the seventh documented sighting for T&T in the last 28 years and the first since 2011.



Fig. 6. Reddish Egret, Otaheite, November 2023. Photo Vishal Rangersammy.

Two **Plumbeous Kites** *Ictinia plumbea* were seen soaring and gliding over Englishman's Bay, Tobago on 9 January 2023 (MKe). This is a common breeding visitor to Trinidad from mainland South America with most birds arriving from mid-February and returning south during September. Three of the four documented records for Tobago have occurred between 12 December and 9 January.

A **Savanna Hawk** *Buteogallus meridionalis* was photographed on the golf course at Lowlands, Tobago on 15 December 2023 (MKe *et al.*). The absence of any bands eliminates the possibility of it being a "release" from a resident falconer on the island. This constitutes the first documented record of this species for Tobago.

An **Orange-breasted Falcon** *Falco deiroleucus* was photographed close to Las Lapas on 14 August 2023 (HF). What is likely to be the same bird was seen perched in the same general area on 30 December (MK *et al.*) (Fig. 7.). This is the first documented sighting of this scarce and very localised resident of Central and South America since 1975 although its visible similarity to resident Bat Falcon *F. ruficularis* may obscure its occurrence in Trinidad. It is categorised as "Near Threatened" by IUCN.

Two **Brown-throated Parakeets** *Eupsittula pertinax* were found at Moruga on 26 February 2023 (JF). Whilst the species has occasionally bred in Trinidad, most sighting

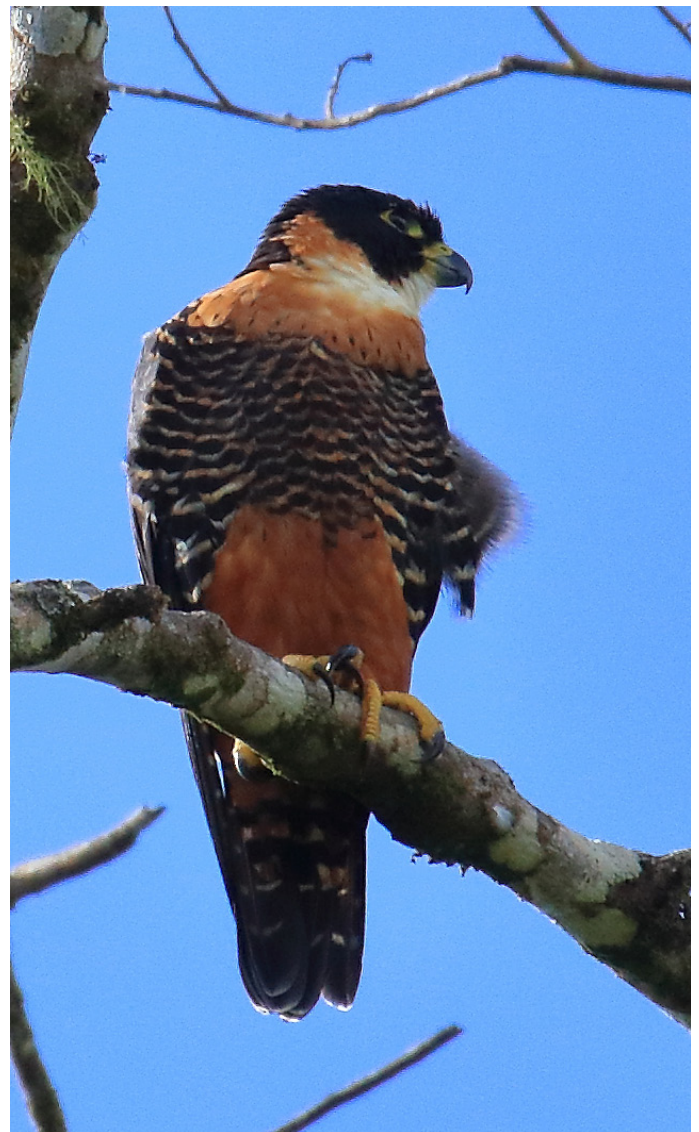


Fig. 7. Orange-breasted Falcon, Las Lapas Trace, December 2023. Photo Nigel Lallsingh.

are considered to be occasional wanderers from mainland South America.

For the seventh year in a row there have been multiple sightings of **Small-billed Elaenias** *Elaenia parvirostris* within the black sage bushes along the southern border of Caroni Rice Project. A minimum of 12 birds were seen feeding between 27 May and 4 June 2023 (NL, MK) and at least two birds remaining until 9 July at least. Elsewhere two birds were photographed along Sumaria Trace on 24 September 2023 (JF).

A **Lesser Elaenia** *Elaenia chiriquensis* was photographed in suitable habitat along Sumaria Trace on 24 September 2023 (JF). Whilst still considered a scarce resident species, the close plumage similarity with the very common Yellow-bellied Elaenia, *E. flavogaster*, may mask its true abundance.

An adult female **Crested Doradito** *Pseudocolopteryx sclateri* was studied and photographed along Rahamut Trace on 3 April 2023 (SA, TA)(Fig. 8.). This is just the fourth documented sighting of this wanderer from mainland South America in the last 30 years, three of which have been from the same location.



Fig. 8. Crested Doradito, Rahanut Trace, April 2023. Photo Steve Aversa.

An immature **Eastern Kingbird** *Tyrannus tyrannus* was photographed along Pond Road, Aripiero on 22 October 2023 (JF, VR, BW). This is the second documented record for Trinidad of this migrant North American flycatcher and the first for 39 years.

An **Eastern Wood-Pewee** *Contopus virens* was found within the cocoa plantation along Tortuga Shortcut Road on 4 January 2023, remaining until 27 March at least (NL) (Fig. 9.). What is assumed to be the same individual returned to exactly the same trees on 29 October and certainly still present up to 19 December (NL *et al.*). Whilst visually extremely similar to Western Wood Pewee *C. sordidulus*, identity was confirmed by comparing the vocalisation of the two species. This is the first documented sighting for T&T of this migrant from continental North America.



Fig. 9. Eastern Wood Pewee, Tortuga Shortcut Road, January 2023. Photo Nigel Lallsingh,

A **Yellow-throated Vireo** *Vireo flavifrons* was photographed at Las Lapas on 9 April 2023 (FM). This is just the fourth documented sighting in T&T of this migrant vireo.

A **Black-whiskered Vireo** *Vireo altiloquus* was photographed in the cocoa plantations off of Tortuga Shortcut Road on 12 March 2023 (NL).

Single **Cliff Swallows** *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* were documented from Centre Street ponds, Canaan on 8 April 2023 (JCu) and feeding over Caroni Rice Project on 10 September 2023 (NL), the latter still present on 17 September. This species is predominantly a passage migrant through T&T although a few over winter. Indeed 72% of all documented sightings occur during March and October.

October and November are very much the key months to find **Bobolink** *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* in T&T. Two birds were photographed inside Caroni Rice Project on 14 October 2023 (NL) and five birds were seen along Rahamut Trace on 12 November 2023 (DH, RJ) (Fig. 10), four of which remained until 19 November at least.



Fig. 10. Bobolink, Rahamut Trace, November 2023. Photo Jerome Foster.

A female **Great-tailed Grackle** *Quiscalus mexicanus* was photographed at La Brea on 17 September 2023 (BW). This sighting may well refer to the same individual photographed at the same site back in December 2020.

An **Ovenbird** *Seiurus aurocapilla* was found amongst a loose feeding flock along the Blanchisseuse Road on 14 November 2023 (RZE, CR). This is just the third documented sighting of this rare passage migrant in the last 28 years with records in both November and March.

An alternate plumaged **Tennessee Warbler** *Leiothlypis peregrina* was photographed along Tortuga Shortcut Road on 4 February 2023 (NL). Elsewhere, a basic plumaged bird appeared at the feeders at Asa Wright Nature Centre on 29 November 2023 (CW). This latter sighting is the first

documented record of this migrant warbler from continental North America at this well-watched site and the tenth ever record for Trinidad.

The adult male **Cerulean Warbler** *Setophaga cerulea* recorded from Tortuga Shortcut Road on 22 October 2022 remained in the same general area until 17 January 2023 at least (MK). What is likely the same individual returned for its third winter to the same line of mango trees. It was first seen on 19 December 2023 (NJ, JF) and remained present until 23 December at least.

A female **Blackburnian Warbler** *Setophaga fusca* was photographed along Tortuga Shortcut Road on 4 February 2023 (NL) and a male on Blanchisseuse Road on 3 April 2023 (FA). Once deemed to be an exceedingly rare passage migrant through Trinidad, there have now been 12 birds found in the last 10 years.

Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra* is an annual, yet uncommon winter visitor to T&T. Documented sightings during the review period are as follows:- immature male along St Michael Road on 26 February 2023 (MK, RJ); adult female at Las Lapas on 9 April 2023 (FM) and another female along Tortuga Shortcut Road on 29 October 2023 (NL).

A moulting male **Indigo Bunting** *Passerina cyanea* was found in wet agricultural fields at Aranguez on 2 February 2023 (Bd'A) (Fig. 11.). It remained faithful to the same small area until the 26 February, during which it slowly attained alternate plumage. There are two "historic" sight records of this migrant from continental North America accepted by Richard French in March 1977 and April 1994 (French 2011). Since the formation of TTBSDC in 1996, the only previous documented sighting was a female in March 2020.

A **Dickcissel** *Spiza americana* was photographed at Bon Accord, Tobago on 12 March 2023 (RJ). Whilst large flocks are annually found in Trinidad, this remains an extremely rare wanderer to Tobago with only three documented sightings in the last 25 years.

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 birds from this scheme. **Blue-and-yellow Macaws** *Ara ararauna* frequently seen around the Queen's Park Savanna, Port of Spain and **Festive Parrots** *Amazona festiva* seen in Port of Spain and Champs Fleurs are assumed to be escapees from captivity. **Village**



Fig. 11. Indigo Bunting, Aranguez, February 2023. Photo Nigel Lallsingh.

Weavers *Ploceus cucullatus* are frequently seen inside Caroni Rice Project but there are as yet no records to suggest that the population is expanding. **Red-and-green Macaws** *Ara chloropterus* continue to be regularly reported from several areas of Trinidad. All evidence suggests that this population originated from individuals which escaped or were released from captivity. However, over the past 15 years there have been 108 records of this species on eBird, with numbers as high as 14 and 12 respectively at La Brea and along the North coast between Las Cuevas and Blanchisseuse, and indications of nesting at four locations at least. Based on these records the Committee believes that the population of Red-and-Green Macaws is self-sustaining and as such has been added to the official list of birds of T&T, but not on the review list. The provenance of seedeater and seed-finch sightings continue to be uncertain due to individuals which have escaped or been released from captivity, often after being illegally imported from the continent. This is particularly so for **Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch** *Sporophila angolensis* and **Gray Seedeater** *Sporophila intermedia* for which the committee's assessment will be based on identification alone.

Additional records

Acceptable records were also received or submitted to eBird for a further 40 sightings of the following species whose status has been established but whose distribution continues to be monitored by the Committee: **Trinidad**

Piping-Guan *Pipile pipile*, **Scaled Dove** *Columbina squammata*, **Rufescent Tiger-Heron** *Tigrisoma lineatum*, **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*, **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus*, **Hook-billed Kite** *Chondrohierax uncinatus*, **Snail Kite** *Rostrhamus sociabilis*, **Double-toothed Kite** *Harpagus bidentatus*, **Black Hawk-Eagle** *Spizaetus tyrannus*, **Crane Hawk** *Geranospiza caerulescens*, **Rufous Crab Hawk** *Buteogallus aequinoctialis*, **Great Black Hawk** *Buteogallus urubitinga*, **Crested Caracara** *Caracara plancus*, **Aplomado Falcon** *Falco femoralis*, **Variiegated Flycatcher** *Empidonomus varius* and **Yellow-bellied Seedeater** *Sporophila nigricollis*.

Inconclusive records

Submissions of the following species were deemed inconclusive :- **White-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon lepturus*, **Scarlet Tanager** *Piranga olivacea* and **Black-faced Grassquit** *Melanospiza bicolor*.

The Committee is to undertake a review of all current and, where possible, historic submissions of **Gray Heron** *Ardea cinerea* and immature **Cocoi Heron** *Ardea cocoi*. A report will follow in due course.

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. The following change were made in 2023:

- The scientific name for Double-striped Thick-knee is now *Hesperoburhinus bistriatus*.
- The scientific name for Leach's Storm-Petrel is now *Hydrobates leucorhous*.
- The scientific name for Mouse-colored Tyrannulet is now *Nesotriccus murina*.
- The scientific name for Golden-rumped Euphonia is now *Chlorophonia cyanocephala*.
- The common name for Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, *Tolmomyias flaviventris* has now changed to Yellow-breasted Flatbill.

- The common name for Yellow-olive Flycatcher, *Tolmomyias sulphureus* has now changed to Yellow-olive Flatbill.
- The common name for Guianan Trogon, *Trogon violaceus* has now changed to Guianan-Violaceous Trogon.
- The common name for Trilling Gnatwren, *Ramphocaenus melanurus* has now reverted back to Long-billed Gnatwren.

Additions to the SACC List of Species

The following documented sightings from Trinidad have been accepted by SACC as “firsts” for the South America region:

- Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
- Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

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