



SOCIEDAD CARIBEÑA DE ORNITOLOGÍA

EL PITIRRE

SOCIETY OF CARIBBEAN ORNITHOLOGY

Spring 2001

Vol. 14, No. 1

NOCTURNAL FORAGING BY THE GREEN HERON (*BUTORIDES VIRESCENS*) UNDER ARTIFICIAL ILLUMINATION IN TOBAGO

FLOYD E. HAYES^{1,2} AND DALE R. HARDY^{1,3}

¹Department of Biology, Caribbean Union College, P. O. Box 175, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago; ²Present address: Unit of Zoology, Department of Life Sciences, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago; ³Present address: Barbados Seventh-day Adventist School, Abingdon, Dalkeith Hill, St. Michael, Barbados

Abstract.—Few details have been published on nocturnal foraging in the Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*). We report an observation of a Green Heron feeding on frogs under artificial illumination about 90-150 min after sunset at Bon Accord, Tobago, on 19 June 1995.

Resumen. —FORRAJE O NOCTURNO EN EL CHICUACO CUELLO ROJO (*BUTORIDES VIRESCENS*) BAJO ILUMINACIÓN ARTIFICIAL EN TOBAGO. Se han publicado pocos detalles sobre el forrajeo nocturno del Chicuaco Cuello Rojo (*Butorides virescens*). Se relata una observación de un Chicuaco Cuello Rojo alimentándose de ranas bajo iluminación artificial aproximadamente 90-150 minutos después de la puesta del sol en Bon Accord, Tobago, el 19 de junio de 1995.

Key words: *Butorides striatus*, *Green Heron*, *nocturnal foraging*, *Tobago*

NOCTURNAL FORAGING is widely reported among wading birds; some species, such as the night-herons, specialize in nocturnal foraging (Kushlan 1978, McNeil *et al.* 1993). Although nocturnal foraging has been reported in the Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) of North America and the Caribbean (Kushlan 1978, pers. comm.), few details have been published (Davis and Kushlan 1994). At a roost in New Jersey, Seibert (1951) observed Green Herons arriving after sunset and leaving about 30 min before sunrise, suggesting that feeding occurs crepuscularly. Nocturnal foraging has also been reported in the closely related Striated Heron (*B. striatus*) in Africa (Brown *et al.* 1983) and Australia (Recher *et al.* 1983). In this note we report an incidence of nocturnal foraging by the Green Heron under artificial illumination at Tobago, West Indies.

On 19 June 1995, we observed a single Green

Heron foraging at night on a grassy lawn of a residential area at Bon Accord, Tobago, from 20:00-21:00 h, about 90-150 min after sunset. The bird foraged near a streetlight and was still foraging by the time we ceased our observations. On several occasions we observed the bird “walking slowly” and “pecking” (Kushlan 1978) at frogs that were subsequently consumed. Two species of frogs were heard calling; we captured several individuals of one species, later identified (based on a written description) as *Leptodactylus fuscus* (Murphy 1997).

A diversity of bird species have been recorded feeding opportunistically at night under artificial illumination. In reviewing an earlier version of this note, James Kushlan (pers. comm.) wrote “I consider it rather common for Green Herons (*sensu lato*) to feed at night under lights. I’ve seen it numerous times in Florida, and can almost assure you of a sighting in

the marina on Virginia Key, near Miami, on most nights.” The geographical extent of this novel behavior, however, is unknown and it remains uncertain whether the Green Heron forages nocturnally in the absence of artificial illumination. We encourage others to publish observations of nocturnal foraging in the Green Heron.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank J. A. Kushlan and R. McNeil for reviewing an earlier version of this note. Our trip to Tobago was funded by profits from the sales of T-shirts with a painting of the White-tailed Sabrewing (*Campylopterus ensipennis*) generously donated by John P. O’Neill. A literature search at the American Museum of Natural History and the U. S. National Museum of Natural History was funded by a study-travel grant to Hayes from the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

LITERATURE CITED

BROWN, L. H., E. K. URBAN, AND K. NEWMAN. 1982. The birds of Africa. Vol. 1. Academic Press, London. 521 pp.

- DAVIS, W. E., JR., AND J. A. KUSHLAN. 1994. Green Heron *Butorides virescens*. Birds N. Amer. 129:1-23.
- HANCOCK, J., AND J. KUSHLAN. 1984. The herons handbook. Harper & Row, New York. 288 pp.
- KUSHLAN, J. A. 1978. Feeding ecology of wading birds. Pp. 249-297 in *Wading birds* (A. Sprunt, IV, J. C. Ogden, and S. Winkler, eds.). Natl. Aud. Soc. Res. Rep. 7.
- MCNEIL, R., P. DRAPEAU, AND R. PIEROTTI. 1993. Nocturnality in colonial waterbirds: occurrence, special adaptations, and suspected benefits. *Curr. Ornithol.* 10:187-246.
- MURPHY, J. C. 1997. Amphibians and reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago. Krieger Publishing Company, Malabar, Florida. 245 pp.
- RECHER, H. F., R. T. HOLMES, W. E. DAVIS, JR., AND S. MORTON. 1983. Foraging behavior of Australian herons. *Col. Waterbirds* 6:1-10.
- SEIBERT, H. C. 1951. Light intensity and the roosting flight of herons in New Jersey. *Auk* 68:63-74.