

Notes on some Cuban birds

Ghislain Rompré, Yves Aubry and Arturo Kirkconnell

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Se presentan las observaciones de algunas especies de aves residentes de Cuba en la zona occidental y central de la isla, en Febrero de 1998. Sólo cubrimos las zonas boscosas para nuestro censo. En el presente trabajo, presentamos observaciones de interés sobre especies amenazadas (Gavilán Colilargo *Accipiter gundlachi*, Paloma Perdiz *Starnoenas cyanocephala*, Catey *Aratinga euops*, Carpintero Churroso *Colaptes fernandinae*, Fermina *Ferminia cervical* y Cabrerito de la Ciénaga *Torreornis inexpectata*) como nuevas observaciones o confirmación de las especies en áreas donde no había registros por bastante tiempo.

Introduction

Cuba is known for its interesting and rare bird fauna. The country possesses a variety of habitats, from swampy lowland forests and marshes to montane cloud forests. Various ornithologically important sites are relatively well known for their rare and threatened species, but it is unsurprising, given current levels of ornithological activity, that a number of new distributional data have been published recently^{2,3,5-8,12}.

Nevertheless, as demonstrated by Collar *et al.*¹, many Cuban threatened species are very locally distributed and rarely recorded, usually at a handful of locations. Here, we report observations of threatened¹ Cuban resident bird species made in February 1998. A complete report of our observations¹⁰ is available from the first author.

We surveyed the avifauna of montane cloud forests and a few lowland forest localities in western and central Cuba during 1–22 February 1998. We visited La Güira National Park and Soroa, including “El Mirador”, 8 km north of Candelaria (Pinar del Rio province); Sierra del Escambray, including

Topes de Collantes and Pico Potrerillo (Cienfuegos–Sancti Spiritus provinces); and Ciénaga de Zapata, including Playa Girón and an area close to the highway, west of Jagüey Grande (Matanzas province).

Gundlach’s Hawk *Accipiter gundlachi* (Vulnerable/Rare)

One on 12 February, nesting at Playa Girón, Ciénaga de Zapata. We first saw the bird fly from the nest area. It did not vocalise or respond to playback. The nest was c.15 m up in a deciduous tree, close to the trunk and below the canopy as described by Collar *et al.*¹ and Raffaele *et al.*⁹. Two empty nests were located nearby, suggesting the species has nested here for several years; Cooper’s Hawk *A. cooperi*, which appears to be closely related to *A. gundlachi*, typically builds a new nest each year in the same area¹¹. According to Collar *et al.*¹, the species was last known to breed in the Zapata region in 1985, when two nests were found. The habitat around the nest was dry-deciduous forest which was damaged by Hurricane Lili in 1996. Another individual was seen flying over mountain tops at c.350 m on the

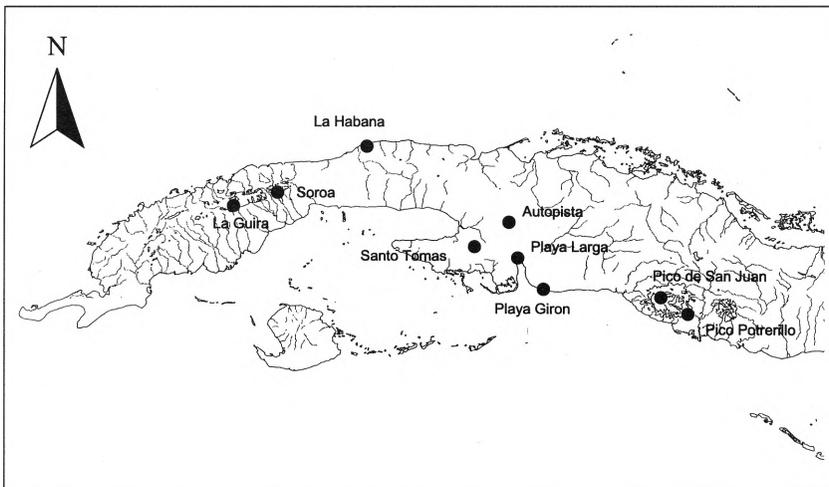


Fig. 1. Map showing the locations of survey sites in western and central Cuba.

road between Trinidad and Topes de Collantes (Sierra del Escambray), from where there have been a number of previous records^{1,3}.

Blue-headed Quail-dove *Starnoenas cyanocephala* (Indeterminate: possibly urgent)

Three birds were seen on the trail to El Mirador, Soroa, on 8 February. The species was last recorded in this area in October 1955, although it has been observed more recently in other parts of Pinar del Rio province¹. Another group of birds was encountered in dry deciduous lowland forest, on the trail perpendicular to the road leading to Playa Girón. The species has previously been reported in the Ciénaga de Zapata^{1,3,7,12}. One was heard on the roadside between Trinidad and Topes de Collantes, at c.400 m. The forest here is deciduous second-growth. The species has apparently not been recorded in Sierra de Escambray since 1892¹.

Cuban Parakeet *Aratinga euops* (Vulnerable)

A flock of six birds was c.3 km south of the highway, west of Jagüey Grande, on 12 February. They were calling and foraging in the subcanopy of wet deciduous forest surrounded by marshy and swampy areas. Another flock, of 2–4 individuals, was seen flying above the forest canopy on the south slope of Pico Potrerillo (Sierra del Escambray). The species has been observed in both areas previously¹.

Fernandina's Flicker *Colaptes fernandinae* (Indeterminate: possibly urgent)

One was heard, on 8 February, in second-growth montane forest in Soroa with a Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus chrysocaulosus*. A. Mitchell (in Collar *et al.*¹) observed the species in this region in 1987 and 1989. We saw a pair in dry deciduous forest in the Playa Girón area, Ciénaga de Zapata, on 10 February. The two birds responded aggressively to playback. We heard the species near Molina and Bermeja (12 km north of Playa Girón) in the same habitat and one was heard in moist forest close to the highway west of Jagüey Grande, on 12 February.



Fernandina's Flicker *Colaptes fernandinae* (J. Fjeldså)

Zapata Wren *Ferminiaervervai* (Vulnerable/Rare)

One was observed at the end of a trail leading to the highway, c.25 km north-east of Santo Tomás. It was in a marshy area with numerous shrubs and small deciduous trees, and surrounded by lowland moist forest and swampy areas. In response to playback, it flew from tree to tree until it came very close, appearing on the ground and moving from branch to branch singing in the tail-up position. The species is known from savanna-like terrain in the Santo Tomás area^{1,4}; however this record expands its known range^{1,8}.

Zapata Sparrow *Torreornis inexpectata inexpectata* (Vulnerable/Rare)

Five birds were found in the same location as the Zapata Wren. This site represents a 25 km range extension, to the north-east of Santo Tomás, for the species and confirms the expansion of the species' range described by Collar *et al.*¹.

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Ghislain Rompré

Department of Geography, McGill University, 805 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec H3A 2K6, Canada.

Yves Aubry

Canadian Wildlife Service, 1141, Route de l'Église, P.O. Box 10100, 8th floor, Sainte-Foy, Quebec G1V 4H5, Canada.

Arturo Kirkconnell

Museo Nacional de Historia Natural de Cuba, Obispo # 61, Habana Vieja 10100, Cuba.



Zapata Sparrow *Torreornis inexpectata* (Pedro Regalado Ruiz)