

# A PREDATOR AT WORK

By Clyde A. Crichlow.

Grass-quits and other birds nest regularly in my garden and back yard. Humming birds, Longuemare's Hermit in particular, and other birds have also nested. The grass-quits build their nests about two feet above the ground on the branch of a shrub. They generally fly about three or four feet high.

On many occasions the young would vanish from the nests before their feathers were fully developed. My neighbours' cats were believed to be robbing the nests of the young birds. About a year ago I became suspicious that the Common Ani or mel corbeau was robbing the nests of the grass-quits and possibly those of other birds. I began noticing that when the anis were around the quits would become excited and fly up to the electric light poles and perch on the poles or wires twittering agitatedly. The anis are voracious feeders on insects.

I have seen about eight anis space themselves about six feet apart combing a piece of land 50 feet wide and about 100 feet deep; the birds advancing in line abreast, actually keeping formation while picking out and eating the insects they discovered.

It was about 4.30 p.m., on Friday 29th July 1966 that my worst fears were confirmed. Approaching my house I noticed that all the small birds were on the telephone and electric wires. They were in a very agitated mood, twittering excitedly and pivoting their bodies from side to side or flying from tree. This agitated action was a sign that there was danger around. It appeared to be a warning from one bird to another.

Becoming suspicious through the action of the birds I rushed into my garden to a nest where a pair of young quits had hatched about two weeks before and were about to leave the nest. The nest was empty. Looking through the wire fence into the vacant lot next door, I saw what appeared to be the parents flying excitedly in and out of the bushes. The young birds had apparently fallen into the bushes in their attempt to fly.

I had seen an ani on my fence. Realizing that the young birds were in danger, I rushed out endeavouring to get into the vacant lot which was enclosed with wire. Before I could get to the rescue, the Ani swooped down into the bushes and in a few seconds emerged with a female quit in its beak.

The Ani flew into another yard. I pursued but was unable to make it drop its prey. Nevertheless positive identification of its prey was obtained. My neighbour was a witness and I had established the fact that the Anis were preying on the small birds in my garden and elsewhere.

I believe that the Ani may have taken its prey to a nest. It returned about fifteen minutes after. There was a feather in its beak. I succeeded in driving it away. The grass quits remained agitated for about forty-five minutes, then peace and calm returned.

Birds Haven, Charles Avenue, Fairview, Diego Martin.