

## NOTES ON THREE CUBAN BIRDS.

BY THOMAS BARBOUR.

*(Plates II-IV.)*

ONE hears rumors from time to time, especially while collecting in Tropical America, concerning all sorts of creatures which one seeks but never finds. I still believe that the "Taquache" of the Trinidad Mountains may be, or may have recently been, a living *Nesophontes*. Running down another clue led to getting living specimens of *Capromys nana*, previously known only from fossil remains. Another chance, years ago, brought about my meeting with Fermin Z. Cervera.

He was, I have always understood, a soldier in the Spanish Civil Guard and by some mischance was not repatriated after the war. Cervera, although a somewhat peculiar person in several respects, was nevertheless a born naturalist, keenly interested in entomology and indeed in everything pertaining to the animal life of Cuba. We made many trips together and Cervera did much collecting at other times. He became a skillful preparator and a keen observer.

I had been into the Zapata Swamp from the northeast several times with W. S. Brooks and with him had also spent some time near the upper end of the Ensenada de Cochinos, whence the swamp is quite readily accessible. Finally Cervera decided to reach the same general region via the Hatiguanico River and since the only means of communication available was the aid of the charcoal burners, for Cervera was no camper, he finally landed at Santo Tomás. Santo Tomás is the name for an early settlement, now abandoned, but it nevertheless persists as the designation for a charcoal producing region. It may be reached by finding a launch of sorts at Batabanó and then running about ten hours to reach the mouth of the Rio Gonzalo, as it is usually called on the maps or Rio Hatiguanico as it is generally known to the people. Proceeding up the river some three or four leagues one meets a ditch running, roughly, S. S. E. and extending about three leagues farther where one reaches a short, narrow gauge railroad on which, by means of light trucks, charcoal and hard wood railway ties are



CERVERA'S WREN, FERMINIA CERVERAI BARBOUR

gotten out when the state of the water permits of transportation through the ditch.

I have described the general character of the Zapata Swamp in 'The Birds of Cuba' (Mem. Nuttall Ornith. Club, 6, 1923). It is a tangled mass of aquatic plants and sawgrass, oft times afloat but in dry seasons resting on the hard pan which underlies the whole area. Throughout the Swamp there are scattered *cayos*, small areas of firm land bearing palms and hard wood trees. On some of these unmolested by the introduced rats, the little *Capromys* still occurs and it was while visiting *cayos* near the Cochinos Bay area that I first heard rumors which led to the belief that there were birds hitherto unknown still to be found in the Zapata Swamp region.

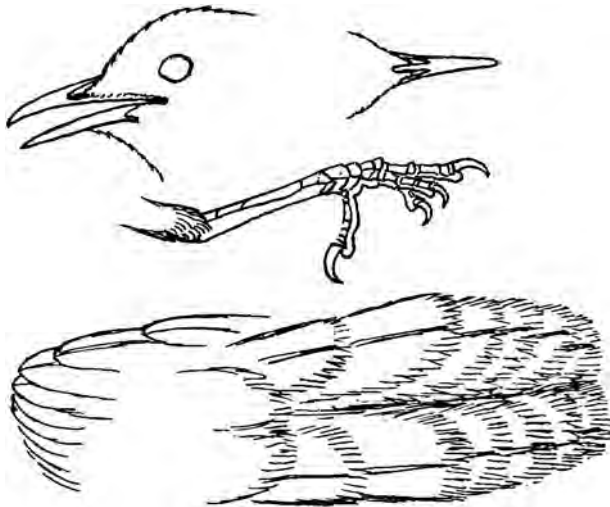


Fig. 1. *Ferminia cerverae* (nat. size).

Finally during the autumn of 1926 Cervera made his first trip to Santo Tomás. Here the peculiar Wren which I called *Ferminia cerverae* (Fig. 1) turned up in a region of low but firm terrain, of scattered bushes, mostly *Myrica*, low scattered trees mingled with patches of sawgrass and rushes, the whole matted thickly together with creepers and vines.

This bird, like the others described in a subsequent paper, really seems to have no very near ally. Its details are well shown by Major Allan Brooks's excellent figures. It recalls to some extent Bewick's Wren and Dr. Chapman has called my attention to the peculiar, but I believe fortuitous, similarity in pattern to be seen in *Troglodytes tessellatus* of the coastal plain of southern Peru. The males apparently are easy to collect for they have a loud and pleasing song which Cervera said at once recalled the Goldfinch (*Carduelis*) of his native Spain. I at first believed this Wren to be quite flightless, but I am now told that it has a weak, fluttering flight though in general it lives in the beds of sawgrass and rushes and has, of course, no occasion to make protracted journeys. Of the nests and eggs unfortunately we as yet know nothing whatever.

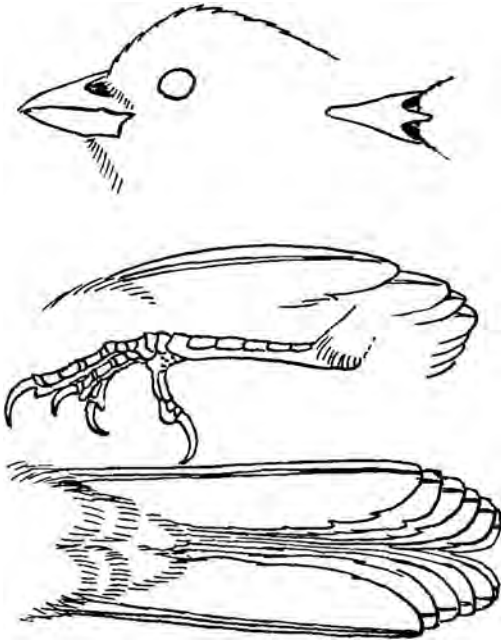
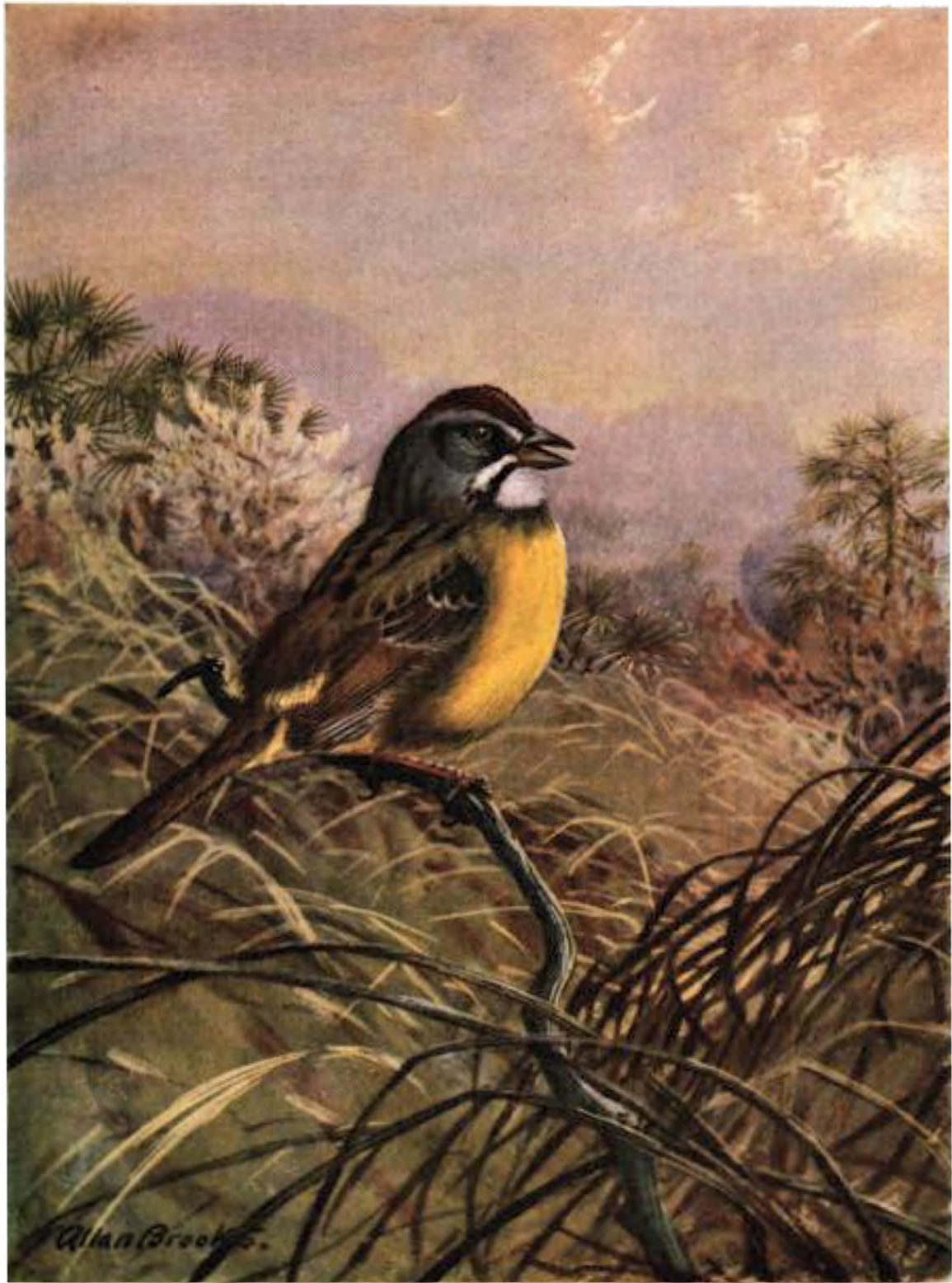


Fig. 2. *Torreornis inexpectata* (nat. size).

Shortly after the trip on which *Ferminia* was discovered, occurred the frightful hurricane of October 24, 1926, when the town of



THE ZAPATA FINCH, *TORREORNIS INEXPECTATA* BARBOUR AND PETERS

Batabanó and its shipping was almost completely annihilated. I went to Cuba in early February and met Cervera but even then transportation was unobtainable to the river and it was not until the spring that Cervera was able to get back to Santo Tomás. He then made several trips of varying duration, finding *Ferminia* again and collecting in addition the extraordinary Finch (*Torreornis inexpectata*) (Fig. 2) and the still more remarkable and apparently quite flightless Rail (*Cyanolimnas cerverai*) (Fig. 3) which have been

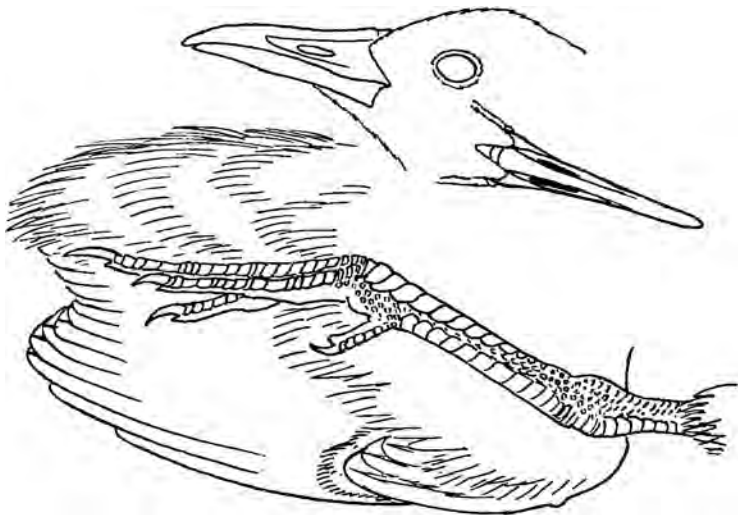


Fig. 3. *Cyanolimnas cerverai* ( $\frac{4}{5}$  nat. size).

described elsewhere. The Finch is perhaps the most peculiar bird of the three in that while recalling through one character or another several Neotropical genera it stands quite by itself with no obvious allies and when all is said and done it is hard to say much more concerning the Rail. Here again Major Brooks's excellent figures tell more than long pages of description.

I feel quite sure that probably all three of these birds have a slightly wider distribution than these notes would indicate and there may be, and probably are, small colonies on other bits of firm land in the Zapata area. A large part of the region is still unknown zoologically and even along the southern coast of the

peninsula composed largely of salt pans and bare marly wastes with outcrops of dog-tooth limestone there may perhaps be other localities with environmental conditions similar to those at Santo Tomás.

There is no reason to suppose that such conditions have been much more widely spread in Cuba during recent geologic times, with the possible exception that conditions similar to those found today may have extended over the large submerged area now represented by the shallow banks, with scattered mangrove keys, extending towards the Isle of Pines and perhaps eastward along the southern Cuban coast. I do not believe that these birds are relics in the sense that they once ranged widely over Cuba, as did, for instance, *Capromys nana* and the Zapata crocodile (*Crocodylus rhombifer*). Of these animals fossil remains are abundant but the three birds are surely so highly modified for just the conditions which exist where they now occur that broad distribution seems most improbable. Altogether it seems fair to say that they have proved a pleasant and most unexpected climax to the delightful series of journeys which I have made in Cuba during the last twenty years.

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THE ZAPATA RAIL, *CYANOLIMNAS CERVERAI* BARBOUR AND PETERS