

## IS CHANNEL-BILLED TOUCAN (*RAMPHASTOS VITELLINUS*) ESTABLISHED ON GRENADA?

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*Abstract.*— We describe the discovery of Channel-billed Toucan (*Ramphastos vitellinus*) in Grenada during August 2001 and its introduction into the island.

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

*Resumen.*— ¿SE HA ESTABLECIDO EL TUCÁN PICO ACANALADO (*RAMPHASTOS VITELLINUS*) EN GRANADA? Describimos el descubrimiento del Tucán Pico Acanalado (*Ramphastos vitellinus*) en Granada durante agosto de 2001 y su introducción a la isla.

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

WE VISITED GRENADA from 12 to 25 August 2001 to study the distribution of Hook-billed Kites (*Chondrohierax uncinatus mirus*). During this time we explored a wide area of the country to assess the kite's occurrence, particularly in forest habitats.

At 07:45 h on 15 August EBM, was reconnoitering forest north of Les Avocats Dam, bordering Mt. Sinai, when he heard a mysterious far-carrying call coming from an area of emergent canopy trees on the richly forested ridge (ca. 520 m elevation) on the western side of the valley approximately 0.4 km away. The call sounded vaguely familiar and was repeated at intervals, but the most likely candidate that sprang to mind was the introduced Mona monkey (*Cercopithecus mona*).

A quick scan through a telescope, however, produced a surprising discovery. The large, long-tailed silhouette that was located turned briefly to reveal the characteristic bill shape, pale upper-chest and red gorget of a toucan species before it vanished. From the evidence, the most likely species appeared to be Channel-billed Toucan (*Ramphastos vitellinus*), whose nearest populations are in Trinidad and northern South America.

The following day EBM visited a lookout north of Annandale Dam on the southwestern edge of the Grand Etang National Park and was surprised to hear again the quite distant but recognizable call of a toucan vocalizing from the highest rainforest ridge (ca. 365 m elevation), between 07:30 and 08:00 h, but the bird was too distant to be located. The location was 3.5 km northwest of the first bird at Les Avocats Dam.

On 19 August at 09:20 h we located a much closer toucan at Cocoa Hall Estate (ca. 300 m elevation) on the western side of the island. The bird was watched as it clambered about in a fruiting

golden apple tree (*Spondias cytherea*) about 80 m away in abandoned plantation habitat. It was at this stage that we were able to exclude any other species and confirm all the features of Channel-billed Toucan. The location was about 2.6 km northwest of the Annandale forest bird.

The Les Avocat Dam toucan was heard again in the same area on 23 August. Our final observation of Channel-billed Toucan was a single individual on 24 August in the Concord Valley (ca 180 m elevation) in a golden apple tree close to the road about 0.5 km due north of the Cocoa Hall Estate sighting. A local reported that he had previously seen a "small group" of toucans in the area.

On 17 August EBM met with Mr. Anthony Jeremiah, Officer at the Forestry Division, and mentioned that he encountered a strange bird in the forest. Before EBM could go any further, Jeremiah immediately asked whether the strange bird was a toucan and described seeing one several years before near Paraclete in the east of the island. Most importantly, the mystery of how toucans got to Grenada was explained. During the 1980s a Guyanese bird-dealer set up an aviary in the Botanical Gardens and stocked it with a variety of South American species. The activities of the dealer soon met with the disapproval of the government of Grenada, because the aviary was alleged to have been used for an illegal bird smuggling operation. The aviary was dismantled in 1989 and several exotic species including an unknown number of toucans and Orange-winged Parrots (*Amazona amazonica*), were released into the wild; thus about 12 years had elapsed between the releases and our sightings.

The four localities where toucans were observed all border or are within the Grand Etang Forest Reserve; one on the southern edge, one in the west-

central area, and two on the western edge, all within a range of about 7 km. On this evidence we suggest that Channel-billed Toucans may already have established a breeding presence in the forests of Grenada, although this is yet to be proven. In Trinidad the breeding season is listed as being from March to June (French 1991). In discussing these sightings it is also relevant to point out that the Orange-winged Parrot may also have become established in the forests of Grenada, although it does not appear to be common (Frost and Massiah 2003).

There are large areas of suitable forest habitat in Grenada that are infrequently visited by birdwatchers and it is not too surprising that a small population of toucans could remain largely hidden and unreported, especially in the more remote locations. We did not have time to investigate our toucan sightings more thoroughly and we urge others to

look for this species in Grenada. Since then, in early August 2002, EBM paid a short visit to the island and again located a calling Channel-billed Toucan in forest above Les Avocat Dam.

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