

FIRST RECORD OF A BARE-THROATED TIGER-HERON (*TIGRISOMA MEXICANUM*) NESTING ON A CLIFF LEDGE

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The monotypic Bare-throated Tiger-heron (*Tigrisoma mexicanum*) ranges from coastal Mexico to northwest Colombia and occurs in habitats ranging from brackish and mangrove coastal zones to inland marshes, swamps, streams, and rivers (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). Bare-throated Tiger-herons are crepuscular to nocturnal foragers, feeding on a variety of aquatic prey, including fish, frogs, and crustaceans (Blake 1977, Wetmore 1965). del Hoyo *et al.* (1992) described this species as building large stick platforms in horizontal branches of trees 6–15 m over water or low branches of trees at the tops of sea cliffs. Here we describe the first observation, to our knowledge, of this species nesting on a cliff ledge.

On 7 June 1996 we observed an adult Bare-throated Tiger-heron on its nest from 14:30 to 16:10 in a remote area of Petén, Guatemala. The tiger-heron was completely shaded and displayed typical brooding or incubating behavior throughout our observation, including prolonged periods in an incubating position interrupted six times by brief bouts of standing, turning, preening, and mandibulating the contents of the nest. The

nest was located on a ledge ca. 4.5 m long and 2 m deep from front to back with little to no protective overhang. The ledge was ca. 50 m above the base of a 150 m tall, vertical, south-facing cliff. The nest was ca. 1.5 m in diameter by 25 cm tall and constructed of dry sticks approximately the diameter of a pencil. Directly below the cliff was a large wetland with several interconnected, open bodies of water along the Rio San Pedro. Unmodified semi-deciduous tropical broadleaf forest surrounds the area for many km in all directions.

At least 11 species of three ardeid genera (*Ardea*, *Egretta*, and *Nycticorax*) are known to nest on cliffs (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). Though a cliff nest may be more conspicuous than a tree nest camouflaged by foliage, the virtually complete security from non-avian arboreal predators afforded by nesting on vertical cliffs may be advantageous in some cases.

This occurrence of cliff nesting by a Bare-throated Tiger-heron in Central America could be indicative of a more diverse nest site selection than has previously been appreciated. However, considering the inevitably exposed nature of a tiger-heron stick nest on

a cliff and the relative abundance of avian predators with cliff access in this region, we suspect this behavior is likely maladaptive in this species, at least in this part of its range.

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