

LIST OF AND NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF THE ILES DES SAINTES, FRENCH WEST INDIES

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LES Saintes, a small archipelago that lies south of Guadeloupe, has seldom been visited by ornithologists. No list of its birds seems to have been published, although, to be sure, 25 species have been mentioned from these islands by Noble (1916), Bond (1936, 1956), Danforth (1939), or Pinchon and Bon Saint-Come (1951). Three of these were recorded on doubtful evidence and, pending confirmation, should be deleted from the list. Nineteen of the remaining 22 and an additional five were observed by me on 2-5 July 1960, when Mrs. Vaurie and I visited the French West Indies for the American Museum of Natural History. The species mentioned by Noble and Danforth were incorporated in their reports on the birds of Guadeloupe, those cited by Bond or Pinchon and Bon Saint-Come in general works on the birds of the West Indies. The birds reported so far are listed below with a few notes.

I am grateful to James Bond for his very helpful advice, Eugene Eisenmann for reading the manuscript, and to the Gendarmerie of Basse Terre and Terre-de-haut for arranging our visit as there is no hotel in Les Saintes.

Les Saintes are of volcanic origin and are separated from the Basse Terre in Guadeloupe by a stormy channel seven miles wide. They consist of two relatively large islands called Terre-de-bas and Terre-de-haut, the only islands inhabited, and of six small islands or islets, some of which appear to be the sites of sea-bird colonies. One of these, called La Redonde, lies only 300 meters off Terre-de-haut but, unfortunately, is quite inaccessible as it rises perpendicularly out of the sea to a height of 46 meters and is pounded by huge waves that rise to nearly half its height. The top of La Redonde, which is about 170 meters wide, is alive all day with many sea birds. The other islets, which are probably occupied by birds also, are slightly lower than La Redonde but similar to it in structure.

Terre-de-haut, the only island we visited, is five kilometers long and varies from three quarters of a kilometer to two kilometers in width. The central part of the island is relatively flat, and its coastline is formed by two magnificent beaches about one kilometer long. The beach on the lee of the island is quiet, lined by the street of the village and coconut trees; the one to the windward is very broad, backed by dunes, and swept by great rollers. The island of Dominica, 16 miles away, is clearly visible from it. Two large, shallow, brackish ponds are found on this part of

the island, and one of these is surrounded by extensive flats that probably receive shore birds and perhaps ducks during the migration; but, so far, the only migrant noted for Les Saintes is the Oven-bird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*). There are also several small, artificial ponds for watering cattle.

The rest of Terre-de-haut is rugged and formed by a series of transverse hills separated by narrow, deep valleys, and the coastline, except at the western end of the island, is very deeply indented by numerous bays and coves. This western end is formed by a double-headed hill, called Le Chameau, which rises to 309 meters (over 1,000 feet) and drops into the valley by a series of cliffs or steep slopes. These cliffs are the home of a colony of the Antillean Martin (*Progne dominicensis*) and of one pair of American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*). Le Chameau and the hill facing it across the valley are heavily wooded, many of the trees being large but giving way on the lower slopes to dense scrub consisting chiefly of mesquite. The floor of the valley is given over to pasture, one or two small gardens, and groves of mangos, citrus, or other leafy trees.

The western end of Terre-de-haut is the least disturbed and supports a good bird life. Some species, such as the hawk, pigeon, two of the doves, flycatcher, bullfinch, and Plumbeous Warbler, were seen only there. On the rest of the island the vegetation becomes more meager and the birds fewer. The many large iguanas (*Iguana delicatissima*), which are found in its valley, add much to its charm and interest. They are not molested and sun themselves or stroll about unconcernedly. A snake, endemic to Les Saintes, is found there also but was not seen by us.

Terre-de-haut is very beautiful and interesting. It has preserved its fauna, since the mongoose, which has caused so much destruction in the rest of the West Indies, has never been introduced, and as its inhabitants have shown little interest in exploiting the island. The people are all descendants of Breton seamen and fisherfolk to whom the sea is home and living, although some older men make a desultory effort at cultivation and keep a few cows, sheep, and goats.

Terre-de-bas is much more regular in shape and uniform in its topography than is Terre-de-haut. It is squarish, measuring about three kilometers on a side, and rises to 293 meters. It is said to be more wooded than Terre-de-haut, a fact attested to by the map of vegetation.

Our visit coincided with a period of great activity on the part of the birds and insects, as the rains had started only about two weeks before, after five months of drought. Some birds were very vocal, and I observed chasing, suggesting territorial activity, although, no doubt, some had

started to nest earlier as Bond writes to me that "The height of the breeding season in the Lesser Antilles is in May, and many birds nest there in April."

In the list below, I have omitted three birds that were included by Danforth (1939) because they had been mentioned from Les Saintes by Noble (1916). These are: *Sula leucogaster* (Brown Booby), *S. sula* (Red-footed Booby), and *Thalasseus maximus* (Royal Tern). But Noble did not collect or see these birds, stating that they had been reported to him by fishermen. Danforth questioned the validity of two of these records, and it seems significant that Noble omitted all three birds from his list, mentioning them merely (with reservation) in the introduction to his paper.

Danforth visited Terre-de-haut on the afternoon of 5 July 1937, spending most of the morning on Terre-de-bas, or on the same day and month we visited Terre-de-haut. I have, therefore, quoted his observations when they differ from mine to some extent, and have also mentioned his records for Terre-de-bas, as all the records from that island in the literature, with the exception of *Crotophaga ani*, are to be found in his paper.

ANNOTATED LIST OF THE BIRDS OF LES SAINTES

Puffinus lherminieri, Audubon's Shearwater. Several seen between Terre-de-haut and Guadeloupe and also flying to and from La Redonde. Not recorded previously.

Phaëthon aethereus, Red-billed Tropic-bird. Reported by Danforth (1939) and Bond (*in litt.*).

? *Phaëthon lepturus*, White-tailed Tropic-bird. Six birds were seen flying off La Redonde, but too far away to be identified as to species with certainty. The light was good, however, and I noted that they appeared to be all white on the back. After comparing skins, and before reading Danforth and hearing from Bond, I felt confident that they were *P. lepturus*. But Bond writes to me that the only species he observed was *P. aethereus*. The latter is also the only tropic bird reported by Danforth.

Pelecanus occidentalis, Brown Pelican. Single birds and bands of three, perhaps vagrants. Not recorded previously.

Fregata magnificens, Magnificent Frigate-bird. Common, but Danforth saw only one each at Terre-de-haut and Terre-de-bas. They are tamed also by the fishermen, and birds are found in the village.

Butorides virescens, Green Heron. Common and Noble (1916) reports six adult and half-grown birds taken during the first week in September, but only single birds were seen by Danforth on Terre-de-haut and Terre-de-bas.

Falco sparverius, American Kestrel. Two pairs in the valley at the western end of the island. This valley is divided in the middle by a small ridge, which constitutes apparently the limit of the territories as the birds were not seen to cross it. One pair had young and was seen carrying food to the nest, the prey consisting on all occasions of lizards. The nest was in leafy trees at the base of the cliff, or perhaps on the cliff that was difficult of approach. The martins mentioned above and the kestrel paid no apparent attention to one another, but the latter was put

to flight once by an Emerald-throated Hummingbird. Danforth collected this species also on Terre-de-bas.

Sterna dougallii, Roseate Tern. Common. Danforth did not find it on Terre-de-haut, but states he "observed many, apparently nesting on Terre-de-Bas and Grand Ilet." The latter is the largest of the smaller islands.

Sterna fuscata, Sooty Tern. Common and the most abundant of the terns. Bands of about 150 individuals were seen pursuing schools of small fish in company with a few Brown Noddies. It was very abundant also off La Redonde, but Danforth saw only three at Terre-de-haut and apparently none at Terre-de-bas. The Sooty is tamed by the natives also, and pets were seen on the doorsteps of houses.

Anoëus stolidus, Brown Noddy. Common. Danforth states he "found it nesting commonly on Grand Ilet and on the cliffs of Terre-de-bas, and observed a few (apparently not nesting) around Terre-de-Haut."

Columba squamosa, Scaly-naped Pigeon. Two flying together. Danforth saw "a few" on Terre-de-haut and says it was common on Terre-de-bas.

Zenaida aurita, Zenaida Dove. Common. Not recorded for Terre-de-bas.

Columbigallina passerina, Ground Dove. The amost abundant Columbidae and seen throughout the island. Danforth says it is "fairly common" on Terre-de-bas. The birds of this family seem to be the only ones that are hunted, people coming over from Guadeloupe for this purpose.

Geotrygon mystacea, Moustached Quail Dove. This bird, which is recorded by Bond, was not seen, but its distinctive booming note was heard from the woods on Le Chateau. Danforth saw it only on Terre-de-bas on the higher part of the mountain.

Coccyzus minor, Mangrove Cuckoo. In mangrove or dense scrub near the shore. Not recorded previously.

Crotophaga ani, Smooth-billed Ani. Associated with cows in bands of six or eight and remarkably unsuspecting for an ani. On other trips to the West Indies I noted that this bird, although easily watched, never allowed a very close approach, but on Terre-de-haut I could walk to within five or six feet of the birds in full view. They were feeding on a ground moth, about half an inch long, the only insect we could find. Some of the moths, which were abundant, were flushed by the cows, others by the bird itself.

Danforth "found it [to be] perhaps the commonest bird on Terre-de-Haut, frequenting pastures and brushy land, but observed none on Terre-de-Bas" from where it has been reported, however, by Pinchon and Bon Saint-Come (1951). Danforth collected two individuals and states "One stomach contained 15 weevils, *Lachnopus curvipes*, and the other 6 *Lachnopus curvipes* and a grasshopper." This is of interest, as Mrs. Vaurie (a coleopterist) and I found this weevil emerging in great numbers, mating on flowering mesquite, but the anis never approached the mesquite during our stay.

Rand (1953), who has studied the feeding rates of the Groove-billed Ani (*C. sulcirostris*) in Central America, found that when the birds were feeding with cows at the beginning of the rainy season they captured or tried to capture an insect on an average of 1.8 per minute. It did not occur to me to time the anis of Terre-de-haut, but they were certainly feeding at a much faster rate. It seems to me in retrospect that they would pause only for a few seconds between captures, and, no doubt, the feeding rate varies with the abundance of prey. I do not recall that they missed, probably because the insect was relatively slow and large.

The islanders told us that they call the bird "Merle Martinique." According to Pinchon and Bon Saint-Come, it is called "Merle de Porto-Rique" on Guadeloupe, and "Gros Merle de Sainte-Lucie" on Martinique, each island thus attributing it to another. On Guadeloupe and Martinique the name "Merle," without a qualifier, is given to the Lesser Antillean Grackle (*Quiscalus lugubris*). It is curious to note that this grackle, although very adaptable and very widely distributed in the Lesser Antilles, is not found on Les Saintes, only seven miles away from Guadeloupe.

Eulampis jugularis, Garnet-throated Hummingbird. Recorded by Bond (1936, 1956), who writes to me that "I was told that the strikingly colored *Eulampis* has been seen [on Terre-de-bas] occasionally," but that the only two hummingbirds he saw in Les Saintes were *Sericotcs holosericeus* and *Orthorhynchus cristatus*. He saw these on Terre-de-bas. *Eulampis jugularis* was not seen by me or Danforth.

Sericotcs holosericeus, Emerald-throated Hummingbird. Common everywhere in open areas. Not recorded previously, although Bond (1956) implied that it occurs in Les Saintes and (see above) has seen it on Terre-de-bas.

Orthorhynchus cristatus, Antillean Crested Hummingbird. Equally common as the preceding species and in the same habitat. Common also on Terre-de-bas, according to Danforth.

Elaenia martinica, Lesser Antillean Elaenia. Two individuals that were very vocal were seen in the orchards or groves. Danforth saw it on Terre-de-haut and found it to be common on Terre-de-bas. The specimen he collected had been eating fruit.

Progne dominicensis, Antillean Martin. Common and apparently nesting in the cliffs mentioned. Danforth "found it breeding on the cliffs on both Terre-de-Bas and Terre-de-Haut."

Virco altiloquus, Black-whiskered Vireo. Common. Danforth states it is common also on Terre-de-bas.

Dendroica petechia, Golden Warbler. Common throughout but more so near the shore in bushes and especially manchineel trees. Danforth found it to be common on both Terre-de-haut and Terre-de-bas.

Dendroica plumbea, Plumbeous Warbler. Two individuals singing in dense scrub at the foot of the hills at the western end of the island. They were located with difficulty as they were furtive and never came out in the open, but when finally tracked down after many scratches they prove to be not particularly nervous. They wag their tail constantly up and down like a Palm Warbler when perched and sing from a low, sheltered branch. The song is loud and musical, not typical of a warbler, and the call or alarm note a sharp "chick." The next day the two birds were heard and found at the same sites, a behavior that suggests they had established territories. Some old, cup-shaped nests that were found while searching for the birds may have belonged to this species. This warbler was known hitherto only from Dominica, Marie Galante, and Guadeloupe. It will probably be found also on Terre-de-bas.

Sciurus aurocapillus, Oven-bird. A winter visitor according to Bond.

Coereba flaveola, Bananaquit. Common. Not seen by Danforth, who was surprised not to find it on Terre-de-haut, as he states it was common on Terre-de-bas.

Tiaris bicolor, Black-faced Grassquit. Very common, the most abundant land bird. It may have been less abundant when Danforth visited the island as he says he "observed" it on Terre-de-haut, whereas he found it to be "common" on Terre-de-bas.

Loxigilla noctis, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch. Danforth states it is "Common on Terre-de-Bas, but not found on Terre-de-Haut." It seems to be rare in this last island, as I saw only one male accompanied by a female in habitat that seems eminently suitable for this species.

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