

NEW DATA ON THE DISTRIBUTION AND LIFE HABITS OF CUBAN BIRDS

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Abstract. Birds were observed in 15 localities of Cuba in March 1984 and March/April 1989. Together, 95 species belonging in 41 families were observed. Details on the distribution and life habits are given. First probable breeding of *Seiurus noveboracensis* outside of North America was recorded.

INTRODUCTION

In spite of the long history of Cuban ornithology (Garrido & Garcia Montaña, 1975), the birds of Cuba belong currently to the least known of the Caribbean islands (Bond, 1979). The distribution and phenology of occurrence of Cuban birds have been described only in general terms so far (Barbour, 1923; Garrido & Garcia Montaña, 1975). Data on the breeding habits of Cuban birds were recently summarized by Balát & González (1982) and Valdes Miro (1984), but adequate information is available for a few species only, such as *Mimus polyglottos* or *Zenaida macroura* (Balát & Pozac, 1981). Hence, even anecdotal data on the birds of Cuba obtained by visiting ornithologists are of interest (e.g., Bond, 1950; Ripley & Watson, 1956; Vaurie, 1957; Dathe, 1967; Dathe & Fischer, 1969, 1979, 1981; Santos & Taraščuk, 1981; Buden & Olson, 1989). In the present paper I describe ornithology observations obtained during my visits to Cuba in 1984 and 1989.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

During two trips to Cuba (4-18 March 1984, 27 March - 12 April 1989) I visited 15 ornithological localities and occasionally made bird notes in several other places in 7 of the 12 Cuban provinces (Pinar del Rio, Habana, Matanzas, Cienfuego, Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritus and Ciego de Avilla: see Fig. 1). The localities are listed and briefly characterized below. Birds were identified with the help of field guides by Robbins et al. (1966), Bond (1979) and Scott (1983). Ornithological nomenclature follows Garrido & Garcia Montaña (1975). In 1984, birds were only observed, in 1989 they were also mistnetted in two localities (Soroá and Caibarien).

(1) **Vinales.** Pinar del Rio Province (1 April 1989): In mountains, characterized by narrow deep valleys between isolated hills and hill chains covered by tropical forest. Most of the observations were made in the close vicinity of Rancho San Vicente, north of the City of Vinales.

(2) **Soroá.** Pinar del Rio Province (31 March 1989, 2-3 April 1989): Tropical forest.

(3) **City of L a H a b a n a,** La Habana Province (4-5 March 1984, 30 March 1989): Intravillan with parks rich in trees.

(4) **H a b a n a - B a c u r a n a o,** La Habana Province (28-29 March 1989): Suburb near shore; dry, macchia-like biotopes.

- (5) *Habana-Guánabo*, La Habana Province (4-5 March 1984): Suburb, garden-city near shore at Playa Hermosa.
- (6) *Jibanao*, Matanzas Province (4-5 April 1989): Forest - covered hills near sea.
- (7) *Varadero*, Matanzas Province (16 March 1984): Sea shore, partly covered by sand, partly by stone blocks.
- (8) *Laguna del Tesoro*, Matanzas Province (6-7 March 1984): Salt-water lake, skirted by *Cortaderia* reed thickets.
- (9) *Playa Larga*, Matanzas Province (6-8 March 1984): Lowland tropical forest at the eastern border of the Zapata swamps.
- (10) *Topaz de Collantes*, Cienfuegos Province (8-9 and 11 March 1984): In Escambray Mountains, approximately 900 m a.s.l. Hill sides are covered with tropical forest, but above approximately 800 m a.s.l. they are replaced by *Pinus caribaeus* monocultures.
- (11) *Playa Ancón*, Sancti Spiritus Province (10 March 1984): Sea shore with remains of mangroves.
- (12) *Caibarien*, Villa Clara Province (6-8 April 1989): Near-shore lakes near villa Blanca, partly covered by remains of dying mangroves at Villa Blanca.
- (13) *Boquerón*, Sancti Spiritus Province (13 March 1984): Hills covered with tropical forest in the eastern part of Alturas del Nordeste Mountains.
- (14) *Morón*, Ciego de Avilla Province (12 March 1984): Intravillan.
- (15) *La Tinaja*, Ciego de Avila Province (14 March 1984): Near-shore shallow lakes, partly covered with mangroves.

Breeding records are classified according to the clue by the European Ornithological Atlas Committee (Sharrock, 1974). The sequence of species and names used follow Garrido & Garcia Montana (1975). Data are mostly omitted in the following text because they can be found in the "Localities" section.

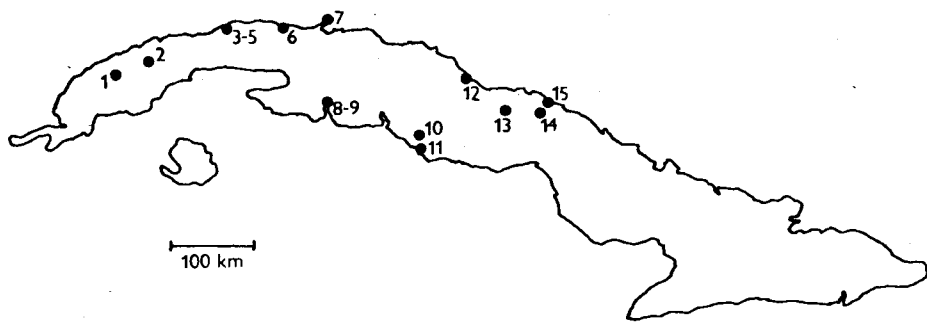


Fig. 1. Ornithological localities in Cuba. visited during March 1984 and March/April 1989. 1 - Vinales. 2 - Soroá, 3 - City of La Habana, 4 - Habana-Bucuranao, 5 - Habana-Guánabo, 6 - Jibanao, 7 - Varadero, 8 - Laguna del Tesoro, 9 - Playa Larga, 10 - Topez de Collantes, 11 - Playa Ancón, 12 - Caibarien, 13 - Boquerón, 14 - Morón, 15 - La Tinaja.

Podicipedidae

Least Grebe *Podiceps dominicus* (Linnaeus): Laguna del Tesoro.

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* (Linnaeus): Vinales.

Pelecanidae

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* Linnaeus: Playa Larga, Varadero.

Phalacrocoracidae

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus* (Lesson): Playa Ancón.

Olivaceous Cormorant *Phalacrocorax olivaceus* (Humboldt): Caibarien (1 carcass found at shore).

Anhingidae

Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga* (Linnaeus): Laguna del Tesoro.

Fregatidae

Man-o'-War Bird *Fregatta magnificens* (Mathews): Playa Ancón, Caibarien.

Ardeidae

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* (Linnaeus): Laguna del Tesoro, Playa Ancón.

Common Egret *Egretta alba* (Gmelin): La Tinaja.

Little Blue Heron *Florida caerulea* (Linnaeus): La Tinaja.

Louisiana Heron *Hydranassa tricolor* (Mueller): La Tinaja.

Cattle Egret *Ardeola ibis* (Linnaeus): Abundant at all localities, except La Habana-City.

Green Heron *Butorides virescens* (Linnaeus): Laguna del Tesoro, Playa Ancón, Topez de Collantes. La Habana-city (1984, 1989), Habana-Bacuranao, Soroá, Caibarien.

Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis* (Gmelin): Caibarien.

Threskiornithidae

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus* (Linnaeus): La Tinaja.

Roseate Spoonbill *Ajaia ajaja* (Linnaeus): La Tinaja.

Phoenicopteridae

Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* Linnaeus: La Tinaja (small flock of adult and immature individuals).

Anseridae

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (Linnaeus): Laguna del Tesoro.

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa* (Linnaeus): Soroá (B-1). According to Garrido & Garcia Montana (1975), *Aix sponsa* inhabits only lagoons in Cuba. In Soroá, I observed a pair on a creek surrounded by tropical forest. This is roughly in accordance with habitat requirements of this bird in other parts of its area, although more slowly running water is usually preferred (Johnsgard, 1975; Bellrose, 1981).

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* Linnaeus: Jibanao. A female was observed on the sea near shore at Jibanao-El Abra on 4 April 1989. Garrido & Garcia Montana

(1975) listed only two records of this species in Cuba (20 November and 18 December; years not given). This is thus probably the first spring record of *Mergus serrator* in Cuba.

Cathartidae:

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura* (Linnaeus): Abundant at all localities. An individual was observed entering a rock cavity located approximately 80 m above ground in the cliff with "prehistorical paintings" near Vinales on 1 April 1989. This may indicate breeding (D-13). A flock of 120 individuals was observed near Rancho San Vicente on the same day.

Accipitridae:

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis* (Gmelin): Jibanao.

Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus* (Vieillot): Playa Larga, Boquerón.

Falconidae:

Pigeon Hawk *Falco columbarius* Linnaeus: Habana-Bacuranao (rather abundant).

Sparrow Hawk *Falco sparverius* Linnaeus: Topez de Collantes, Soroá, Vinales. Also along the road between Australia and Playa Larga on 6 March 1984.

Rallidae:

Purple Gallinule *Porphyryla martinica* (Linnaeus): Laguna del Tesoro

Florida Gallinule *Gallinula chloropus* (Linnaeus): Laguna del Tesoro, Caibarien.

American Coot *Fulica americana* Gmelin: Laguna del Tesoro.

Jacaniidae:

American Jacana *Jacana spinosa* (Linnaeus): Laguna del Tesoro.

Charadriidae:

Thick-billed Plover *Charadrius wilsonia* Ord: Caibarien.

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus* Linnaeus: Playa Larga, Playa Ancón, Bocquerón, Habana-Bacuranao. Distraction behavior was observed in Habana-Bacuranao on 29 March 1989 (L. H o v o r k a, pers. communication). This indicates the presence of flightless young, or at least nest with eggs (D-10). B a l á t & G o n z á l e z (1982) knew complete clutches of this species only since the 3rd decade of April. G u n d l a c h (1875), however, stated that nesting starts already in March, which is more in accordance with the data presented here.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* (Linnaeus): La Tinaja.

Recurvirostridae:

Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (Linnaeus): La Tinaja, Caibarien.

Scolopacidae:

Lesser Yellow-leg *Tringa flavipes* (Gmelin): La Tinaja, Caibarien.

Willet *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus* (Gmelin): Playa Anceón, La Tinaja, Varadero.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* (Gmelin): La Tinaja.

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* (Linnaeus): La Tinaja.

Laridae:

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* Pontoppidan: A single immature individual was observed at La Tinaja on 14 March 1984. According to Garrido & García Montaña (1975) this species is regularly encountered only outside of this area, in the provinces of Habana and Matanzas.

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* Ord: Several individuals were seen at La Tinaja on 14 March 1984. According to Garrido & García Montaña (1975), *Larus delawarensis* is a rare visitor to Cuba.

Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* Linnaeus: La Tinaja, Caibarien.

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus* (Boddaert): La Tinaja.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* (Pallas): A single individual was seen at La Tinaja on 14 March 1984. The species has been recorded only twice in Cuba so far (25 December and 3 June, years not given) according to Garrido & García Montaña (1975):

Rynchopidae:

Black Skimmer *Rynchops nigra* Linnaeus: La Tinaja.

Columbidae:

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* (Linnaeus): Rather common at all localities, except Varadero. On the 30 March 1989 I located two nests in La Habana-City. In one of them, placed approximately 14 m above ground on a *Magnolia* tree, an incubating individual was seen (D-13). The other nest was being constructed approximately 10 m above ground on *Reystonea regia* palmtree (C-9). Both nests were higher than those recorded by Balát & Pozas (1981).

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica* (Linnaeus): Topez de Collantes. Also along the road between Cienfuegos and Trinidad.

Ground Dove *Columbigallina passerina* (Linnaeus): Habana-Bacuranao, Playa Larga, Bocquerón, La Tinaja, Soroá and Caibarien. A female mistnetted on 3 April 1989 in Soroá laid an egg before being released (D-14).

Psittacidae:

Cuban Parakeet *Aratinga euops* (Wagler): Topez de Collantes.

Cuculidae:

Cuban Lizard Cuckoo *Saurothera merlini* d'Orbigny: Playa Larga.

Smooth-billed Ani *Crotophaga ani* Linnaeus: Common at all localities, except La Habana-City.

Strigidae:

Cuban Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium siu* (d'Orbigny): Playa Larga.

Trochilidae:

Cuban Emerald *Chlorostilbon ricordii* (Gervais): Habana-Guánabo, Playa Larga, Topez de Collantes, Playa Ancón, Soroá, Vinales and Jibanao.

Trogonidae:

Cuban Trogon *Priotelus temnurus* (Temminck): Soroá, Vinales, Jibanao. Gundlach (1893), Todd (1916) and Balát & González (1982) mentioned that this species breeds very late in the year, only after woodpeckers leave their breeding holes, which are then used by trogons. However, males of *Priotelus temnurus* were frequently singing already in the late March and early April 1989 in Soroá and Vinales (B-2).

Alcedinidae:

Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon* (Linnaeus): Playa Ancón, La Tinaja, Soroá.

Todidae:

Cuban Todi *Todus multicolor* Gould: Topez de Collantes, Bocquerón, Jibanao.

Picidae:

Yellow-shafted Flicker *Colaptes auratus* (Linnaeus): Playa Larga.

Fernandina's Flicker *Colaptes fernandinae* Vigors: Soroá. This woodpecker runs on ground, instead of hopping as do other picids.

West Indian Red-bellied Woodpecker *Centurus superciliaris* (Temminck): Playa Larga. Topez de Collantes, Soroá, Vinales. Singing males were frequently heard in Vinales (B-2), and a frequently visited nest-hole was found in Soroá (D-13). It was located approximately 8 m above ground in a thick side branch of an unidentified angiosperm tree. The entrance hole was oriented toward the ground.

Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* (Linnaeus): Topez de Collantes, Habana-Bacuranao.

Cuban Green Woodpecker *Xiphidiopicus percussus* (Temminck): Soroá, Vinales, Jibanao. A breeding hole was found in Soroá, approximately 6 m above ground in a side branch of an unidentified angiosperm tree in Soroá (D-13). The entrance hole was oriented toward ground. As I have never observed this woodpecker pecking, the possibility should be considered that the observed nesting hole was pecked by *Centurus superciliaris* and subsequently occupied by *Xiphidiopicus percussus*. Two individuals (probably mates) alternated in the breeding hole in intervals of several hours. This might indicate that they incubated eggs or very small nestlings and that both sexes participate in this activity. While searching for food, none of the observed individuals pecked for it. They most often examined for food tufts of epiphytes, occasionally scanning also tree bark.

Tyrannidae:

Gray Kingbird *Tyrannus dominicensis* (Gmelin): Soroá, Vinales. Both females mistnetted at Soroá on 2-3 April 1989 had large brood patch (C-8) which indicates earlier breeding than known to Balát & González (1982). Pairing flights were observed in Vinales on 1 April 1989 (C-5).

Loggerhead Flycatcher *Tyrannus caudifasciatus* d'Orbigny: Soroá, Vinales. A nest of this species with two half-grown nestlings was found approximately 3 m above ground on a thin side-branch of an unidentified angiosperm tree in Soroá on 2 April

1989 (D-16). This indicates an earlier breeding date than known to B a l á t & G o n z á - l e s (1982). Both parents were observed to feed the young.

Greater Antillean Pewee *Contopus caribaeus* (d'Orbigny) : Soroá, Vinales. Singing males were recorded at Soroá, and a female with large brood patch was mistnetted there on 2 April 1989 (C-8). This agrees with the breeding period given for this species in the Isla de la Juventud (W a l k i n s h a w & B a k e r 1946). But indicates earlier start of its breeding season in the Island of Cuba than recorded by B a l á t & G o n z á l e z (1982).

Hirundinidae:

Cuban Purple Martin *Progne dominicensis* (Gmelin): La Habana-City (1984, 1989).

Cave Swallow *Petrochelidon fulva* ((Vieillot): Habana - Bacurano.

Corvidae:

Cuban Crow *Coryvus nasicus* Temminck: Playa Larga. Here, two individuals were observed to build nest in the fonds of an unidentified palmtree, approximately 7-8 m above ground on 7-8 March 1984 (C-9). This indicates an earlier breeding date than recorded by G u n d l a c h (1983) or T o d d (1916).

Mimidae:

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos* (Linnaeus): Recorded at all localities, except Laguna del Tesoro and Playa Larga. Males were everywhere Singing in 1984, but they sang only in Soroá and Vinales in 1989 (B-2).

Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis* (Linnaeus): Playa Larga, Vinales.

Turdidae:

Red-legged Thrush *Mimocichla plumbea* (Linnaeus): Topez de Collantes, Soroá, Vinales, Jibacoa. Males of this species were frequently singing in Soroá and Vinales (B-2) and all the three females mistnetted in Soroá on 2-3 April 1989 had large brood patches (C-8). On both these days, adults were observed to bring food to the young, but nests were not located (D-14).

Sylviidae:

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Poliophtila caerulea* (Linnaeus): Habana-Guánabo.

Vireonidae:

Cuban Vireo *Vireo gundlachii* Lembeje: Topez de Collantes, Playa Ancón.

Black-whiskered Vireo *Vireo altiloquus* Vieillot: Soroá, Vinales, Caibarien. Males of this species were frequently singing in Soroá and Vinales (B-2). A female mistnetted in Soroá on 3 April 1989 had a large brood patch (C-8). This indicates an earlier breeding date than recorded before (B a l á t & G o n z á l e z, 1982).

Parulidae:

Black and White Warbler *Mniotilta varia* (Linnaeus): Playa Larga, Habana-Bacurano.

Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorus* (Gmelin): Caibarien.

Tennessee Warbler *Vermivora peregrina* (Wilson): Habana-Guánabo. Playa Larga.

Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia* (Linnaeus): Playa Ancón, Caibarien.

Magnolia Warbler *Dendroica magnolia* (Wilson): Playa Larga.

Cape-May Warbler *Dendroica tigrina* (Gmelin): Habana-Guánabo, Topez de Collantes.

Black-throated Blue Warbler *Dendroica caerulescens* (Gmelin): Playa Larga, Topez de Collantes.

Black-poll Warbler *Dendroica striata* (Forster): Playa Larga, Caibarien.

Prairie Warbler *Dendroica discolor* (Vieillot): Playa Ancón, Caibarien.

Palm Warbler *Dendroica palmarum* (Gmelin): Habana-Guánabo, Habana-Bacuranao, Caibarien.

Northern Water-Thrush *Seiurus noveboracensis* (Gmelin): Soroá, Caibarien. Among 29 individuals of this species mistnetted at Caibarien on 6-7 April 1989 there was one female with a large brood patch (C-8). Since this is a good indicator of incubating activity (Thiede, 1985), this find represents the first breeding record of this species in Cuba or elsewhere in the Caribbean area. *Seiurus noveboracensis* normally breeds in Canada and the northern USA (Scott, 1983), while the Caribbean islands belong to its winter area.

Common Yellow-throat *Geothlypis trichas* (Linnaeus): Playa Larga, La Tinaja, Habana-Bacuranao, Soroá.

Yellow-headed Warbler *Teretistris fernandinae* (Lembeye): Soroá.

Oriente Warbler *Teretistris fornsi* Gundlach: Playa Larga (common). According to Garrido & Garcia Montana (1975), this is an eastern vicariant of *Teretistris fernandinae*. The record from Playa Larga is far west from the range registered before, but is well in accordance with the spreading trend of *Teretistris fornsi* mentioned by Garrido & Garcia Montana (1975).

Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla* (Linnaeus): Playa Larga, Caibarien.

Coerebidae:

Red-legged Honey-creeper *Cyanerpes cyaneus* (Linnaeus): Vinales.

Thraupidae:

Striped-headed Tanager *Spindalis zena* (Linnaeus): Topez de Collantes (C-3), Soroá (B-2).

Icteridae:

Greater Antillean Grackle *Quiscalus niger* (Cassin): Common at all localities. A breeding colony was found in Soroá in a group of unidentified angiosperm trees (B-2, C-3, C-5, C-7, C-8, C-9, D-13). Nests were placed in tufts of epiphytes, approximately 7-15 m above ground.

Cuban Oriole *Icterus dominicensis* (Linnaeus): Laguna del Tesoro, Playa Larga, Habana-Bacuranao, Soroá.

Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula* (Linnaeus): Playa Larga.

Meadowlark *Sturnella magna* (Linnaeus): Playa Larga.

Fringillidae:

Yellow-faced Grassquit *Tiaris olivacea* (Linnaeus): Playa Larga, Vinales, Soroá, Jibacoa. Singing males were observed in Vinales on 1 April 1989 (B-2).

Cuban Grassquit *Tiaris canora* (Gmelin): Boquerón.

Cuban Bullfinch *Melopyrrha nigra* (Linnaeus): Playa Larga. Topez de Collantes, Boquerón, Soroá.

Ploceidae:

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (Linnaeus): Common in most human settlements visited. In 1989, signs of breeding activity (B-2 to D-13) were observed at all localities.

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