

## RECENT RECORDS OF BIRDS IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

RICHARD P. FFRENCH AND MARGARET FFRENCH

**I**N a tropical country where amateur ornithologists are few and professional work is usually limited to short periods with little time for general observation, it is to be expected that much is still to be learned about the occurrence and status of uncommon birds. The island of Trinidad, so close to the South American mainland and sharing much of its fauna, is also on one of the fall migration routes for water birds from the North down the chain of the Lesser Antilles. Thus its unique position makes it a likely place for unusual visitors from both North and South.

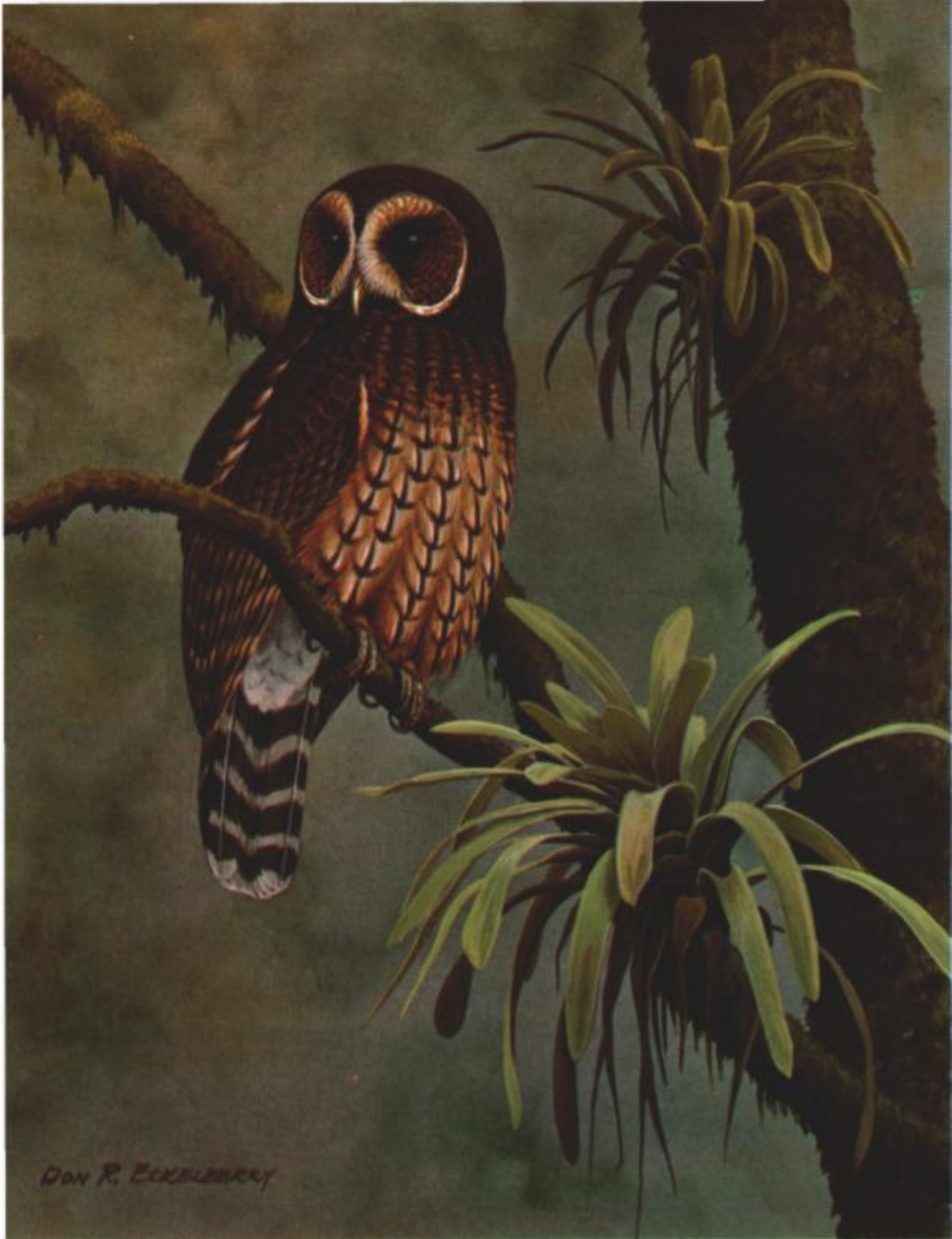
This paper is designed to supplement "The Birds of Trinidad and Tobago" (Herklots, 1961), clarifying the status of several species on the basis of recent fieldwork and recording recent additions to the avifauna of these islands. A few recently published records have also been included for completeness. In addition to our own observations, those of several other observers, particularly David W. and Barbara K. Snow and Charles T. Collins, have been incorporated in the text. We are grateful to them for permission to include these records.

Although the majority of the records are sight records, only unquestionable identifications from reputable observers have been included. Full field notes made on the spot have been required, and any doubtful records have been rejected. Nevertheless, the sight records of species new to the islands must be considered provisional, pending the collection of specimens.

Seventeen new records for Trinidad, three for Tobago, and six new breeding records for Trinidad are reported here. Other records are for birds which have rarely been seen in the past, while some show that certain birds are not as rare as was thought. The text reflects the fact that we were working intensively on banding shorebirds at Pointe-a-Pierre during 1959-62, in the course of which several interesting observations were made. It is more than likely that a similar concentration in swamps or forests would bring to light many other unusual occurrences, especially among migrant ducks and warblers from the North, and among raptors from the continent of South America.

Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*).—A bird was found dead at Manzanilla Beach on 4 April 1957. The skin is in the American Museum of Natural History. One bird was seen on 20 April 1963 at sea off Soldado Rock, southwest of Trinidad. Rare off Trinidad, where it is not known to breed, though it breeds on Tobago.

Mediterranean Shearwater (*Puffinus kuhli*).—Dead or exhausted birds have been found on Mayaro Beach on 21 June 1955, 19 February 1956, and 29 April 1961. The skins have been identified at the American Museum of Natural History, and one of them



MOTTLED WOOD-OWL (*Ciccaba virgata*)

From a tempera painting by Don R. Eckelberry

(See page 8)

is in the collection of the Trinidad Regional Virus Laboratory, Port of Spain. Only one bird had been recorded previously.

Greater Shearwater (*Puffinus gravis*).—A bird found dead at Manzanilla in July 1960 (D. Snow) was identified at the American Museum of Natural History as this species. This is the first record for Trinidad.

Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*).—Two dead birds were found on the Manzanilla Beach on 6 December 1958 (D. Snow), supplementing the one previous record for Trinidad.

Bulwer's Petrel (*Bulweria bulwerii*).—One dead bird was found on 23 January 1961 on Soldado Rock by J. B. Saunders. This is the only record for Trinidad and the Caribbean area (French, 1963).

White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchus*).—A bird seen in December 1963 at Blanchisseuse by three observers (Eckelberry, 1964) is the first record of the species in the southern Caribbean.

Gray Heron (*Ardea cinerea*).—A bird banded as a nestling in France was shot by a Fyzabad hunter in early August 1959. The exact locality was not recorded. This is the first record of this species for the Caribbean area, although another banded bird was taken in Montserrat at about the same time (Baudouin-Bodin, 1960). In the New World the bird has only occurred before in Greenland.

White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*).—A bird was seen going to roost along with several thousand Scarlet Ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*) in the Caroni Swamp on 19 July 1964. It was seen again on 17 August 1964 by the author, C. T. Collins, N. Niosi, and I. Black. This is the first record for Trinidad, although in Venezuela the two *Eudocimus* species commonly live side by side (Zahl, 1950).

Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*).—Two adult birds were seen on 10 April 1963 at Pigeon Peak, Tobago. This is the first record for Tobago, although the bird is a common visitor to Trinidad.

Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*).—Birds of dark and light phases, but chiefly the latter, have been seen by numerous observers on numerous occasions during the last six or seven years, nearly always over hill forest, but also occasionally over fairly open country in central Trinidad. The species appears to be widespread in Trinidad; the fact that Herklots (op. cit.) quotes but one record is due to the difficulty which observers have hitherto experienced in its identification.

Black-collared Hawk (*Busarellus nigricollis*).—Two adult birds were seen on 30 December 1963 in Bush-Bush Forest, Nariva Swamp, by D. R. Eckelberry, C. Brooke Worth, and other observers. The first-named observer is very familiar with this species on the mainland. This is the first record for Trinidad, though its presence has been suspected before (Eckelberry, 1964).

Yellow-headed Caracara (*Milvago chimachima*).—A bird was seen in the Nariva Swamp on 5 October 1960 (D. Snow), and another by R. P. French in the Caroni Swamp on 31 May 1964. These supplement the two previous records for Trinidad.

Pearl Kite (*Gampsonyx swainsoni*).—Previously known from only two or three records, birds of this species, usually singly, have been seen on various occasions recently: 26 July 1960 at Alandale Beach near Toco, 11 September 1960 at the mouth of the Nariva River, 3 December 1961 in the Moruga forest, and in July 1963, March, September, October, and November 1964 on the edge of the Nariva Swamp, at Chaguanas, and at Waller Field. It seems to be uncommonly seen, rather than rare.

Plomado Falcon (*Falco femoralis*).—A bird was seen on 21 and 26 January 1962 by several observers on the edge of the Oropouche Lagoon. It was frequenting the area

where thousands of Dickcissels (*Spiza americana*) came to roost. The species is very rare, but possibly breeds, in Trinidad.

Sora Rail (*Porzana carolina*).—One was seen on 21 November 1963 on the edge of the Oropouche Lagoon. This bird is commonly observed in winter on the nearby island of Barbados, but is rather rarely seen in Trinidad, where there is much more extensive cover.

Yellow-breasted Crake (*Porzana flaviventer*).—Two birds have been seen on three occasions, 3 May 1959, 2 May 1960, and 28 May 1961, in the same patch of decaying water hyacinth (*Eichhornea speciosa*) on the southeastern edge of the Caroni Swamp. Originally thought to be *Laterallus exilis*, they were seen by up to four observers at distances ranging down to less than 30 feet in perfect light conditions with 8 × 30 binoculars. Detailed descriptions checked at the American Museum of Natural History subsequently indicated their identity. These are the first records for Trinidad, but the species is known to inhabit several islands of the Greater Antilles, as well as Central and South America, including the Guianas.

Temminck's Crake (*Laterallus exilis*).—Individual birds have been seen on 21 December 1960, 4 February 1964, and on other unnoted occasions on the edge of the Oropouche Lagoon. Also birds were seen on 5 July 1961 and 28 August 1962 at Waller Field (Collins). It is resident in Trinidad, and is probably less rare than it seems.

Cayenne Lapwing (*Belonopterus cayennensis*).—A bird was seen under excellent conditions on the bank of a reservoir at Pointe-a-Pierre on 22 and 23 May 1961 by three observers at distances down to 75 feet. On 26 May 1963 three birds were seen by Wilbur G. Downs on the University College savannah at St. Augustine. These are the first records for Trinidad, although the species is abundant on the nearby mainland.

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*).—A bird was caught in a mist net at Pointe-a-Pierre on 31 October 1962, which had its inner toes almost entirely unwebbed and very small webs to the outer ones. The observers, R. P. and M. ffrench and J. B. Saunders, are quite familiar with all the species of *Charadrius* which have occurred in Trinidad, including *C. semipalmatus* (of which more than 40 have been banded), *C. collaris*, and *C. wilsonia*. The bird was banded and released. This appears to be the first record for Trinidad, but a specimen was taken in Barbados about 1888.

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*).—Five birds were seen feeding on a flooded pasture at Pointe-a-Pierre on 19 November 1961, and a single bird also at Pointe-a-Pierre on 25 December 1962. Though the species has been recorded from neighbouring islands, including Tobago, these are the first records for Trinidad.

Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*).—A nest was found on bare earth among mangroves on the seashore at Pointe-a-Pierre on 26 May 1960. It contained one hatching egg and one very small chick. Another nest was found 8 yards away on 19 June 1960, containing three eggs. The eggs were still there on 11 July but had disappeared on 14 July. These are the first definite breeding records for Trinidad. It was impossible to establish whether the birds were of the nominate race, which breeds as far south as Antigua, or of the form *cinnamominus* which breeds on the South American continent and neighbouring islands.

Upland Plover (*Bartramia longicauda*).—This bird does not seem to be as rare as is stated by Herklots (op. cit.). Up to four birds have been seen on grassland at Pointe-a-Pierre on 17 September 1960, 16 October 1960, from 19 September to 22 October 1961, from 4 to 7 October 1962, and from 18 to 25 September 1964. One was trapped and banded on 17 September 1960. Also about 20 birds were seen on 4 October 1960 at Arima (D. Snow). It seems to be a regular passage-migrant in small numbers.

Knot (*Calidris canutus*).—Although sparsely recorded previously, this bird appears to be regular on migration in small numbers through Trinidad. Recent records include birds seen at Pointe-a-Pierre on 26 August and 7 September 1960, and trapped and banded on 19 September 1960, 19 September 1962, and 22 September 1964. A single bird was seen at the Nariva River mouth on 15 September 1962.

Stilt Sandpiper (*Micropalama himantopus*).—Though Herklots (op. cit.) gives the impression that this bird is an irregular visitor, it appears in fact to be regular on migration through Trinidad, although in small numbers. Birds have been seen at Pointe-a-Pierre as early as 5 August and as late as 24 October. Six birds were trapped and banded in 1960 and three in 1962.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*).—Despite recent fieldwork on shore-birds, this species still appears to be rare on migration through Trinidad. Individuals have been seen on but three occasions recently, 11 September 1960 at Nariva River mouth, and on grassland at Pointe-a-Pierre on 16 October 1960 and 4 October 1962.

Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*).—Two birds were seen at close quarters on the seashore at Pointe-a-Pierre on 19 September 1960. This seems to be a very rare species in Trinidad, having apparently not been recorded before during this century.

Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*).—A light phase adult was seen from a distance of 30 feet by three observers on a boat at anchor in Port of Spain harbour on 22 January 1961. Jaegers, possibly of this species, have also been seen at sea near Soldado Rock on 18 June 1961, 27 May 1962, and 8 July 1962, and another off the north coast on 18 May 1963. These are the first records for Trinidad.

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*).—An immature bird was seen by several observers at Pointe-a-Pierre from 17 November to 18 December 1960. It was always with a flock of *Larus atricilla*. This is the first record for Trinidad.

Royal Tern (*Thalasseus maximus*).—Small numbers were found breeding on Soldado Rock in 1962 and 1963 among a large breeding colony of *Sterna fuscata* and *Anous stolidus* (French and Collins, 1965). These are the first breeding records for Trinidad.

Cayenne Tern (*Thalasseus eurygnathus*).—Indications of breeding were found on Soldado Rock in 1962 and 1963 (French and Collins, 1965). These are the first breeding records for Trinidad.

Band-tailed Pigeon (*Columba fasciata*).—Previously considered to be an extremely rare resident, this species appears to be not only rare but very local, perhaps confined to the higher parts of the Northern Range around El Tucuche. Two birds were seen by four observers at the summit of this mountain (elevation 3,075 feet [936 meters]) on 13 January 1963, and five birds were also seen there on 26 June 1963 (Collins and F. Gary Styles).

Mottled Wood-Owl (*Ciccaba virgata*) (see frontispiece).—This uncommon owl has been seen and heard on several occasions recently in the Bush-Bush Forest, Nariva Swamp, by T. H. G. Aitken and C. Brooke Worth.

Rufous Nightjar (*Caprimulgus rufus*).—The well-known call of this species was heard at Chaguaramas on 21 May 1963 (Collins). At Monos Island on 16 and 17 May 1964 the calls of many individuals were heard and recorded on tape by members of the Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club (French, 1965), and later compared with authenticated recordings of the species. The presence of the species in Trinidad remains, however, unsubstantiated by a specimen.

Chapman's Swift (*Chaetura chapmani*).—Previously considered to be a rare resident, it has been observed in mixed flocks of *Chaetura* swifts near Rio Claro on 13 June 1964. It has also been seen flying in the company of Short-tailed Swifts (*C. brachyura*) on

numerous occasions from May to November 1964 near Valencia and in the Arima Valley, and roosting with *C. brachyura* near Valencia (Collins). The first nest of this species was found near Valencia on 3 June 1963 (Collins in prep.).

Picine Woodhewer (*Xiphorhynchus picus*).—Although previously considered to be extremely rare, this species was seen and heard on numerous occasions in the centre of the Caroni Swamp from May to October 1964. On 28 July a nest containing two well-grown young was found in the hollow trunk of a dead mangrove tree. This is the first breeding record for Trinidad.

Souleyet's Woodhewer (*Lepidocolaptes souleyeti*).—This bird, rare in Trinidad, has been seen on 31 July 1962 and several other occasions in Bush-Bush Forest, Nariva Swamp. A single bird was trapped by C. Brooke Worth and T. H. G. Aitken near Vega de Oropouche in July 1964.

White-winged Swallow (*Tachycineta albiventer*).—Although rarely seen in northern Trinidad, this species is common at Pointe-a-Pierre, where nests have been found in scaffolding pipes near water. Eggs were found abandoned on 28 July 1962, but a second brood hatched on 16 September.

Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Hylocichla minima*).—An adult male (which had killed itself by flying against a glass door) was found in Port of Spain by T. H. G. Aitken on 1 November 1963. The skin was referred to the nominate race at the American Museum of Natural History, and is now in the collection of the Trinidad Regional Virus Laboratory (No. 7154). This is the first record for Trinidad, although the species is a common visitor to Venezuela (Worth and Aitken, 1965).

Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*).—A bird of this species was caught in October 1960 by the lighthouse keeper on Chacachacare Island and seen on the following day (D. and B. K. Snow). This is the first record for Trinidad, although there is a single record for Tobago (ffrench, in Herklots, op. cit.).

Black-whiskered Vireo (*Vireo altiloquus*).—One was seen at Pointe-a-Pierre on 10 September 1961 by the writer, who knew the species well in Barbados. Birds were seen in the Arima Valley on 14 March and 9 April 1961 (D. Snow). Although seen "frequently" in the years 1921–26 (Belcher and Smooker, 1937) it now seems to be a very occasional visitor.

Black and White Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*).—One was seen among other migrant warblers on 20 October 1960 at the head of the Arima Valley (D. Snow). Other birds have been seen by various American visitors at the same place (Christmas 1961, 10 January and 20 January 1965). It appears to be a regular visitor in small numbers. These are the first records for Trinidad.

Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*).—A male of this species, not quite in full spring plumage, was seen in the Arima Valley in March 1959 (D. Snow). This is the first record for Trinidad.

Rice Grackle (*Scaphidura oryzivora*).—A flock of about a dozen birds was seen on 8 September 1964 in the Louis d'Or Valley, Tobago. Until recently the species was unknown in Tobago, although common in Trinidad.

Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*).—An adult male of this species was seen by several observers during December 1963 at Pointe-a-Pierre. It fed mainly at a golden apple tree (*Spondias cytherea*). This is the first record for Trinidad, although the species has been recorded from Tobago.

Troupial (*Icterus icterus*).—An adult bird was seen at Pointe-a-Pierre from September 1964 through February 1965. It was in richly coloured plumage, but since the species

is occasionally imported in captivity from Venezuela, it is possible that this and previous records are of escaped birds.

Cravat (*Tanagra trinitatis*).—This species has recently been reported on Tobago (Pilling and Trowern, 1964). It is perhaps pertinent to point out that this species is a common cage bird in Trinidad, and that traffic in caged birds is frequent between Trinidad and Tobago. The present writer recently found a pair of Blue-winged Parakeets (*Forpus passerinus*) breeding in Tobago, undoubtedly introduced by this method.

Hepatic Tanager (*Piranga flava*).—Birds of this species have been seen frequently in the higher parts of the Northern Range, especially near the Arima-Blanchisseuse road. Breeding has been recorded and individuals of both sexes have been trapped and photographed. A recent skin is now in the Florida State Museum, and at least 12 others collected many years ago are in other American museums.

There has evidently been confusion in the past over the identification in Trinidad of this species and *P. rubra*. Herklots (op cit.) states that *flava* has a black bill, but individuals caught have shown in life the mandible to be pale horn, while the maxilla is blackish only at the base, ridge, and tip, otherwise horn-coloured. *Flava*, moreover, has quite a distinct call from *rubra*, and the majority of birds found in the Northern Range (and all those found from April to August) have given the call attributed to *flava* by Peterson (1941). Birds have been collected only in the Northern Range, usually above 1,000 feet, and have been seen there in every month of the year.

Birds of this genus seen in the lowlands at Pointe-a-Pierre have given only the typical *rubra* call. These birds, moreover, have been observed only during the winter months. Specimens have been taken on 6 November 1903 and 28 October 1964, the latter in the Northern Range.

Saffron Finch (*Sicalis flaveola*).—Recorded in every month of the year at Pointe-a-Pierre, where the species is not uncommon. Breeding behaviour has often been observed, and a nest was found on 4 October 1962 which contained young birds until 11 October. It had been built inside an old nest of the Yellow Oriole (*Icterus nigrogularis*), at about 35 feet from the ground in a mango tree (*Mangifera indica*). The species has been thought a migrant, but it seems more likely to be a localized resident, gradually spreading over savannah country throughout Trinidad.

#### SUMMARY

Recent records for 48 species in Trinidad and Tobago are presented, including 17 species not previously recorded in Trinidad, three new for Tobago, and six new breeding records for Trinidad.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- BAUDOIN-BODIN, J.  
1960 Des hérons cendrés bagues au lac de Grand-Lieu repris aux Antilles *L'Oiseau et R.F.O.*, 30:270.
- BELCHER, C., AND G. D. SMOOKER  
1937 Birds of the colony of Trinidad and Tobago, Part VI. *Ibis*, 79:504-550.
- COLLINS, C. T.  
Biology of *Chaetura chapmani*. (In prep.)
- ECKELBERRY, D. R.  
1964 Bird painting in a tropical valley. *Audubon Mag.*, 66:284-289.

FFRENCH, R. P.

1963 Bulwer's Petrel in Trinidad. *Auk*, 80:379.

1965 The avifauna of Grand Fond, Monos. *J. of Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club*.

FFRENCH, R. P., AND C. T. COLLINS

1965 The breeding of Cayenne and Royal Terns in Trinidad. *Auk*, 82:277.

HERKLOTS, G. A. C.

1961 The birds of Trinidad and Tobago. Collins, London.

PETERSON, R. T.

1941 A field guide to western birds. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

PILLING, N. B., AND R. W. TROWERN

1964 *Tanagra trinitatis* on Tobago, West Indies. *Wilson Bull.*, 76:96-97.

WORTH, C. B., AND T. H. G. AITKEN

1965 First record of the Gray-cheeked Thrush in Trinidad. *Auk*, 82:109.

ZAHL, P.

1950 *Nat. Geog. Mag.* 97:633-661.

TEXACO TRINIDAD INC., POINTE-A-PIERRE, TRINIDAD, 11 MARCH 1965