

Contributions to the Avifauna of the Bay Islands of Honduras, Central America

Miklos D. F. Udvardy (*)

ABSTRACT

Between 24 June and 4 July 1971, 23 species of birds were observed and six of these (*Sula leucogaster*, *Ardea herodias*, *Sterna dougallii*, *Sterna fuscata*, *Sterna albifrons*, *Anous stolidus*) were new for the Bay Islands of Honduras. Several new Island records and rediscovery of nesting *Dendroica petechea erithacorides* are discussed.

The islands of the Caribbean coast of Central America are still seldom visited. Following a collecting trip in 1936, Bond reported extensively on the resident birds of these islands. Six subsequent visits by ornithological collectors were summarized by the latest of them, Monroe (1968). Up to and including Monroe's through study, 106 species have been recorded from the islands. Of these, 66 are definitely transient or wintering visitants. However, the number of nesters for each island is uncertain because breeding seasons are extended and most observers had but brief visits (often during the wrong season for nesting observations). My visit there (28 June-4 July 1971) was likewise short, and my observations were scattered among the several islands and cays. I observed 23 species and only four were definitely breeding at this time. Two tern species observed were not previously known to nest in Honduras (Udvardy, de Beaussef, and Ruby, 1973). The paucity of data warrants a detailed list of these few observations.

I flew to Utila on 28 June 1971, proceeded to the Utila Cays, then stayed on Sandy Cay until 1 July. I then boarded

(*) Department of Biology, National Autonomous University of Honduras.

a ship at Utila harbor and early on 2 July proceeded to Anthony's Cay on Roatán — keeping a watch, in vain, for seabirds in the channel between Utila and Roatán. From Anthony's Cay to Coxen Hole (a village on Roatán, with harbor and air strip), the only birds at sea were five Brown Pelicans and five Frigate Birds. In the afternoon of 2 July I flew from Coxen Hole to Guanaja and on 3 July visited three cays in the town's vicinity: Henry, George's, and North East Cay. I also landed on the island of Guanaja for brief visits at two locations. I left the islands early 4 July by air.

Ecological notes about the cays.

The cays ("key" is the North American, "cay" the Caribbean English spelling) consist here of an archipelago of low coral islands with encircling coral reef, the water being shallow between the cays. Among the Utila cays, Sandy Cay is covered with a grove of mature coconut palms. The only ground vegetation at the time of my visit consisted of leaves of a liliaceous plant. This grew widely scattered and to about 40 cm high but no fully grown and flowering specimen was seen. The leeward shores of this, and the other cays, are sandy. The windward shore is covered with coral rubble. On Sandy Cay this rubble juts out to form a promontory, which on the protected side is sandy, and houses the ternery. Rugged Cay and Southwest Cay are covered with dense underbrush and coconut grove. The former has a small sandy point, not large enough for a ternery, though I saw Least Terns resting there.

Anthony's Cay is the name of a small Carib village on the mainland of Roatán Island, thus not a cay.

The Guanaja Cays are guarded by a shallow coral reef on the windward side, followed by a beach crest up to 2 m. high composed of coral pieces and rubble. The sickle-shaped beach crest is partly overgrown with a low shrub reminiscent of the *Messerschmidia* shrubbery of Pacific atolls which are used by frigate birds for nest sites. But the nesting season had been month past, and no sign of nests was detected. The cay is mostly covered with coconut grove, with a scattering of other, lower trees, shrubs, and some openings with tall, dense stands of a lily (apparently the same species seen on the Utila Cays where it was less thriving). The leeward side is girdled by mangrove, and shallow, white, coral-sand beaches with green, eutrophic water and in places treacherously soft mud. All cays are perforated by rabbit-sized holes. According to my boatsman, these are made and inhabited by crabs.

FAUNA LIST

Abbreviations: * = New species for an island; ** = New species for the Bay Islands; Number and IFFH: My field number of a specimen collected and deposited in the collections of the Investigación de Flora y Fauna de Honduras of the Dept. of Biology, National University of Honduras, Tegucigalpa. Capital letters in parentheses denote the source of the Spanish vernacular names of birds; E = El Salvador; G = Guatemala; M = México; P = Panama; S = Spain. There is no literature source known to me which would have Honduran = Spain. There is no literature source known to me which would have Honduran Spanish vernaculars; those used here have been learned while working in Honduras (Udvardy, MS.).

**Pelecanus occidentalis*, Brown Pelican, Alcatraz pardo (P). 28 June: two adults in Utila harbor; 29 June: Southwest Cay of Utila, 9 adults. 2 July: 3 ad. and 2 juv. off *Roatán between Anthony's and Coxen Hole. 3 July: *Guanaja: Henry Cay; 2 ad., George's Cay: 2 ad., Northeast Cay; 4 ad. and 6 juv. taking off and circling overhead excitedly. Nothing is documented about its Honduran nesting, but Richard P. Ruby, then of Tegucigalpa (in litt., 1971) told of having visited, in 1970, a large colony between Puerto Cortés and Tela in a coconut grove where hundreds of birds were seen on the palm crowns: Actual nests were not sighted from below.

***Sula leucogaster*, Brown Booby, Piquero moreno (P). 29 June, Utila, Southwest Cay: 6 ad., 10 juv. 3 July, Guanaja, North East Cay: 4 ad., 7 juv.

**Fregata magnificens*, Great Frigatebird, Tijereta de mar (H). 28 June, *Utila at harbor: 2 o, 1 o; 29 June, Southwest Cay: 2 o, 1 o; 2 July, Utila harbor, a few; Roatán, Anthony's Cay: 5; 3 July, Guanaja, North East Cay: 3-4, Guanaja City: 3-4.

***Ardea herodias*, Great Blue Heron, Garzón cenizo (P. M.). 3 July, Guanaja: Henry Cay: 1 juv.

Butorides virescens, Green Heron, Garcita verde (G). 3 July, Guanaja, Henry Cay: 2; George's Cay: 3; North East Cay: a couple, of which a ♂ collected (038 IFFH).

Florida caerulea, Little Blue Heron, Garceta azul (P.). 3 July, Guanaja, Henry Cay: 1 juv. in transitional (dark and white pied) plumage.

**Bubulcus ibis*, Cattle Egret, *Garcilla bueyera* (E). 29 June, Utila Cays: one flying; 1 July, *Roatán: one on west coast, on cattle.

Nyctanassa violacea, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, *Garza nocturna corona amarilla* (G). 3 July, Guanaja, North East Cay: one specimen collected in transitional, semi-adult plumage (039 IFFH).

Cathartes aura, Turkey Vulture, *Viuda* (G). 1 July, one at Utila harbor; 2 July, Roatán, Anthony's Cay: 6-8 in the air over the village and fields.

***Sterna dougallii*, Roseate Tern, Charrán rosado (S). Has been found nesting on Sandy Cay at Utila, 29 June to 1 July, as discussed in Udvardy et al. (1973). At least 10 pairs had eggs or hatchlings. (Specimen 034 in U. S. NAT. MUS.).

***Sterna fuscata*, Sooty Tern, Charrán sombrío (S). One mummified specimen (036 IFFH) collected on Southwest Cay, Utila (Udvardy et al., 1973).

***Sterna albifrons*, Least Tern, Charrancito (G. P.) at least 27 pairs nested and Sandy Cay of Utila, cf. Udvardy et al., (1937). (Specimen 035 in IFFH).

***Anous stolidus*, Noddy Tern, Charrán pardelo (G), was seen at Sandy Cay of Utila, 28 June (Udvardy et al., 1973).

**Thalasseus maximus*, Royal Tern, Charra real (G). 28 June, Utila Cays; 3 July, between George's and Henry Cays, *Guanaja (Cf. Udvardy et al., 1973).

Columba leucocephala, White-crowned Pigeon, *Paloma cabeceiblanca* (P.) Cooing ♂♂ in nuptial flight, or pairs, were noted on every cay visited: 29 June Southwest, Rugged, and Sandy Cays of Utila; 3 July, South East, George's, and Henry Cays of Guanaja.

Amazona ochrocephala, Yellow-headed Parrot, *Loro cabeceiamarillo* (G.) 4 July, a not-yet-fledged but fully grown nestling was carried to the airfield of Guanaja by a North American tourist, who claimed that he purchased it on Guanaja as a locally caught bird.

Anthracothorax prevostii, Green-beasted Mango, *Mango pechiverde* (G). 29 June, Sandy Cay of Utila. At least two pairs were seen on the cay, but only high among the fronds of coconut palms. Mangos were also seen flying to and from Southwest Cay from Sandy Cay. 1 July, Utila harbor, in the village. 2 July, Anthony's Cay of Roatán. 3 July, on all three cays that were visited at Guanaja. One ♂ collected at Henry

Cay could not be saved for the collection. In contrast to the canopy-stratum habitat of the Sandy Cay Birds, on the Guanaja cays with rich and occasional dense undergrowth this species occurred from ground level to the palm tops.

Centurus aurifrons, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Cheje común (H). 1 July, Utila village. 2 July, Roatán, Anthony's Cay. Subspecies not determined.

Myiarchus tyrannulus, Tropical Flycatcher. Mosquero co-petón (G.). 2 July, on the main island of Guanaja.

**Vireo pallens*, Mangrove Vireo, *Vireo manglero* (G.) Singing, territorial ♂♂ as well as non-territorial, more grayish individuals (♀ or juvenile?) seen and heard on Henry Cay and Northeast Cay of *Guanaja, 3 July. This vireo, as well as adult Mangrove Warblers, fed from the water of a wood-encircled lagoon. They stood in an upright stance, expectantly watching, on a mat of algae on the water surface. Upon sighting their prey on it they pounced upon, seized and swallowed it on the spot.

Vireo magister, Yucatán Vireo, *Vireo yucateco* (M). 3 July, Main island of Guanaja at each of two locations, territorial singing males were heard and identified.

Dendroica petechea erithacorides. Mangrove Warbler, *Chipe manglero* (G). 3 July on Henry Cay and North East Cay but not on George's Cay of Guanaja. Adult ♂♂ and ♀♀ and newly-fledged young seen on two cays corroborates Gaumer's report from the last century from Guanaja (Salvin 1888) and invalidates Bond's (1936) doubt. Bond has not found it on Guanaja and therefore doubted the correctness of Gaumer's record. The Mangrove Warbler was present on two, but absent from the third cay, which all were thoroughly investigated and small enough that these lively, vocalizing birds would not likely escape my attention (My party consisted of four persons and we crisscrossed each of these cays). This fact speaks for the possibility that Bond might have looked at cays where the bird was not present at the time of his visits (juv. o? No. 037 IPFH).

Cassidix mexicanus, Great-tailed Grackle, Zanate (H). Utila village: 28 June, 1 July; Sandy Cay: 29 June, pair feeding fledgling. Rugged Cay: 29 June. Roatán: 2 July, Anthony's Cay: several feeding in tidal zone; Coxen Hole, 2 July, in village. Guanaja: 3 July, in the town of Guanaja but not observed on the three cays visited.

SUMMARY

Between 28 June and 4 July 1971, 23 species of birds were observed and six of these were new for the Bay Islands of Honduras. Five more of these species were recorded from islands where their occurrence has not previously been observed. The occurrence and likely breeding of the Mangrove Warbler was authenticated by observation of young and by taking of a documentary specimen. This bird has not been observed in this area since the 1880s.

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