

OBSERVATIONS OF RARE AND UNUSUAL BIRDS ON GRENADA

MARTIN D. FROST¹ AND EDWARD B. MASSIAH²

¹*Featherbed Lane, St. John, Barbados;* and ²*Johnson Road, Fitts Village, St. James, Barbados*

Abstract.—We present information on eight rare and unusual species observed during a visit to Grenada in August 2001, including the first known occurrence in the West Indies of Channel-billed Toucan (*Ramphastos vitellinus*), a species introduced to the island.

Key words: Channel-billed Toucan, Grenada, introduced species, Lesser Antilles, observations, *Ramphastos vitellinus*

Resumen.—OBSERVACIONES DE AVES RARAS O POCO USUALES EN GRANADA. Presentamos información sobre ocho especies raras o poco usuales observadas durante una visita a Granada en agosto de 2001, incluyendo el primer reporte de la existencia en las Indias Occidentales del Tucán Pico Acanalado (*Ramphastos vitellinus*), una especie introducida a la isla.

Palabras clave: Antillas Menor, Granada, especies introducidas, observación, *Ramphastos vitellinus*, Tucán Pico Acanalado

IN THIS NOTE, we report on eight rare and unusual species observed during a visit to the island of Grenada in mid August 2001 with additional notes from other years. Our observations include two introduced species, Channel-billed Toucan (*Ramphastos vitellinus*) and an *Amazona* parrot, which together with Masked Duck (*Nomonyx dominicus*) are reported for the first time from Grenada. Further information and comments are presented for the remaining five species, which have previously occurred.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*).—Two, possibly three, individuals were observed at Levera Pond on 18 August, one of which had aigrettes on the back. This species is not listed for Grenada by Devas (1970), Groome (1970), Evans (1990), or Raffaele *et al.* (1998). There is, however, an old record in the British Museum — a specimen collected in the 1890s by D. W. Smith assigned to the race *ruficollis* (Bond 1959), whose range includes North American and Caribbean birds, including those from northern Venezuela (Voous 1983:52). It was considered rare in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with individuals observed at Levera Pond and Point Salines (J. Wunderle, pers. comm.). More recently, single individuals were observed on 31 May 1998 on the beach at the east end of the defunct Pearls airstrip and at Lake Antoine (P. W. and S. A. Smith, pers. comm.). The origin of the individuals occurring in Grenada is intriguing. Although migratory North American individuals probably reach the island periodically, it seems equally, if not more,

likely that wanderers from the south also occur. Our brief views obtained did not permit identification to subspecies but observers should carefully scrutinize any birds in the southern Lesser Antilles for dark chestnut (rather than white) chin and line down the neck, which is indicative of *rufimentum*, the South American race occurring as close as Trinidad (French 1991). The presence of several individuals in summer months in two recent years raises the possibility of future colonization by this species.

Masked Duck (*Nomonyx dominicus*).—A male in high breeding plumage was observed at the edge of reeds, preening and resting for up to 15 min on two occasions at Palmiste Dam on 22 August. This apparently represents the first occurrence on Grenada. This species is not listed for Grenada by Devas (1970), Evans (1990), or Raffaele *et al.* (1998), although it is included with a question mark by Groome (1970), apparently based on information supplied by W. J. Plowden-Wardlaw, who collected around 300 specimens on Grenada between September and December 1955. This species occurs to the north in other southern Lesser Antillean islands (Raffaele *et al.* 1998) and to the south on Trinidad (French 1991), so its presence on Grenada is expected. Three males in breeding plumage and one female were observed at the same location on 7 August 2002.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*).—A molting male was observed on top of a dungpile at Mt. Hartman on 12 August (EBM). We are aware of three previous occurrences for the island, all from Point Sa-

lines: an immature male obtained on 31 July 1935 (Danforth 1936), one on 8 August 1971 (Lack and Lack 1973), and one in the late 1970s (J. Wunderle, pers. comm.). This species is included in Robert Leeds' unpublished list of Grenada birds compiled between the 1960s and late 1970s but the details are unknown.

Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*).—Five adults and one juvenile were seen perched on rocks a few meters offshore at Grand Roy on 21 August. All birds belonged to the “Sandwich” subspecies, evidenced by the black bills, tipped yellow in the adults. Neither Devas (1970) nor Leeds (unpubl.) made mention of this species, which is listed under Grenada as “rare” by Raffaele *et al.* (1998). The quality of information on the status of seabirds in general for the island was rated as poor (van Halewyn and Norton 1984:176) and this assessment still seems to hold true. Observations were made of this species in recent years from the nearby island of Carriacou (politically part of Grenada): several near the harbor at Hillsborough on 26 May 1998 (P. W. and S. A. Smith, pers. comm.) and a total of six or seven birds from several locations during the first week of August 2002 (EBM and R. W. Burke). It is likely that this species occurs more often than these few observations suggest, but has been overlooked.

Parrot sp. (*Amazona* sp.).—Small numbers at four locations: a flock of six at Mt. Hope on 18 August; several heard at Tempé on 21 August; several parties totaling 11 birds at Grenville Vale, Beauséjour on 21 August; and several at Annandale on 23 August. All individuals observed were in flight. Adequate views of only a few individuals were secured which were tentatively identified as Orange-winged Parrots (*Amazona amazonica*), based on the orange patch in the wing. During a previous visit to Grenada in July 1999, EBM observed four parrots at La Sagesse Estate, which appeared to be clearly Orange-winged Parrots. The introduction of parrots on the island appears to be a relatively recent phenomena, because Devas (1970) makes no mention of their occurrence. Several parrots, all identified as orange-winged, were released from a Guyanese bird dealer's collection during 1989 (A. Jeremiah, pers. comm.). Successful colonization may be expected, if not already underway, based on the numbers observed at these widely scattered locations.

White-collared Swift (*Streptoprocne zonaris*).—We observed a flock of ca. 30 at Belle Isle, Requin Estate, accompanied by a few Black Swifts (*Cypseloides niger*) on 18 August and a single indi-

vidual over the playing field at La Sagesse on 20 August. This species is known to occur in Grenada, where its status is given as “uncommon” (Raffaele *et al.* 1998). However, there seem to be few detailed reports of such large flocks and its occurrence in general on Grenada. This species was first reported from Grenada by Wells (1887), who found a “large flock” on 13 July 1882 at Tuilleries Estate and was informed they frequent there every year, and subsequently saw “several” near Grenville on 9 August. Devas (1952, 1970) considered this species a visitor in July and August, although “I have no proof yet that it comes every year,” with Annandale Estate in the mountains a favored location. Unfortunately Devas makes no mention as to the numbers observed. These swifts were observed annually during three years residence (1978–79 and 1981) usually in groups of 3 to 15 from August to September at various lowland sites including Point Salines (J. Wunderle, pers. comm.). A specimen in the British Museum collected in October 1891 by D. W. Smith belongs, as expected, to the South American subspecies *albicincta* (Bond 1957). In summary, previous occurrences suggest that this species may be expected at any elevation from July to October.

Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*).—An estimated 50 individuals roosted in white mangroves (*Laguncularia racemosa*) at True Blue on 18, 20, and 24 August, which we believe to be an unusually high number. The first birds were at the roost by 17:45 h and small parties and individuals continued to arrive from the west until around 18:30 h. Few details regarding the numbers of this species occurring in Grenada appear to be published but there are regular observations around the island's southwestern tip in summer and fall; e.g., six birds south of the airport on 17 July 1999 (EBM) and a few individuals at several localities on the southwestern peninsula during 26 to 31 July 2000 with a high count of 10 at True Blue on 26 July 2000 (F. E. Hayes). Wells (1887) makes no mention of abundance, although his species account suggests it was not rare, but writing about neighboring Carriacou, Wells (1902) states “a migrant, arriving in August in considerable numbers.” Devas (1970) states “comes ... each year, July and August are the months to expect half a dozen pairs,” whereas Groome (1970) indicates its frequency as “commonly seen ... August to October,” but does not comment on its abundance. This species was not found at True Blue on the afternoons of 7 to 9 August 2002 or elsewhere on the island during early to mid-August 2002 (EBM and R. Thorstrom), suggesting that an above-normal influx was observed in

August 2001.

Channel-billed Toucan (*Ramphastos vitellinus*).—Single individuals were seen at four separate locations bordering the Grand Etang Nature Reserve: Les Avocats Dam on 15 and 23 August (EBM); Annandale on 16 August (heard only) (EBM), Cocoa Hall Estate on 19 August, and Concord Valley on 24 August. Massiah and Frost (2003) provide further details and discuss the introduction of this species on Grenada.

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