

LIVING WORLD

Journal of the Trinidad and Tobago

Field Naturalists' Club

admin@ttfnc.org

ISSN 1029-3299



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

Seventh Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee: Rare Birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2009

Martyn Kenefick

Kenefick, M. 2010. Seventh Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee: Rare Birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2009. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2010, 78-83.

Seventh Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee: Rare Birds in Trinidad and Tobago 2009

Martyn Kenefick

36 Newalloville Ave., San Juan, Trinidad and Tobago.

martynkenefick@hotmail.com

The Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee (TTRBC) 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 2009. In all, 70 records were adjudged, representing 51 different species. As a result of these submissions, two additional species have been added to the Official List of Birds of Trinidad and Tobago, bringing the running total to 471 species, including a new sub-category of “Introduced Species”. Two species, previously recorded for Trinidad only, have been found on Tobago for the first time. Of the submissions assessed, in only six cases did the Committee find the identification inconclusive. The records tabulated below follow the nomenclature and taxonomic order of the American Ornithologists Union South American Checklist, September, 2009.

The Committee comprises the following members: Martyn Kenefick (Secretary), Geoffrey Gomes, Floyd Hayes, Bill Murphy, Courtenay Rooks and Graham White.

Archived records including photographic submissions are held at 36 Newalloville Ave., San Juan. Previous reports of the committee were prepared by Hayes and White, (2000); White and Hayes (2002) and Kenefick (2005, 2007, 2008, 2009).

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, together with the Official List of the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago and details of all accepted records by the Committee, can be accessed from our new website at <http://rbc.ttfnc.org>.

RECORDS ACCEPTED

A tide-line **Cory's Shearwater**, *Calonectris diomedea* corpse was photographed at Manzanilla on 28 November, 2009 (GW). This is the ninth record in the last 15 years, many of them dead.

Another tide-line corpse, a **Manx Shearwater**, *Puffinus puffinus* was photographed at Manzanilla on 23 January, 2002 (KG). This is the third record for Trinidad, all being from the north-east or east coast.

An adult **Northern Gannet**, *Morus bassanus* was

seen flying offshore from St. Giles rocks on 2 August, 2009 (BM). This is the second record for the country and the first for Tobago.

An adult **Striated Heron**, *Butorides striata* was photographed at Bon Accord Lagoons on 25 July, 2009 (JB *et al.*). Whilst common in Trinidad (and indeed mainland South America), this is the first documented record for Tobago in the last 15 years.

An adult **Gray Heron**, *Ardea cinerea* was found at the mouth of the Nariva River on 10 December, 2009 (GW). With just one record preceding, there have now been a total of eight sightings in the last 11 years; no doubt a reflection of our increased awareness of separation features from Great Blue Heron.

A white-morph **Reddish Egret**, *Egretta rufescens* was found on the tidal mudflats at Orange Valley on 16 June, 2009 (MK). This record follows three similarly plumaged birds during 2008 and indicates the possibility of white-morphed birds being historically overlooked in Trinidad and Tobago.

A single adult **Muscovy Duck**, *Cairina moschata* was photographed at Icacos on 12 May, 2009 (MR) may have been part of a flock of nine birds photographed nearby at Fullerton Swamp on 12 July, 2009 (KS). Historically, a very rare wanderer from the mainland, there have now been five sightings involving 15 birds in the last two years.

A female or immature **American Wigeon**, *Anas americana* was photographed at Lowlands, Tobago on 16 November, 2009 (BMu *et al.*). There have now been five records in the last 15 years, all from wetlands in south-west Tobago.

A group of two male and five female **Ring-necked Ducks**, *Aythya collaris* were photographed on ponds within the Lowlands complex, Tobago on 8 March, 2009 (DS, MKe, TM). There are unconfirmed reports that they had been present since early February.

A small group of three females and one male **Lesser Scaup**, *Aythya affinis* were also photographed on the Lowlands complex ponds 16 - 19 November, 2009 (AK, BMu *et al.*). This is still a rare visitor with just five records in the last 14 years.

Three non-breeding plumaged **Masked Ducks**, *Nomonyx dominicus* were photographed on a pond within the Lowlands complex, Tobago on 11 August, 2008 (KK) and

an adult male was photographed nearby on 8 March, 2009 (MKe, DS, TM). Further sightings in April suggest at least one pair bred in the area. In Trinidad, an adult male was found at Rahamut Trace on 8 January, 2009 (MK, GG) and photographed on 11 January, 2009. Whilst undoubtedly still a rare resident in both islands, its secretive nature and preference for lily-covered ponds may hide its true abundance.

On 26 July, 2008 a **Glossy Ibis**, *Plegadis falcinellus* was photographed at South Oropouche bearing a coloured numbered band (Kenefick 2009). Further investigation has confirmed that this individual was banded at the Donana National Park in southern Spain on 3 June, 2006. It is interesting that the first record of **Little Egret**, *Egretta garzetta* for Trinidad in 1957 was banded the previous year at the same location in Spain (Downs 1959).

Two sub-adult **Jabiru**, *Jabiru mycteria* were photographed in freshwater marsh east of Bush Bush Reserve on 11 July, 2009 (PB, MK, SR). The birds were present until 19 July, at least. This is the fifth record for Trinidad and Tobago.

A gray-morph (probably male) **Hook-billed Kite**, *Chondrohierax uncinatus* was found at Cat's Hill on 2 May, 2009 (KS). Whilst predominantly a rare visitor to Trinidad and Tobago, a small resident population may still exist in south Trinidad.

The Committee is currently conducting a full review of all immature **Rufous Crab-Hawk**, *Buteogallus aequinoctialis* records submitted and a full report will be published at a later date. During the review period, adults were photographed at Carli Bay on 4 July, 2009 (GW); Columbus Bay on 23 August, 2009 (KS) and another seen at Guayaguayare on 4 December, 2009 (GW). Adults have now been seen in each of the last four years in coastal mangrove.

An immature **Great Black-Hawk**, *Buteogallus urubitinga* moulting into its second plumage was photographed at Nariva Swamp on 7 December, 2008 (GT). Elsewhere, an adult was photographed soaring over Surrey Village, Lopinot on 1 November, 2009 (GW). Whilst locally common on Tobago, this remains a rare resident to Trinidad forest with just five records documented in the last 14 years.

Presumably the same **White-tailed Hawk**, *Buteo albicaudatus* regularly seen in the Kernaham area of Nariva during 2008, was again present on 4 March, 2009 (MK *et al.*).

An adult **Black Hawk-Eagle**, *Spizaetus tyrannus* was photographed at Cat's Hill on 2 May, 2009 (KS). In the Northern Range, an immature was seen over the Asa Wright Nature Centre on 11 November, and an adult from Las Lapas on 13 November, 2009 (BMu *et al.*). Whilst now

reported annually, this remains a rare Trinidad resident.

Sightings of **Crested Caracara**, *Caracara cheriway* were concentrated in two areas of Trinidad. On both the eastern and western borders of Nariva Swamp, at least three, probably four birds were found. An adult was seen along the coast road near Nariva Farm on 14 April, 2009 (MK). Another adult was photographed closer to Plum Mitan on 24 May, 2009 (MR *et al.*) and an adult with attendant juvenile were photographed at the edge of Kernaham Settlement on 16 July, 2009 (GG, MK, GW). In south-west Trinidad, a further adult with juvenile were photographed on 26 July, and again on 23 August, 2009 at Icacos (KS, GW). Whilst this is an indication of breeding at both sites, there is no conclusive evidence.

A **Bat Falcon**, *Falco rufigularis* was found perched beside the Boxborough - Bloody Bay Road, Tobago on 20 February, 2008 (MKe). This is just the second record of this species for Tobago, the previous being in October, 2005 just a few miles away between Bloody Bay and Parlatuvier. This is possibly the same individual.

There were two sightings of **Aplomado Falcon**, *Falco femoralis* during the year, both from the east coast. An adult was found at Manzanilla on 8 March, 2009 (GW) and an immature in Nariva Swamp, close to Kernaham on 22 September, 2009 (MK, BMu *et al.*). Whilst still a rare visitor from the mainland, this species has now been recorded in eight of the last 10 years.

A **Rufous-necked Wood-Rail**, *Aramides axillaris* was found in mangrove north of Manzanilla Beach Facility on 1 January, 2009 (MK). This is the first mainland record away from Caroni Swamp.

An **Upland Sandpiper**, *Bartramia longicauda* was seen and photographed at Turtle Beach, Tobago on 23 September, 2009 (DH). Whilst fitting into an established pattern of occurrences between 14 September - 26 October, this is the tenth to be found this century for Trinidad and Tobago, but only the second for Tobago.

A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper**, *Tryngites subruficollis* was found on Caroni Rice Project on 10 October, 2009 (MK, GW). This sighting falls within the established pattern of autumn records with a total of 25 birds found between 17 September - 28 October in the last 14 years.

A first winter plumaged **Black-headed Gull**, *Larus ridibundus* was found at the Orange Valley high tide roost on 24 February, 2009 (MK, GW). A second bird was photographed the following day (NL, DS) and remained until at least 28 March, 2009. There have now been ten records in the last 14 years.

An adult **Ring-billed Gull**, *Larus delawarensis* was photographed amongst the high tide roost at Orange Valley on 28 March, (NL, DS); present until 18 April, at least. A second winter plumaged bird was photographed

at the same location on 24 October, 2009 (NL, DS) and was seen intermittently until the year's end. This species is still a rare visitor to Trinidad with just four sightings in the last five years.

An adult **Kelp Gull**, *Larus dominicanus* was photographed amongst the seabird roost at Orange Valley on 4 December, 2009 (NL, DS). This is the second record of this species for Trinidad.

A "near-adult" **Greater Black-backed Gull**, *Larus marinus* was photographed at Orange Valley on 31 January, 2009 (JM). It remained present until at least 21 March. This is the first record for Trinidad and Tobago. On 23 February, 2009, a first winter plumaged bird was found at the same site (MK); well watched and photographed until 9 July, 2009.

A sub-adult **Herring Gull**, *Larus argentatus* was photographed at Coco Reef Beach, Tobago on 8 March, 2009 (DS, MKe, TM). Unconfirmed reports suggest this bird was present since 18 February, 2009. This is just the fourth record for Trinidad and Tobago and the first for Tobago.

An adult **Black-legged Kittiwake**, *Rissa tridactyla* was seen offshore Speyside, Tobago for several hours during the afternoon of 3 March, 2009 (NH). The following day, two or three adults were seen flying north past Manzanilla Beach (MK, GG *et al.*). These records constitute the second and third records for Trinidad and Tobago, and the first for Tobago. A storm during late February, in the north-east Atlantic, caused a widespread dispersal of Kittiwakes across both shores of the ocean with individuals even straying to central Morocco in North Africa. In the Caribbean, there were also at least five tide-line corpses in Guadeloupe and two in Barbados together with another two birds seen flying south.

A male **Blue Ground-Dove**, *Claravis pretiosa* was seen on 23 June, 2009 close to Chaguaramas Golf Course (FO). On 27 June, two males and a female were found at the same site (MK, FO). This species remains a rarely seen resident in Trinidad with just two documented records in the last 14 years.

A small flock of four **Scaly-naped Pigeons**, *Patagioenas squamosa* were photographed perched in treetops on Little Tobago island on 28 July, 2009 (JB *et al.*). There are unconfirmed reports that the birds had been present for at least two months. This is the third record of this species for Tobago; none have reached Trinidad to date.

A **Scaled Antpitta**, *Grallaria guatemalensis* was heard calling from Matura National Park on 20 May, 2009 (GW, KM). Perhaps our scarcest resident, this is just the fifth documented record in the last 14 years.

A **Small-billed Elaenia**, *Elaenia parvirostris* was photographed on Cantamoon Trace, Lopinot on 16 May,

2009. It was seen again on 11 June, and once more on 16 July, when there were probably two birds present (GW, MK *et al.*). This is the second series of records from Lopinot Valley in recent years and whilst this species remains undoubtedly very rare in Trinidad, its true abundance may be masked by historical lack of identification knowledge.

A **Variiegated Flycatcher**, *Empidonomus varius* was photographed at Asa Wright Nature Centre on 26 July, 2009 (BM). That there have now been nine individuals found this decade in Trinidad of this hitherto very rare species, no doubt reflects increased observer awareness of identification features separating the similar Piratic and Streaked Flycatchers.

A **Black-whiskered Vireo**, *Vireo altiloquus* was seen feeding in a Trema tree close to the main building at Asa Wright Nature Centre on 11-12 April, 2009 (MK *et al.*). Whilst historically a rare visitor to both islands, a total of 20 individuals have now been seen during the period October - May for this decade.

Two adult and two immature **Cliff Swallows**, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* were found feeding over Bon Accord Lagoons, Tobago on 16 November, 2009 (BMu *et al.*). Of the six records of this decade, four have been from this location.

A **Northern Parula**, *Parula americana* was photographed at Englishman's Bay, Tobago on 31 December, 2008 (MKe). This is the sixth record for Trinidad and Tobago, five of which have been from Tobago.

An adult female **Black-and-white Warbler**, *Mniotilta varia* was found along Las Lapas Trace on 27 December, 2009 (MK). Whilst still a rare visitor, there have now been eight records this decade.

A small flock, comprising three male and two female, **Lesson's Seed eaters**, *Sporophila bouvronides* were photographed in the Cat's Hill area of south Trinidad on 2 August, 2009 (KS *et al.*). This is just the third record in the last 14 years.

An adult and an immature male **Lined Seed eater**, *Sporophila lineola* were found in agricultural land close to South Oropouche on 15 August, 2009 (MK, KS, DS). This species has now been found in southwestern Trinidad in each of the last three years.

A pair of **Yellow-bellied Seed eaters**, *Sporophila nigricollis* were photographed initially on 2 May, 2009 and seen on a number of dates in Lopinot Valley up to 9 August (GW, MK *et al.*). Breeding is suspected, but unproven. Elsewhere, an adult male and an immature or female were seen briefly on Mt. St. Benedict on 11 December, 2009 (DS).

An adult male **Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch**, *Oryzoborus angolensis* was seen in a Surrey Village, Lopinot

garden briefly on 8 May, 2009 (GW). Whilst this individual may well have been of wild origin, it is a commonly kept cage bird in Trinidad and Tobago and this record must attract a “possible escapee caveat”.

A male **Summer Tanager**, *Piranga rubra* was seen briefly on Mt. St. Benedict on 11 December, 2009 (DS). This species is still a rare winter visitor; there have now been eight documented records in the last 15 years. However their true abundance may be shadowed by their similarity to **Hepatic Tanager**, *Piranga flava* resident in Trinidad.

An adult male **Scarlet Tanager**, *Piranga olivacea* was photographed at Asa Wright Nature Centre on 31 May, 2009 (SP). An exceptional date as all other spring passage sightings have been during the period 8 - 28 April.

A group of three **Bobolink**, *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* were briefly seen and one photographed on Caroni Rice Project 8 October, 2009 (MK, GW). Two more were photographed close to Speyside Village, Tobago on 12 October (SJ, JC). These two sightings are probably part of the same migratory movement.

An adult male **Lesser Goldfinch**, *Carduelis psaltria* was photographed at Mt. St. Benedict on 28 March, 2009 (MB). At the same site, a male and two females were found on 29 May, 2009. During the period 5 - 14 November, 2009 up to three males and seven females were seen (DS). This is just the second documented records for Trinidad; the first being found at the same site in February, 2005.

INTRODUCED SPECIES

A female **House Sparrow**, *Passer domesticus* was photographed close to Scarborough, Tobago on 5 May, 2009. The only previously documented sighting was on 28 May, 1997 where both adult male and an immature or female plumaged bird were photographed on Caroni Rice Project (BG, RN, PP). This species was introduced into “the Americas” back in the 19th century and has now colonised much of South America and the islands of the Caribbean. As such, it has been accepted onto the Official South American Checklist as an Introduced Species by SACC.

INCONCLUSIVE RECORDS

The following submissions were considered inconclusive: **Glossy Ibis**, *Plegadis falcinellus*; **Short-tailed Hawk**, *Buteo brachyurus* (Tobago); **Baird’s Sandpiper**, *Calidris bairdii*, **Blue-chinned Sapphire**, *Chlorestes notata* (Tobago); **Slaty Elaenia**, *Elaenia strepera* and **Lesson’s Seedeater**, *Sporophila bouvronides*.

South American Classification Committee

For ornithological classification, Trinidad and 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 seven 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 were made in December 1975 and December 1984.

Northern Gannet, *Morus bassanus*. This species was seen off north-east Tobago in November 1991 and 2009.

Common Ringed Plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*. A single bird was mist netted in October 1962.

Spotted Redshank, *Tringa erythropus*. A single bird was seen in Tobago in February 1983.

Common Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia*. There were two different sightings; south-west Tobago in July 1977 and Waller’s Field early 1987.

White-eyed Vireo, *Vireo griseus*. There is one single record of this species from Buccoo Marsh, Tobago in January 1998.

Red-winged Blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus*. One was seen close to Caroni Swamp from June 1980 to mid 1981.

Individuals with photographic evidence of any of the above are asked to contact a member of the TTRBC.

NOMENCLATURE CHANGES

Part of the mission statement of the SACC is to create a standard classification, of English names, for the birds of South America. This is subject to constant revision by the proposal system to allow incorporation of new data. As a result, the following nomenclature changes have been made in recent times. The most significant change has been the conferment by the SACC of full species status to the Motmot found in Trinidad and Tobago. The **Trinidad Motmot**, *Motmotus bahamensis* is now considered an endemic of Trinidad and Tobago distinguished by its size, underparts colouration and vocalisation (Stiles 2009). Changes in common names are as follows:

American Flamingo, *P. ruber* formerly Greater Flamingo.

Common Gallinule, *G. chloropus* formerly Common Moorhen.

Black-headed Gull, *C. ridibundus* formerly Common Black-headed Gull.

Trinidad Motmot, *M. bahamensis* formerly Blue-crowned Motmot.

Spectacled Thrush, *T. nudigenis* formerly Bare-eyed Thrush.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Records and contributions were received from the following: Matt Andrews, Michael Ball, Jeff Bouton, Paul Budgen, John Camp, Geoffrey Gomes, Keith Grant, Nigel Hacking, Dave Hughes, Martyn Kenefick, Matt Kelly (MKe), Kevin Kenny, Adam Kent, Imran Khan, Jalaludin Khan, Nigel Lallsingh, Bill Mackie, Kevin Mahabir, Tarran Maharaj, John Muddeman, Bill Murphy (BMu), Feroze Omardeen, Sanjiv Parasram, Michael Patrikeev, Sham Ramsubhag, Michelle Rochford, Kris Sookdeo, Dave Smith, Geoff Trinder, Stephanie Tyler and Graham White.

REFERENCES

Downs, W. G. 1959. Little egret banded in Spain taken in Trinidad. *The Auk*, 76: 241-242.

Hayes, F. E. and **White, G.** 2000. First report of the Trinidad

and Tobago Rare Bird Committee. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 1999-2000: 39-45.

Kenefick, M. 2005. Third report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2005: 56-61.

Kenefick, M. 2007. Fourth report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2007: 79-81.

Kenefick, M. 2008. Fifth report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2008: 70-74.

Kenefick, M. 2009. Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee 2008. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2009: 46-49.

Stiles, F. G. 2009. A review of the genus *Momotus* (Coraciiformes: Momotidae) in northern South America and adjacent areas. *Ornitología Colombiana*, 8: 29-75.

White, G. and **Hayes, F. E.** 2002. Second report of the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2002: 51-56.

REVIEWERS 2006 – 2010

The Editorial Committee thanks the following persons who took time off from their busy schedule to review papers over the last five years.

Dr. Paula Cushing
 Prof. David Bass
 Mr. Hans Boos
 Dr. M. J. W. Cock
 Dr. Ross G. Cooper
 Dr. Bruce Cutler
 Dr. Lebert Grierson
 Dr. Adrian Hailey
 Prof. F. Hayes
 Dr. Michele Lee Haynie

Dr. Allan Hook
 Prof. Julian Kenny
 Dr. Raymond Manuel
 Dr. Azad Mohammed
 Dr. John Murphy
 Dr. Howard Nelson
 Dr. Ricardo Pinto-da-Rocha
 Dr. Victor Quesnel
 Prof. I. Ramnarine
 Dr. William D. Shepard

Dr. Christopher Starr
 Dr. Andrew Warren
 Prof. Yehudah Werner
 Prof. D. D. Williams

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



8.



9.



1. Adult Greater Black-backed Gull. Photographed by John Muddeman at Orange Valley on 31 January, 2009.
2. First winter Greater Black-backed Gull. Photographed by Graham White at Orange Valley on 26 February, 2009.
3. Herring Gull. Photographed by Matt Kelly at Crown Point, Tobago on 8 March, 2009.
4. Jabiru Stork. Photographed by Paul Budgen at Nariva Swamp on 11 July, 2009.
5. Lesser Goldfinch. Photographed by Michael Ball at Mount St. Benedict on 28 March, 2009.
6. Ring-billed Gull. Photographed by Dave Smith at Orange Valley on 28 March, 2009.
7. Black Hawk-Eagle. Photographed by Kris Sookdeo at Cat's Hill on 2 May, 2009.
8. Ring-necked Duck. Photographed by Matt Kelly at Lowlands, Tobago on 8 March, 2009.
9. Kelp Gull. Photographed by Nigel Lallsingh at Orange Valley on 4 December, 2009.