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# Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee: 2008

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The Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee was established in 1995 with the principal aim to assess, document and archive the occurrence of rare or unusual birds in Trinidad and Tobago. The Committee has now assessed all records submitted during 2008. In all, 38 records were adjudged, representing 30 different species. As a result of these submissions, one additional species has been added to the Official List of Birds of Trinidad and Tobago, bringing the running total to 469 species. Additionally, one more species has been found on Tobago for the first time. Of those assessed, in only one case did the Committee feel that the identification had been inconclusive. The records tabulated below follow the nomenclature and taxonomic order of the American Ornithologists Union South American Checklist; 10<sup>th</sup> version February, 2006.

The Committee comprises the following members: Martyn Kenefick (Secretary), Geoffrey Gomes, Floyd Hayes, Bill Murphy, Courtenay Rooks and Graham White. Richard French resigned from the Committee early this year for health reasons. It was Richard himself who formed the Committee and has been a steady influence in its evolution over the years. I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of all of us, to record here our most grateful thanks for all his help and guidance.

Archived records including photographic submissions are held at 36 Newalloville Ave., San Juan.

We are aware that a number of other rare birds are found each year in Trinidad and Tobago and urge finders not only to report their sightings to us but to document same. A recently revised list of those species considered by the TTRBC can be accessed from the home page of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club website at "www.ttfnc.org"

## RECORDS ACCEPTED

Three different sightings of the **Muscovy Duck**, *Cairina moschata* were made in 2008. A single bird was found in North Oropouche on 9 July, 2008 (JK) followed by one flying south over Sudama Steps on 24 July, 2008 (MK *et al.*) and finally three birds at Icacos from 17-19 September, 2008 (KS). These are the first documented records for at least 13 years.

An immature **Gray Heron**, *Ardea cinerea* was found at Bon Accord ponds, Tobago on 1 April, 2008 (BM, PT *et al.*). A second bird, the first adult to be found in our islands was seen at Lowlands, Tobago on 28 November,

2008 (GW, PP). This brings to seven, the number found in the last 10 years.

Three different **Reddish Egrets**, *Egretta rufescens* were found during 2008. Firstly, an immature or very worn plumaged non-breeding bird was seen briefly at the high tide roost by Brickfields Fish Quay on 8 July, 2008 (MK, GG) before flying north over Caroni Swamp. On 10 July, 2008 a similarly plumaged but clearly different individual began a stay on the Diego Martin River (FO, GW); being last recorded on 1 August, 2008. Finally, a much darker plumaged and very confident bird was present on the shoreline at Erin from 23-30 August, 2008 (TM, DS). (See Plate). These are the first records of this species for Trinidad and Tobago since a Tobago sighting in July, 2003.

A single **Glossy Ibis**, *Plegadis falcinellus* flew west over the Caroni Rice Project on 26 July, 2008 (MK *et al.*). On the same date, a different juvenile was seen and photographed in South Oropouche freshwater marsh (KS). This bird showed a colored numbered band strikingly similar to a bird banded in Spain and seen in the UK in August, 2008, posing a real possibility that this was a transatlantic vagrant as opposed to a wanderer from mainland South America. Ten individuals have now been found in Trinidad during the last ten years.

A **Roseate Spoonbill**, *Platalea ajaja* was seen briefly amongst a feeding flock of Egrets in rice fields close to Caroni bridge on 6 December, 2008 (RT). This is the first report of this species since August, 1999.

A flock of **American Flamingo**, *Phoenicopterus ruber* spent several months on the west coast tidal mudflats either side of Orange Valley. Eight birds were originally found on 19 April, 2008 peaking at 37 during June before slowly fragmenting. Eight birds were still present on 9 September and a lone sub-adult finally until 23 October (TM, NL *et al.*). (See Plate).

An adult male **Snail Kite**, *Rostrhamus sociabilis* was found along Rahamut Trace, South Oropouche on 21 October, 2008 (MK). This is the first sighting of this species since the well documented birds on Caroni Rice Project during 1998-2002.

Two adult **Crane Hawks**, *Geranospiza caerulescens* were found during 2008. The first at Rousillac on 31 May (KS) and the other near Penal on 26 October (KS). There have now been 13 sightings since this species was first identified in Trinidad in 2001.

An adult **Rufous Crab-Hawk**, *Buteogallus aequinoctialis* was photographed at mangrove edge in Moruga on 13 September, 2008 (TM, DS, KS), possibly the same as one found close by in July, 2007. Whilst adults are straightforward to identify, immatures still prove to be problematic. There have now been eight accepted sightings in the last five years.

A sub-adult **White-tailed Hawk**, *Buteo albicaudatus* spent much of 2008 intermittently hunting the freshwater marsh, northeast of Kernahan Settlement, Nariva. First found on 22 February, it was regularly seen between 31 March and 27 April, and then again from 13 November into early December (RN, RG, MK, NH *et al.*). This remains a rare visitor from mainland South America with just four birds found in the last 13 years.

An adult **Black Hawk-Eagle**, *Spizaetus tyrannus* was seen and photographed close to Quinam on 26 April, 2008 (KS). Whilst a total of 17 birds have now been documented in the last 10 years, this remains a rare, local resident species.

Two adult and a juvenile **Crested Caracara**, *Carcara cheriway* frequented the Icacos area during the period 19-29 September, 2008 (KS). There have now been 11 sightings, almost all in eastern and southwestern Trinidad, in the last eight years.

A single **Spotted Rail**, *Pardirallus maculatus* was first found on 25 January, 2008 in an area of shallow freshwater marsh close to Abidh Trace, Cacandee. This is the first of this species to be found alive in the last 13 years at least. The bird was still showing up to 3 February, 2008 together with three Sora Rails, *Porzana carolina*, two Yellow-breasted Crakes, *Porzana flaviventer* and a Striped-backed Bittern, *Ixobrychus involucris* (GW, MK *et al.*).

A **Marbled Godwit**, *Limosa fedoa* was found on Freeman's Bay, San Fernando on 15 September, 2008 (TM). (See Plate). The species is a rare visitor with only six records in the last 13 years.

A single **Upland Sandpiper**, *Bartramia longicauda* was found in South Oropouche freshwater marsh on 6 September, 2008 (KS). There have now been seven records in the last eight years.

A first winter plumaged **Black-headed Gull**, *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* was found at Barbados Bay, Tobago on 21 March, 2008 (PD *et al.*). There have been eight records in the last 14 years; three of which were from Tobago.

A group of five **Eurasian Collared Dove**, *Streptopelia decaocto* were found in Barataria on 23 October, 2008 (MK). As a result of this sighting, the Committee has re-assessed and accepted the single bird reported from Waterloo on 8 October, 2000 (GW). This species has a

long history of range expansion on a global scale. It is spreading southwards through the Antilles island chain; is now common as far south as Dominica and present in St. Lucia and it has now been accepted onto the Official List of species in Trinidad and Tobago.

Up to four **Rufous-shafted Woodstars**, *Chaetocercus jourdani*; two partially breeding plumaged and two non-breeding plumaged males, were found on the entrance track to Morne Bleu tracking station between 8-15 June, 2008 (RC, GW *et al.*). (See Plate). All were hunting tiny insects from favored perches; none were seen taking nectar. This is the first documented record of male plumaged birds for Trinidad.

A **Ringed Kingfisher**, *Megaceryle torquata* was seen flying south over Bon Accord on 1 December, 2008 (MK). This is the second sighting for Tobago. Whilst this is the same site as the first bird found on 16 July, 2007, the locality is well watched and the likelihood of the same bird lingering unseen for so long is remote.

Single, rather dull-plumaged **Black-whiskered Vireos**, *Vireo altiloquus* were found on Montevideo Trace, Grande Riviere 29 February, 2008 and the upper Blanchisseuse Road on 11 March, 2008 (MK *et al.*). A total of 19 birds have now been documented in the last eight years during periods January to May and October to December.

An adult female **Swallow Tanager**, *Tersina viridis* was found at Cuffie River Nature Resort, Tobago on 21 April, 2008 (JC). This is the first record for the island.

An adult male **Lesson's Seedeater**, *Sporophila bouvronides* was found in a patch of pigeon peas adjacent to marshland in South Oropouche on 9 December, 2008 (KS). This is the first sighting for five years.

A flock of eight **Lined Seedeaters**, *Sporophila lineola* were found on agricultural land in South Oropouche on 16 August, 2008 (KS). This site is just a mile from where the species was first recorded for Trinidad and Tobago during 2007.

A single male **Summer Tanager**, *Piranga rubra* was found close to Cumuto Village on 24 February, 2008 (NL, KL, TM). There have now been six documented records of this wintering visitor in the last 14 years.

A splendid adult male **Scarlet Tanager**, *Piranga olivacea* was seen and photographed at a Mt. Irvine garden bird table on 11 April, 2008 (DK). This brings to nine, the number of spring migrants documented passing through Trinidad and Tobago during the last 25 years with all sightings from 8-28 April. There are an additional two autumn migrants.

An **Ovenbird**, *Seiurus aurocapilla* was found in the Main Ridge Forest Reserve, Tobago on 27 November, 2006 (KM, DH). This is the first documented record for

35 years.

A flock of approximately 45 **Bobolink, *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*** were found in freshwater marsh at South Oropouche on 22 November, 2008 (TM, DS, KS). (See Plate). This species remains a scarce passage migrant through Trinidad and Tobago. Whilst there have been no other sightings in the last five years, access to their most likely feeding area, the Caroni Rice Project, is now extremely difficult.

#### INCONCLUSIVE RECORDS

Just one record was considered inconclusive of **Bay-breasted Warbler, *Dendroica castanea***. Whilst submissions of **Red-and-Green Macaw, *Ara chloropterus*** and **Tricolored Munia** were correct in identification, they were both considered of unnatural origin.

#### South American Classification Committee

For ornithological classification, Trinidad & Tobago are considered part of South America and, consequently, we contribute to the Official South American Checklist compiled and maintained by the above group. Their criteria for record acceptance of a new species to the region is far stricter than that adopted by the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee, insisting on photographic or specimen evidence.

Currently, there are eight species, accepted to the "Trinidad and Tobago list" but not documented elsewhere in South America, where no such photographic evidence has been archived. The species involved are as follows:

**Snow Goose, *Chen caerulescens*** :- sightings December

1975 and December 1984.

**Northern Gannet, *Morus bassanus*** :- seen off north-east Tobago November 1991.

**Common Ringed Plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*** :- single bird mist netted in October 1962.

**Spotted Redshank, *Tringa erythropus*** :- single bird in Tobago February 1983.

**Common Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia*** :- two different sightings; south-west Tobago July 1977 and Waller Field early 1987.

**White-eyed Vireo, *Vireo griseus*** :- single record, Buccoo Marsh, Tobago January 1998.

**White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba*** :- one record from Waller Field, Trinidad December 1987.

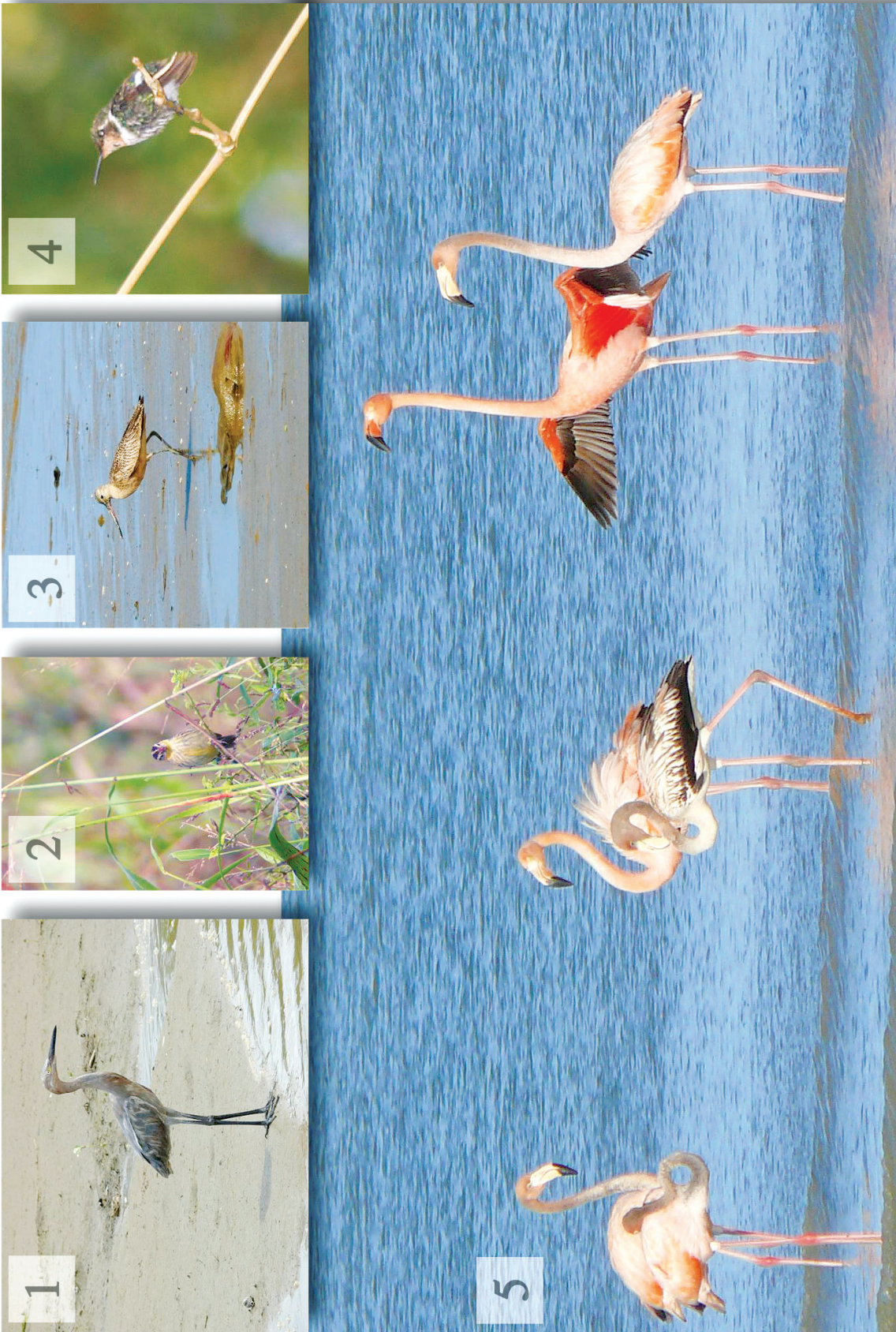
**Red-winged Blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus*** :- one close to Caroni Swamp from June 1980 - mid 1981.

If anyone has photographic evidence of any of the above, the Committee would be delighted to hear from you.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. Reddish Egret. Photographed by Tarran Maharaj at Erin Bay on 23 August, 2008  
 2. Bobolink. Photographed by Dave Smith at Rahamat Trace, Oropouche on 6 December, 2008  
 3. Marbled Godwit. Photographed by Tarran Maharaj at Freeman's Bay, San Fernando on 15 September, 2008  
 4. Rufous-shafted Woodstar. Photographed by Graham White at Morne Bleu on 15 June, 2008  
 5. American Flamingo. Photographed by Tarran Maharaj at Waterloo, July, 2008