

UNUSUAL ROOSTING BEHAVIOR OF THE UPLAND SANDPIPER
(Bartramia Longicauda)

While exploring the tributaries within Tortuguero National Park in northern Caribbean Costa Rica on the morning of March 12, 1989, my local guide directed my attention to an "unusual dove" standing on a major horizontal limb on a large, open riverside tree. The "dove" resolved itself into an Upland Sandpiper, standing calmly on its perch, fifty feet up in tropical lowland forest. The location was approximately one and one-half miles from the coast, where a grassy airstrip provided the closest available typical Upland Sandpiper habitat. The Upland Sandpiper is characterized by Stiles and Skutch (Stiles, F. G. and A. F. Skutch. 1989. *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica*, Ithaca: Comstock Publishing Associates) as an uncommon spring transient (mid-March to late May) in Costa Rica, least likely in the Caribbean lowlands. After getting over the initial shock of a sandpiper in the treetops, I spent the next ten minutes trying to explain the word "upland" to the Spanish-speaking guide. It was a life bird for him.

Brian E. Cassie, Foxboro

**UNUSUAL FEEDING BEHAVIOR OF THE RED-BILLED
SCYTHEBILL (*Campylorhamphus Trochilirostris*)**

The Red-billed Scythebill is a spectacular member of the family Dendrocolaptidae, the woodcreepers. The woodcreeper family comprises forty-eight species and ranges from Mexico through South America. Their typical feeding behavior is similar to that of the Brown Creeper, methodically probing and gleaning insects and insect larvae from tree trunks and branches. Scythebills, as their name implies, possess extraordinarily long and decurved bills, allowing them to probe effectively into clumps of mosses and bromeliads and clusters of palm fruits.

On February 24, 1991, in the company of ten people on a tour of Hato Piñero in the llanos region of northcentral Venezuela, I observed a Red-billed Scythebill along the banks of the Caño San Jeronimo, a small river running through dry deciduous forest. The scythebill spent the time under observation, approximately six minutes, probing the muddy banks of the watercourse, always in the shade of overhanging vegetation. The bird foraged in two distinct manners, alternately picking about the vegetation roots and probing bill-deep in the mud. We observed only one procured food item, a small frog, which was

taken from the mud surface, carefully repositioned in the bill, and swallowed with a toss of the head.

This appears to be the first recorded instance of a scythebill using its exceptional bill to probe deeply in mud in the manner suggestive of a Whimbrel. Additionally, the choice of a frog as a prey item is noteworthy in a family known to be almost wholly insectivorous.

Brian E. Cassie, Foxboro

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL ATTACK ON A SURF SCOTER

On December 3, 1990, I heard a loud ruckus of crows down by Buttermilk Bay, a shallow and protected saltwater bay located between Bourne and Wareham, Massachusetts. It was not unusual to hear groups of crows but the noise was out of the ordinary because of its intensity and duration. I expected to see a Great Horned Owl or eagle being harassed. I was not prepared to see what I saw. Easily locating the crows, which numbered about fifty, I scanned the beach, the sky, and the trees for anything other than a crow. Nothing but crows. However, there was something happening in the water about ten feet from the shoreline. I was about fifty yards away when I noticed it, and it seemed to be the focal point of what the crows were so upset about. I saw a Great Black-backed Gull in the water grappling with a dark colored medium-sized bird. All I could discern at first was a flurry of black wings underneath the attacking gull. My first thought was that the bird being attacked was indeed a crow. With several crows immediately above the fight in the water, I thought these crows were incensed by the sight of one of their own on the verge of being the next meal for a Great Black-backed Gull. Walking another ten or fifteen feet I identified the victim species as an adult Surf Scoter. This alone was unusual because scoters of any species are rare on the bay. The gull had the scoter by the neck with its beak as if trying to crush its neck. I knew that Great Blackbacks were ferocious, aggressive gulls, and I walked up and scared off the gull. The Surf Scoter immediately dove under the water upon gaining its freedom. When it surfaced it looked around and paddled away. I did not see any signs of injury caused by the attack. As to the crows, they quietly disbanded soon after the gull flew away.

Could it be possible that the crows mistakenly took the scoter to be another crow and came to its aid? We'll never know, but the speculation remains an interesting one.

Clark Ewer, Wareham