

GIANT COWBIRD (*SCAPHIDURA ORYZIVORA*): A NEW BIRD
FOR BARBADOS AND THE WEST INDIES

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Resumen. – EL TORDO GIGANTE (*SCAPHIDURA ORYZIVORA*): UNA NUEVA AVE PARA BARBADOS Y LAS ANTILLAS. Se reporta el primer avistamiento del Tordo Gigante (*Scaphidura oryzivora*) en las Antillas, en Barbados. Aunque aparentemente esta especie, un estricto parásito de nidos, se está dispersando hacia el norte desde América del Sur, no se espera que se establezca en las Antillas Menores al menos que las especies huéspedes de esta ave también colonicen estas islas.

Key words: Barbados, Giant Cowbird, habitat, Lesser Antilles, range expansion, record, *Scaphidura oryzivora*

ON 9 MARCH 2000, while at Palm Beach, Hastings, Christ Church with Yvonne Robinson, I observed a Giant Cowbird (*Scaphidura oryzivora*) in a mahogany tree (*Swietenia mahagoni*) at eye level, no more than 7.5 m away. I was immediately struck by its size since it was longer and considerably more robust, due to its deep-chested appearance, than the familiar Carib Grackle (*Quiscalus lugubris*). The second feature that caught my attention was its eye coloration, which I noted as a pale red with a yellowish tinge. The eye coloration contrasted noticeably with its entirely black plumage, which had no gloss or sheen. The tail was “normally shaped” and lacked the “V” or keel shape of a Carib Grackle. Its sturdy legs were black as was the pointed bill, which was longer than that of a Carib Grackle, but considerably deeper at its base. A single, harsh call was heard. I was able to view the bird at this close range for about 1 min before it flew off to perch about 6 m up in a nearby almond tree (*Terminalia catappa*). Here I was able to compare it directly with a Carib Grackle almost side-by-side, about 60 cm apart, and appreciate its heavier-bodied appearance as well as estimate that it was about 1.5 times the length of a Carib Grackle. It remained in the same position in the almond tree for about 3 min before returning to the original mahogany tree.

This observation represents the first report of the Giant Cowbird from Barbados and the West Indies. The Giant Cowbird is an obligate brood parasite which occurs in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as throughout most of northeastern South America, where its occurrence is generally linked to oropendola (*Psarocolius* sp.) and cacique (*Cacicus* sp.) colonies (Ridgely and Tudor 1989). It was first reported from Tobago in 1937 (French 1992) and is now well established there (F. Hayes, *pers. comm.*). Thus, it appears that this species is spreading northwards, much as the Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*) did about a century ago, and future reports from the southern Lesser Antilles should be expected. It is unlikely, however, to establish itself on any of the Lesser Antilles unless it is preceded by successful colonization by one of its preferred hosts.

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LITERATURE CITED

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