

NESTING OF THE RUFESCENT TIGER-HERON *TIGRISOMA LINEATUM* ON BARRO COLORADO ISLAND (REPUBLIC OF PANAMA)

Andrzej Dyrzcz

Department of Avian Ecology, Wrocław University, Sienkiewicza 21, 50-335 Wrocław, Poland.
E-mail: dyrzcz@biol.uni.wroc.pl

Key words: *Tigrisoma lineatum*, nest, Panama.

Barro Colorado is an island in the artificial lake Gatun, which was created during the building of the Panama Canal. The island, approximately 1642 ha in extent, is covered mainly with tropical moist forest, both primary and secondary, and has the status of nature reserve since the last 70 years.

On 17 April 1998, I found a nest of the Rufescent Tiger-heron (*Tigrisoma lineatum*) with a bird sitting on it. The bird's chestnut-brown head and neck, yellow base of bill and brownish mantle were visible. The nest, close to a small bay called Shannon Cove, was 7–8 m up on the drooping branch of a small tree growing at the base of the trunk of a large tree, overhanging the water. The branch was too weak to allow me to reach the nest. The nest looked like an untidy pile of sticks and twigs, and could be easily overlooked unless the bird was sitting on it. From below, the nest was transparent apart from its center, which probably contained eggs or small nestlings. Compared to the size of the bird, I estimated the nest to be roughly 50 cm in diameter.

On 17 and 18 April, I watched the nest

from a blind on the ground, c. 15 m away. On 17 April, after being flushed from the nest at about 10:00, the bird came back after approximately 30 min, and I observed it until 12:30. During that time, the bird was half-sitting on the nest as if protecting the nest content from sunshine, but did not incubate. Most of the time, when the sun was shining, the bird was gaping and gular fluttering. The next day, the bird returned 20 min after I entered the blind and sat on the nest continuously from 08:50 to 10:15 when observations ceased. This time it sat lower, apparently to incubate. As before, the bird panted and its throat quivered. However, on 26 April, I observed the nest for two hours but did not see the bird. I concluded that the brood must have been destroyed or abandoned. This may have resulted from the continuous rain of the previous three days (the onset of the rainy season).

Information about breeding biology of *T. lineatum* is scarce. A nest reported from Corrientes in northeastern Argentina was a large stick platform just over 7 m up in a tree on the edge of a small wood next to a marsh (Hancock & Kushlan 1984). In Surinam,

ests were flimsy structures built fairly high in trees (Haverschmidt 1968).

This is apparently the first breeding record of this species in Panama (cf. Wetmore 1965). According to Ridgely & Gwynne (1989), there are few records from the neighbourhood of the Canal, but they suggest that the number of Rufescent Tiger-herons is slowly increasing. During my 2-month stay on Barro Colorado Island, I observed single adult individuals on 17 March in Wheeler Cove, 19 March in Fuertes Cove, and 26 April on Orchid Island. Twice, I flushed birds standing on the forested shore of the island. The third observation of the species was made when I was sitting in a blind at a nest of *Myzometetes similis* containing nestlings. The nest was located near the shore about 2 m over water on lianas. *T. lineatum* landed in the mud near the nest. At a distance of about 3 m from the nest, it was being attacked by parental birds. The heron did not react to attacks but stopped approaching the nest. It seemed to be looking out for prey in the water. After a few minutes, I drove it away.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I made the mentioned observations during the study of other bird species on Barro Colo-

rado Island thanks to a grant from the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. I would like to express my gratitude to this institution, especially to Dr. Neal G. Smith for his constant help. I thank two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments. One of them kindly improved my English.

REFERENCES

- Hancock, J., & J. Kushlan. 1984. The herons handbook. Croom Helm, London & Sydney.
- Haverschmidt, F., 1968. Birds of Surinam. Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh.
- Ridgely, R. S., & J. A. Gwynne, Jr. 1989. A guide to the birds of Panama with Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Honduras. Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Wetmore, A. 1965. The birds of the Republic of Panama. Part 1: Tinamidae (Tinamous) to Rynchopidae (Skimmers). Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

Accepted 9 December 1998.