



**BIRDS
OF
BRITISH
HONDURAS**

BY

R. P. DEVAS, O.P., M.C.

BIRDS OF BRITISH HONDURAS

NOTES ON SOME OF THE BIRDS
RESIDENT IN THAT PART OF CENTRAL AMERICA

BY

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By the same Author

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FOREWORD.

The birds of British Honduras include many of the birds you may meet again in other parts of Central America. Among them, quite apart from the migrants, will be noticed some that are to be found north of Mexico, and others that are to be seen also south of the Panama Canal. And East? Yes, I am happy to say, British Honduras has a number of birds in common with the West Indies, though some of them, as we shall see, show considerable differences in habits and song and even appearance.

My sojourn in British Honduras was limited to six weeks, covering June and the first half of July. One advantage of such a visit, precisely at that time of year, was this: allowing perhaps for isolated exceptions, all the birds seen may be accepted *as residents*. The migrants going north should all have passed through, and those that had been spending time there, taken their departure, in April and May; while the earliest of the migrants due to come south for the so-called winter, are not to be expected before the end of July, if then. So, as I say, except for some accidental, even

if annual, visitors, which are neither residents nor migrants, all the birds observed, and their presence here recorded, properly belong.

Instead of entitling this booklet as I have done, I had thought of calling it *First Book of Birds, British Honduras*. And the word *first* would rightly have been interpreted as meaning elementary. For the book, as the reader will soon observe, is only a beginning in the study of the birds of this area. No other person as far as I am aware has ever attempted this kind of thing before. Has any book, I wonder, ever been compiled even about the birds of Central America as a whole? I should have been the first to devour such a book had I discovered it. Therefore the present booklet must not be taken for more than it pretends to be. It is a first attempt, made with little or no solid foundation to build upon. The List of Birds in the British Honduras *Handbook* for 1925, and the names of birds in the Ordinance for the Protection of the same, dated 1944, were both of some help; but neither, as those who are familiar with them will admit, takes one very far. The heaviest call therefore had to be made upon one's personal observation. This was only made possible by the kindness of the Fathers of the

Society of Jesus in British Honduras, who not only put me up and put up with me, but also facilitated in every way my getting about and seeing as much of the area as was possible. The wet season began almost as soon as I arrived, so that I did not attempt to tackle the Coxcomb Mountains. No doubt that was providential, because I am now rather too old for what I understand involves a certain amount of precipitous climbing; but on the other hand I have been at great pains to learn what are the birds to be expected in that lovely district.

Some of those who are, or who, let us hope, become interested in what, believe me, is a most interesting subject, will, I trust, continue the good work, if I may presume to call it such. How lucky are the people who have learnt to enjoy birds. The search for species that are new to them can become an absorbing pastime. Watching birds for a while, even just *noticing* these wonders of God's creation, will be found to have a refreshing effect upon the mind so often harassed by the cares of life! I look forward to the time when a second book of birds will appear, including at least photographic illustrations—a book which will correct

the errors, and fill up the gaps, occurring in this first effort to get to know the Birds of British Honduras.

As for the migrants, which people in the Colony told me come down by the hundreds in the Fall, identification should not be very difficult. Quite a number of books are on the market which deal with American birds, including the birds which migrate to or through this region. These books are copiously illustrated and include a large number of coloured plates, so that birds can be recognised not only by the verbal description of their appearance and habits, but even by their very colours. I refer especially to:—

Birds of America: Editor-in-Chief T. Gilbert Pearson — Garden City, Publishing Company Inc. Garden City, New York, 1944.

The Book of Birds. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.

Audubon's **Birds of North America.** Ed. R. H. Pough, and illustrated by Don Eckelberry, 1946.

R. P. D.
Sauteurs, Grenada, B.W.I.
1953.

THE SEA BIRDS.

The bird life over the sea around British Honduras is not very conspicuous. All the more reason for observing *and preserving* what there is.

There is no need to describe the BROWN PELICAN with its slow flight, huge bill and clumsy diving. Some of the birds appeared to me to be black, rather than brown, by comparison with those in the West Indies. The Pelican breeds in this latitude, so there is no reason why it should not nest on one or other of your many cays. This very large bird is a model of good behaviour: I have yet to meet the man who with his own eyes has seen Pelicans fighting.

The FRIGATE BIRD again you cannot mistake, with its very large wings, the height to which it flies, its bullying instinct to rob other birds of their catch, and finally the fact that to the ordinary observer it never seems to come to rest. But they do come to rest on the trees or among the strong shrubs on some of your cays, where also they breed. The female has a white breast, the young have white heads as well, while the male is all black with the

exception of its scarlet pouch. That pouch, however, is seldom on show. It has to be inflated before it can be seen, and this more generally occurs when the bird is at rest, and especially during the mating season. When there are no trees available these birds will alight upon rocks, preferably crags, for from any flat ground they would be unable to take off, their wings being so long. It is perhaps a rare but not an unknown sight for a dozen of the male birds to be seen sitting side by side on the bare branch of a tree jutting out over the sea. This would be at the beginning of the breeding season when their great airfilled scarlet pouches would be very much in evidence. Then, when a female approaches, these males will set up a loud if not rude chorus of "wow-wow-wow-wow-wow-wow," clattering their beaks at the same time. Doubtless, that is their way of asking the lady to make her choice, and make it quickly. ⁽¹⁾

We shall hear more of the Frigate Birds when the Boobies are under consideration. Actually, you may notice that you more often see the females than the males; but both sexes

(1) See the **Standard Natural History**, Ed. W. P. Pycreft,
London, p. 605.

are as badly behaved as each other, and, as a great writer has said, should really be called *Buccaneer Birds* or *Pirates*.⁽²⁾

Little need be said about the six Terns which belong to British Honduras, three of them merely as possible migrants. The ROYAL or LARGE TERN you can see as a rule at any time, not often in any large numbers, but singly or in pairs. They appear to be pure white, and generally speaking they are so, with conspicuous yellow beaks and a black horizontal crest on top of their heads. They dive for fish, and do so quite becomingly: they take their rest upon any solid thing that is on, or but little above, the level of the sea, be it a buoy or a wooden stake or an island rock.

The SOOTY TERN I saw, but it is rare. Brown or sooty black above, its underparts are white, beautifully white. No white on its hindneck, and a black mark in front of its eye (but not behind the eye) distinguishes it from the Bridled Tern, which, however, is not recorded for this area. Sooty Terns are to be

(2) Frank T. Bullen in *The Cruise of the Cachetot*.

espied well out to sea rather than near land, unless you are lucky enough to find the island or cay where they rest and roost.

The NODDY TERN you may see under the same conditions. They are black or very dark mouse-colour, with a white forehead. In the West Indies they are very common in large colonies, but in your waters they seem almost solitary. They do not dive for their food, but with their beaks pick it out from just below the surface of the sea.

The graceful ROSEATE TERN is a rare migrant in these waters, so on both counts, migrancy and rarity, I refrain from describing it. The same applies to CABOT'S TERN as well as to the little LEAST TERN, the latter indeed being so rare as to be classed as negligible.

The LAUGHING GULL, elsewhere common, seems rare with you, even in the month of June. It has a black head, grey wings, white body and tail. The young bird has a white head, brown body and wings, and a black tip to its tail. In company, the mature birds enjoy a really hearty laugh, but not naturally when they are alone. They fish in the same way as the Noddy Terns.

The beautiful YELLOW-BILLED TROPIC BIRD is not unknown in these waters, but all the same is exceedingly rare.⁽¹⁾ In the distance it looks like a pure white bird, but closer examination reveals that it has black "shoulders," with black at the extremity of its wings. It has a yellow bill indeed, but the part of its anatomy it may well be more proud of, is its tail. Two white quills, a foot in length, grow out from the two central feathers of its tail, giving the bird a most attractive appearance, without in any way impeding its graceful movements, even when diving into the sea for fish.

Now we have to deal with the Boobies. All four toes of Boobies, like those of Pelicans, are connected with webs, a point which may not send a thrill through your veins or mine, but which is apparently of some interest to scientists.

Of the three kinds or species of Boobies, you have two; but for the sake of possible readers in the West Indies, where the third kind is found, I am going to say a word about it, and actually put it first.

(1) Pearson. **Birds of America.**

The BLUE-FACED GANNET, also called in some places the WHISTLING BOOBY—*Sula dactylatra*—is the largest of the three, possibly by as much as six inches, which should be enough to be noticeable. It is quite the rarest of the three, and in flight, apart from its size, has only one mark to distinguish it from the mature Red-footed Booby. Both appear to be white birds: both actually have black extremities on their wings: but the Blue-faced has black also at the end of its tail. If you saw the bird at home, of course, you would notice that it makes its nest on the ground and not, like the Red-footed, in trees, and that its feet and legs are dull yellowish-brown. Do not look for much blue in the face: there is as much blue, in my opinion, on the face of the Red-footed (with a little pink in it as well!), and both have much the same kind and colour of bill. Its size, therefore, its black-tipped tail and its dull-coloured legs and feet, remain the three distinguishing marks of the Blue-faced Gannet.

The BROWN BOOBY—*Sula leucogaster*—you have around British Honduras, though not in very large numbers. Whatever colour they are when they come out of the egg, when they leave the nest they begin by being entirely

brown birds. Only gradually do they develop the practically *black* breast and pure white underparts, the dividing line between black and white being clear-cut and straight: the rest of their plumage remains brown. The bills of the mature birds are a dirty yellow, as also are their legs. Like the Blue-faced, these boobies build their nests among rocks on the ground. The flight of the Brown Boobies is worthy of note: they fly a few strokes at a time, and then plane. They dive for their food, and are ready to dive deep; they will sometimes remain for quite a while in the water, and can paddle about like ducks.

The RED FOOTED BOOBY—*Sula sula*—may be described as the *crème de la crème*, the very pick, of the Boobies, and certainly there is a deal of interest attached to it. For ornithologists as well as for other people, one of the attractions of British Honduras is that you have a large colony of these birds on Half Moon Cay, some fifty miles east of Belize. In isolated pairs or in small colonies Red-footed Boobies are known to exist among the Grenadine Islands, such as Battowia and La Tante, as well as on the Giles' Rocks off Tobago, all in the West Indies. But though of the same species these birds do not all

develop, as to their plumage, in the same way. So much so, that one writer says of them that they are "famous for their little understood colour phases."⁽¹⁾ Once and for all then, and for all time, be it known that the majority of the Red-footed Boobies *of the West Indies*, in whatever colour they may be hatched out, very soon become completely brown, and consequently almost impossible to distinguish from the young Brown Booby. Then, they often, *but not always*, develop a white tail and rump. In that condition they remain for a very long time, if not indefinitely, breeding like that, and never developing into the white bird you know at Half Moon Cay. There are many such in the West Indies, and they can easily be identified. But when it comes to those which do *not* develop even a white tail and rump, remaining brown all over, then indeed, as I have already said, is it difficult to distinguish these from young Brown Boobies. Mature boobies are not noticeably larger than the immature, flying about, as they all do, together; so we can get no help in that direction. Presumably, of course, the all-brown Red-footed Booby *has* red feet and legs; but neither legs nor even feet will be visible in

(1) **Book of Birds:** National Geographic Society.

flight, and it is rather a lot to expect us to make a practice of visiting the remote islets where these birds will *lower their legs* in order to land, and allow us to have a look at them.

Happily, you in British Honduras are not faced with this difficulty of one lot of Red-footed Boobies which it is practically impossible to distinguish from young Brown Boobies, because your birds stand in a class apart, and a very distinguished class at that. Here is the whole story, which I travelled nearly 2,000 miles to unravel and write up. In Half Moon Cay the young Red-footed Boobies are hatched out white, with black beaks and light-coloured feet, developing a little later into having black wings and tail, the black in both cases soon turning to brown, their legs and feet now becoming yellowish, but the beak remaining black. When feathers finally replace the whole of the white down of the body and head, the entire bird becomes uniformly brown. In other words, they here reach a stage in their development in common with their relatives in the West Indies. The similarity, however, does not last long, for none of the British Honduras birds develops the white tail and rump. On the contrary, as the bird matures it becomes mottled black and

white, developing quickly into the fine white bird with black extremities to its wings with which you are familiar. Its bill from black has become bluish or bone-colour, and its legs and feet, from yellow or orange, to flaming vermilion.

The plumage of the birds having now been established, we must continue the story with some account of their habits and behaviour. Half Moon Cay, so named doubtless because both bays facing respectively, roughly speaking, east and west, are at least quarter-moon-shaped, itself resembles a square-ended club. The square end is the resting and nesting place of the Red-footed Boobies: at the other end there is a lighthouse, as well as the dwelling houses pertaining thereto. Incidentally, the rays from another lighthouse to the north are visible at night; but apart from Long Cay (where, as I observed, Frigate Birds rest and possibly nest) and little Hat Cay, no other land, if I remember rightly, is to be seen.

The name booby is said to come from the Spanish word *bobo*, meaning a dunce. And, alas that I should have to say it, one cannot label these birds as just tame or unsuspicious, for they are definitely stupid, and do not even

seem to have the instinct that all other birds possess of looking after their eggs and defending their young. In spite of their numbers, they seem unable to put up any kind of a fight against the Frigate Bird, whereas other sea birds, smaller than they, are quite prepared to do so. On Bird Island, 150 miles SW. of Montserrat in the West Indies, and on Sodaldo Rock SW. of Trinidad, Sooty Terns and the common Noddy Terns live together, and both of them breed in these remote spots. Well, if any Frigate Bird dares to fly too near to their nests, these spirited birds will be up in arms at once, and drive off the would-be intruder. Not so the poor Booby. The parent bird will allow you to climb the tree and lift off the squalling youngster from the nest, without any kind of protest; and its entire lack of spirit in face of the intrusion of enemy birds is even more pathetic. Listen to this, written of the birds on the Giles' Rock off Tobago:

“In climbing this other tree (in pursuit of some Frigate Birds) I disturbed a white booby from its nest, and a soaring Frigate Bird checked in its flight and came down to snatch the egg while I was there. This was constantly happening for the boobies nested among the frigates. The most

flagrant example that I saw was a frigate bird that leaned over from its own nest and calmly picked the egg from beneath the breast of an immature white booby which was incubating on a nest two feet below. The booby never looked at the frigate bird, though their heads at one time must have been but inches apart, and did not seem in any way incommodated by the loss of its egg.....and I thought, not for nothing were you called booby.”⁽¹⁾

Nevertheless, on Half Moon Cay one's sympathy could not but go to the spiritless Booby. There were still some fledgelings on the nests when I was there, only one, of course, on each nest, and these still had to be fed. In the evening especially, you could spot the parent birds hurrying home, flying at a tremendous height, their beaks full of fish. And there below them, hardly perhaps in serried ranks but at all events in sufficient numbers, were the Frigate Birds, a row of them, almost motionless in the wind, waiting to give battle. As soon as the descent of the Boobies became evident, the Frigates would

(1) Leslie Brown. *Birds and I*, London. Michael Joseph, Ltd., 1947, p. 100.

rise up in pursuit, in their, alas, so often successful attempts to force the Booby to disgorge, in other words to hand over to these lazy bullies the meal they had prepared and were carrying back to their young. In a number of cases the Booby is caught and meekly surrenders, dropping the fish, which the Frigate with surprising dexterity picks up in mid-air: but in other cases, of course, she must succeed in running the gauntlet and getting through with the goods, because the colony of Boobies happily is still quite large. The question remains, however, as to whether anything should be done about the matter. Red-footed Boobies are a rarity and should surely be protected not only from man but also from beast. A fellow with a gun could have some fun if, living on, or even visiting this cay, he was authorised to shoot any Frigate Birds found trespassing there. Whether this would have a lasting effect would remain to be seen. The destructive marauders do not nest on Half Moon Cay, but they have their camp at no very great distance, and might think of sending reinforcements to the scene of action. But many of these might also be shot down, so that I think the

experiment worth trying. Such action would give a chance to this colony of rare birds to increase in numbers, and to find homes in other cays nearer the mainland, there to entertain more people by their queer ways, lovely white plumage and red legs.

NOTE—Few scientific names are given in this book, and only then (with the exception of the boobies above) for the fairly obvious reason that the bird in question was new to the writer, a bird, moreover, for which he could find an authentic scientific name.

Scientific names of course could have been given for all the birds which British Honduras has in common with the West Indies. These however can be found in the author's book on the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago. But would they all have been authentic, not needing, possibly as sub-species, further qualification?

Birds of the Land

HUMMINGBIRDS

In Trinidad and Tobago there are about eighteen different kinds of hummingbirds. So the claim I remember someone making that there are sixteen separate species of hummingbirds in British Honduras does not seem unreasonable. Some of them, of course, as in Trinidad, may be very rare. I cannot be positive, but I think I saw about nine different kinds. Hummingbirds, always difficult to observe, except when you are lucky to get sight of them at rest upon some twig, seemed to me in British Honduras to be definitely scarce. None of them, moreover, as far as I could perceive, corresponded exactly to any that I knew elsewhere. This may not be surprising; but it necessitated my conferring on the birds I saw names of my own. As some of these names are known and used elsewhere, I have taken the precaution to use the prefix B.H., standing, of course, for British Honduras.

Nor must I forget to remind you that with hummingbirds, as with many other birds, there

may be an astonishing difference between the male and the female. Some of the birds mentioned below I saw but once: it may have been the female I was looking at, and in that case you may have the thrill of discovering the more brightly coloured male.

1. **B.H. Common Emerald**—(size about 5 inches)—the green hummingbird anyone may see anywhere.

2. **B.H. Green-Breasted**—(5") which resembles the Common, but which has a quite exceptionally brilliant green breast, so that you would exclaim—"Just look at its breast!"

3. **Small White-Breasted**—(3½") which I saw in the woods at San Narcisso near Corozal. Whatever the colour of its back, it was the straight bill and white breast that struck me.

4. **Black-Eyed Hummingbird**—(3½") another little bird with its upper back green, its lower back (with wings closed) purple, and its tail purple. There was a black line through the eye and a white line above it, and its bill was straight.

5. **Large White-Breasted**—(4½"-5") has a green head, purple back and tail, white breast and straight bill.

6. **Green-Headed**—(5") has a green head but no white breast; its back and tail are purple, but its bill is slightly curved.

7. **Small Brown Hummingbird**—(3½") is the small all-brown hummingbird which I saw in the woods beyond Middlesex at the top of the Stann Creek Valley.

8. **Stripe-Breasted Hummingbird**—(5"—6") which is a larger bird, I saw at San Narcisso, with greenish-brown back, and black and brown and white on its breast, and with a long curved bill.

9. **B.H. Jacobin**—(6") which resembles, but not exactly, the West Indian Jacobin. The head of the male West Indian bird is blue, its back green, the two colours being separated by a patch of white. Its throat and chest are dark metallic blue, its abdomen and some feathers in the tail are white. I cannot say your B.H. bird was *quite* as bright as that.

SWIFTS

Swifts are not swallows, though they fly about like swallows, only a bit faster and in a more erratic manner. Unlike swallows, you will never see them at rest. If you ever did

see them at rest, be kind enough to inform the nearest "bird-man" you know at once; because, not only in British Honduras, but in all this part of the world, very little indeed is known about swifts, as to where they come from, or where they go, or as to where they nest.

The swifts that you may see can be recognised by the way in which they fly. The beat of their wings is very rapid, not unlike that of bats, for which beasts they are sometimes mistaken. There is some excuse for ordinary people mistaking swifts for bats, because, apart from their generally preferring the mountains and high lands, and apart also from their suddenly appearing from nowhere *after rain*, they are most commonly to be seen in the evening just before the bats themselves begin to come out, and even after they have come out. However, that is a good beginning, because if you mistake swifts for bats, you will not do so for long, and at all events you are not mistaking them for swallows which is a much more serious offence.

I observed two kinds of swifts resident in British Honduras. Both seemed to be entirely black or mouse-coloured. Neither had white or even grey rumps, nor any other sort of distinguishing mark.

1. **Little Swift**—($4\frac{1}{2}$ ") which is dark all over, with a slight curve on its very narrow wings. I saw some of these at El Cayo and on the Pine Ridge; and one evening at Corozal I watched a little flock of six, flying about in all directions, and I heard them twittering as they did so.

2. **Large Swift**—(6"). I saw one or two of these at Middlesex, and thought at first that the bird was the well-known Black Swift. But it was not quite as large, and its wings certainly not as long. Your bird is dark all over, and has the usual narrow wings, slightly curved. Incidentally of course, the Black Swift, for all I know, may visit British Honduras as a migrant, later in the year. It would be just like your own, only another inch in length, and its wings longer and most beautifully curved.

SWALLOWS

As with swifts so with swallows: ornithologists admit that there is a great deal concerning the habits and movements of these birds about which we are still quite unaware and uninformed. In the course of further enquiry, British Honduras may have its contri-

bution to make. In the first place, it may be noted that in your country all these swallows in general are known as Christmas Birds. Seeking information, I was told that in bygone times, if not at the present day, large, indeed very large, numbers of these birds used to congregate at Christmas. But what birds? Was it just the swallows and martins here classed by me as residents, or do swallows of other species arrive around that season? These two questions then remain to be answered:—Do the swallows still congregate at Christmas, and if so, what swallows?⁽¹⁾

1. **Purple Martin**—(7"—8"). This is a well known bird in the West Indies, albeit not occurring in Trinidad. It seems specially partial to British Honduras where in certain localities I saw it in larger numbers than anywhere else in my experience. Apart from possible rare migrants, it is the largest of the swallows we have. It is quite easy to identify, for the male in the air appears to be an entirely black bird with white abdomen, and the female different shades of brown. But as these birds nest with you, in the eaves of houses, holes in walls, etc., you have the opportunity of

(1) The latest information is that the swallows do not seem to congregate round Christmas.

seeing them at close quarters, and then you will observe that the male is indeed quite purple in parts. Singing is one of its accomplishments, on the wing and even when it is raining. In the West Indies it has disappeared by the end of November, re-appearing at the end of January. I have yet to learn how it behaves in this respect in British Honduras.

2. **White-Breasted Swallow**—(6"). Sometimes in company with the Purple Martin, you will notice a somewhat smaller kind of swallow. I have called it White-breasted, and it is the white about the bird that calls one's attention to it, mixing as it does in such a friendly way with the larger and darker swallows.

3. **White-Rumped Swallow**—(5"). This bird, besides having white on its underparts, also has a white rump. They are to be seen in many places, though perhaps not many at a time: I remember noticing them on the river at El Cayo, flying about as they were just above the water. They have set us another swallow problem. Under a house a hanging nest was pointed out to me. The nest must have been about 18 inches in length. At the bottom end of the nest, at the side, there was the entrance

hole into which the bird flew, climbing half way up inside to the nest proper. The bird was a white-rumped swallow! But why only one nest? Or is it that these birds do not nest together but individually and quite separately? No other such nests, at all events, were discovered in that neighbourhood, nor by me anywhere else for that matter.

As other swallows have been mentioned as possibly visiting British Honduras around Christmas time, it may be well to give their names. The Rough-winged Swallow, which is really a Sand Martin, breeds in Central America and may be in British Honduras as a visitor if not a migrant. It is brownish in colour, and has the slow and low flight of Sand Martins. The Tree Swallow, which is a white-breasted bird, may possibly go to British Honduras as a winter migrant. Finally, the Barn Swallow, whose movements are quite puzzling to follow, may be present at Christmas as a migrant. He is a pretty bird, with dark head, very dark bluish back and wings, slightly forked tail, and white throat and underparts spotted or lined with chestnut, in such a way as to give the bird the appearance of having a rufous or russet breast and underparts. In many illustrations of this bird the depth of the

forked tail is grossly exaggerated, *unless there are two kinds of Barn Swallows*, which would account for the contradictory accounts of their movements and migration.

FLYCATCHERS

It is an ill wind that blows no one any good, and the fat Flycatchers of British Honduras looked as though they thought there was something to be said for the eastern sea-board of Central America being called the Mosquito Coast. Actually, eight out of the nine of them are common to the West Indies, where also we have our fair share of flies.

1. **Grey King Bird**—(8"—9"). This is one of the commonest birds to be seen anywhere out of the town of Belize. It has a grey head, dark grey-brown back and wings, bright yellow breast and underparts. It is fairly tame, and its favourite perch seems to be the telephone wire. Generally silent, it does whistle sometimes, but quietly.

2. **Qu'est-qu'il-dit**—(9")—so called from its loud and not unmusical call, which sounds like the French for 'What is he saying?' This is another fine bird and not uncommon. It has a brown back and rich yellow underparts, and,

what at once distinguishes it from the Grey-headed King Bird, black and brown and white markings on the head.

3. **Broad-Billed Kiskadee**—(9"). This bird is almost exactly like the preceding. The broad bill is really the only difference in appearance. He is not quite so common, and definitely prefers the country to the town, where he *never* puts in an appearance. He has a loud and quite distinct call of his own, and you will never hear him sing "Qu'est-qu'il-dit"; so, for that reason, I have spelt his name as the English do—*and* the Americans.

4. **Rusty-Tailed Flycatcher**—(8")—so called because rusty-coloured feathers may be observed in its tail when the bird is in flight. It is a handsome bird, to be seen more often in trees and shrubs than on telephone wires. It has a very fine head of dark brown plush with almost the suggestion of a crest. Its underparts, beginning with something like white at the throat, become yellow lower down. This bird has a soft call as well as a loud one. It is not too common, and inclined to be a bit shy.

5. **Crested Flycatcher**—(8"). This bird is easy to identify because it is the only resident

flycatcher with a real crest—indeed you will sometimes notice that it has a double crest, *two* little points of tiny feathers erected side by side on its head. It is brown above with nicely marked wings, and its underparts become pale yellow. It has a loud and attractive call, and is common enough.

6. **Wood Pewee**—(7½"). This, or a bird *very like* the fairly common bird of that name in the West Indies, is to be seen sometimes among the trees in British Honduras. It is like a Crested Flycatcher without crest: unlike the Crested, this Pewee is very quiet and not common.

7. **Streaked Flycatcher**—(8"). Well named is this bird, because it is conspicuously streaked on its brown back and wings, as well as on its much lighter-coloured underparts. Its tail alone, which is a distinctive brown, is unstreaked. The bird cannot be said to be common, but I caught sight of it several times.

8. **Scissor-Tail Flycatcher**—(8"-12"). This bird is famous alike for its tailpiece and its behaviour. A full account of it you may read elsewhere⁽¹⁾. But what are these birds doing

(1) In **Visitors' Book of Birds, Trinidad and Tobago**, by the present writer.

in British Honduras? I saw them in a district to which three names seem to be attached—Bakers, Sand Hills and (best of all) Rancho Auxac, if I scribbled down that name correctly; the place that lies some seventeen miles up the northern main road. They were playing about in a field not far from the road, a field typical of their choice because there were in it some shrubs and bushes. Both sexes have black heads and not very powerful bills. They are quite dark brown on back and wings, and the breast of both is immaculately white. You will, however, hardly need this or any description, except when you are looking out for the birds in the distance; because when you see the male, you will know at once that you are being favoured with something very special. It is not merely that the tail is forked. In the young male, indeed, it is forked in the usual way, like the tail of some swallows—hence the alternative name for the bird, Fork-tailed Flycatcher. But in the case of the adult or fully mature male, the fork is prolonged to a length of some six inches. This prolongation, moreover, is not straight but curved, like a pair of scimitars, or shears or specially shaped scissors. Remarkable birds: but what were they doing in British Honduras

in June? It is up to you to supply the full answer to that question. If I may hazard a guess, I should say that they had but recently arrived for their annual holiday, being an example of a bird that is neither a resident nor a migrant. They will remain with you till September, when, having thanked you for your hospitality, they will fly south, join those that have been spending their holidays in the north of South America and the West Indies, and then, at the end of October, begin their tremendous flight, tremendous in the sense of the enormous numbers involved, and get back to their winter quarters somewhere in the very heart of Brazil. I may be quite wrong, and they may live with you all the year round, but perversely I doubt it. I saw them only once, not having the opportunity of going back to look for them again. The place was Bakers, and the day a Sunday; and after seeing these, and other of God's beautiful birds (as a priest friend of mine always calls them), I felt all the more pleased to give the children religious instruction, and conduct the Sunday service, in the little school-chapel by the road-side.

9. **Vermilion Flycatcher** — *Pyrocephalus rubinus mexicanus*—($5\frac{3}{4}$ "). Our interest in flycatchers having been worked up to a high

pitch, the series now comes to an end on a top note, amidst resounding applause. Really, this Vermilion Flycatcher is a splendid bird. For sheer beauty and elegance, as well as for its easiness to be seen, it holds the first place, in my opinion, among all the residents birds of British Honduras. It might well compete for first prize even in competition with the birds of British Guiana and the West Indies, where it is not known. You can see it any time you want. You have only to travel up the north road and you will be rewarded, possibly even before you have reached the junction for the Air Port, most certainly after that. The little fellow is fond of perching on any low fence or railing, and so is his mate. From this perch he will suddenly fly off, catch a fly at speed, and return to the same spot. In this, as well as in his shape and size, he is remarkably like the Spotted Flycatcher seen in England. But when it comes to his colour... he is vermilion! His head may be slightly brighter than his breast and underparts, and his back and wings are a rich brown, so when seen from a distance and before the colour of the head can be noticed, it might appear (the back view of it at least) as a brown bird. But when you approach the bird, and you can

do so so easily, you will see, and will probably exclaim, 'This is a red bird, this is vermilion'. The female, of course, is not so grand, but even she is well worth looking at, and these birds do seem to go about in pairs. She is a prettily streaked brown bird with splashes of red on flanks and underparts.

I was often asked in British Honduras if I had been to the cays. I felt inclined to reply with another question: 'Have you seen the Vermilion Flycatcher?'

THRASHERS AND THRUSHES

1. **Mockingbird or Nightingale**—(9"). This is a grey bird with wings that in British Honduras are almost black. It has white in its tail, down the sides of the tail, but most noticeably at the tip. It is easy to identify also, by the way it will perch on the ground, and then slowly open and close its wings. I have seen it feeding on worms, but also on young leaves just bursting from the bud. It sings well and has many airs, and is supposed, not without some reason, to imitate the calls of other birds. Under favourable circumstances it may also be heard singing in the night.

2. **B.H. Brown Thrasher**—(9"—10"). For want of any local name known to me, I have borrowed this one from U.S.A., because the bird does to some extent resemble the one so called in North America; but I have been careful to insert the prefix B.H. This again is a very fine bird, generally speaking rich brown all over. It sings splendidly and continually. Its call and song are so like those of the Bare-eyed Thrush in the West Indies, that when I first heard both, I jumped to the conclusion that it was the same bird. When I did catch sight of it, however, I was at once undeceived; and then I had to admit that though the Bare-Eyed Thrush is the best singer in the West Indies, the song of your thrasher is even more sonorous; and, to be sure, it is a somewhat larger bird. You notice that I heard this thrasher before I saw it; and that may well be your experience as well, because, in common with its cousin in the islands, it does not like to show off, and is distinctly shy.

3. **B.H. Black Thrush**—(8"). This bird is black, with a yellow or white bill, and it sings. But you will be quite lucky if you get sight of it, because it is definitely rare, and, like *its* cousin in the West Indies, seems to be very timid.

WREN

1. **B.H. Wren** — ($4\frac{1}{2}$ "). You appear to have but one sort of Wren in British Honduras. It gives the general impression of being brown all over, and, as is usual with its kind, builds its nest in houses, barns or anywhere where people live or constantly appear. Wrens are like that. They want to be friendly, and they sing merrily. I did not see many of them during my stay, but I think I saw them everywhere I went. They seemed to be a bit on the quiet side, not singing as vociferously as those in the island in which I live. A special aid to identification is the manner in which they cock up their little tails. If in the mountain you ever came across a slightly larger wren, and one singing three time as loudly, then you would know that British Honduras has the Bush Wren as well.

SUGAR BIRD or HONEY CREEPER

1. **Blue Honey Creeper**—(5"). Strange indeed, but you do not seem to have the little Sucrier or Sugar Eater in British Honduras. It is so common elsewhere, with slight but interesting local variations—the small yellow-breasted bird with a white line above the eye on its dark head. However, you have *this*

beauty, the Blue Honey Creeper, though to appreciate the colours you must get close to it, and have the light shining on it and not behind it. Its plumage is mostly rich violet-blue, but its upper back or mantle, as well as its wings, are black. What is specially lovely, however, is its crown of bright and light turquoise blue, so much so that the bird in Trinidad is known as the Turquoise Honey Creeper. Its legs, moreover, add to its beauty, for they are bright red or salmon-coloured. The female is much more of a green bird, and of a duller plumage. The Blue Honey-Creeper is supposed to be common in Central America, but in British Honduras I saw it only twice, once at Orange Walk, and again a few miles north of Corozal.

WARBLERS

Hundreds of these birds, I am told, of many varieties, fly down to British Honduras in the Fall. Some of them remain, while many more probably continue their migration further south. The coloured illustrations in the books on the Birds of North America will help you to identify and name the birds you happen to see. I know of no Warblers that are resident in British Honduras.

TROUPIALS

1. **Yellow-Tail, Hang-Nest, Large Corn Bird**—(13''-15''). By these, and even by other names, is this large bird called. It has a conspicuous white bill and a horizontal crest of black, which is the colour of its head and body. Actually the body assumes a brown tinge lower down, with a suggestion even of red, and then appears the magnificent yellow tail. These birds fly about in flocks, and build their very long hanging nest in colonies. You may expect to see them in the region of the Maya Mountains in the south.

2. **Golden Oriole or Banana Bird**—(8½''). The middle-sized Corn Bird, known elsewhere as the Yellow-rumped, does not seem to be recorded for British Honduras, but the third and smallest, the beautiful Golden Oriole, though not exactly common, may be seen all over the area, generally in pairs. Nobody can fail to identify this yellow and black bird with its golden head and black throat. The female, as usual, may be somewhat less bright. It is often known as the Banana Bird, but, as we shall see just now, there is a rival claimant to that title, albeit the Oriole, I am told, *does* feed on, among other things, young banana leaves.

3. **Red-Eyed Cowbird** — *Tangavius aeneus involucratus* Lesson—(8½"). I was surprised not to meet in British Honduras the elsewhere only too common Glossy Cowbird. The latter is glossy black and really smart, with the additional accomplishment of singing quite prettily. The female is dull brown, and wickedly takes upon herself the rôle of the parasitic cuckoo, seldom if ever building a nest for herself and her progeny, but depositing an egg here and there in the nests of other, and generally much smaller, birds, her handsome husband doubtless being privy thereto ! But here in the Red-eyed Cowbird we have an even more entertaining character and, alas, equally disreputable. Imagine my being on the verandah of a priest's house, and saying to the incumbent, whom I had persuaded to leave his work and come out just for one moment: 'Look, that blackbird has red eyes!' 'How on earth can you see it has red eyes?' he replied. I had to admit, of course, that I had made the discovery by using my field-glasses. But once you know there is a blackbird with red eyes, and are inevitably burning to see it, you have only to do a bit of manoeuvring to get close to the bird, and

then with your own naked eye you will see that it really has red eyes. Then you will know that you are on to something special.

It is indeed a very distinguished-looking black bird with a shining bone-coloured bill. I noticed that, with accompanying females or young, it fed on the ground. The plumage was quite remarkable, soft and silky, as I see someone else has described it, but by no means smooth, giving the appearance of its having been wet and not as yet quite dry. It has, moreover, something that can only be described as resembling a ruff on the back and sides of its neck, a superfluity of little feathers, to be puffed out and erected by it at pleasure, much in the same way as a turkey cock behaves. Another thing I noticed was that this bird goes in for what is called *display* in the presence of the female perched beside him on the branch. He begins by ruffling every single feather in his make-up, and that is saying something! Then the trembling begins. Finally, ascending about a foot into the air, he flutters for about half a minute or more, right above the object of his affections, and then descends and sits quietly beside her. Yet the female, from our point of view, is hardly worth looking at, being just drab brown.

These birds are sometimes to be seen in small flocks, but their habits, I regret to have to remind the reader, are as reprehensible as those of the Glossy Cowbird and the rest of the clan. For actually there is yet another, the Bronzed Cowbird—*Tangavius aeneus aeneus*—which lives in Mexico, and possibly, therefore, in British Honduras (though I never saw it), whose reputation is just as shady as that of the other members of the family.

4. **B.H. Boat-Tailed Grackle**—*Megaquiscalus major major* (Vieillot) 16½". This is your commonest bird at least in Belize itself. Moreover, I think I have got the right name for it, the bird being known further north. It is really a kind of Jackdaw, much larger than the Greater Antillean Grackle of Jamaica, and larger again, of course, than the Lesser Antillean Grackle of my West Indian Islands. Everyone has seen him in all his fussy magnificence, and everyone has heard him. There is indeed a certain nobility in his appearance, with the way in which he holds his head, and with that wonderful tail of his which he can turn fan-shaped as well as keel-shaped. The female is smaller, as you will notice, and has a brown tinge.

5. **B.H. Red-Winged Blackbird**—(8"—9"). This is not any ordinary Red-winged Blackbird from further north, but something special to British Honduras and probably other parts of Central America. It was that field-day I had, a Sunday (in reality, of course, only a couple of hours) at Bakers, *alias* Rancho Auxae; and my host, Señor Rigoberto, asked me if I knew the Banana Bird. Like a conceited boy in the sixth form I answered:—

‘Of course, the yellow-and-black bird.’

‘Oh, no,’ he replied, ‘the *red*-and-black bird. Look! there is one.’

I looked. There was the black bird, all right, but with no red upon it that I could see. A small spot of white indeed, on or near each wing, for the bird was at rest. But then it moved and flew...

‘Oh, yes,’ I cried, ‘red in truth, glorious red in the wings, a pretty bird indeed, if there ever was one.’

Well, Rigoberto said it was known as the Banana Bird. I felt inclined to reply in my excitement that I did not believe it was known at all! Whoever would have expected to meet this beauty in British Honduras? Why, the Troupials can stand up bravely in rivalry with

the Flycatchers; and we have still the gorgeous plumage of the Tanagers to appraise. And I am told that a Government Official returned to Trinidad after spending years in your colony, and said there were no birds in British Honduras worth looking at—heaven help him!

Well, like other troupials, this one may be found in marshy country, but having seen it only once myself, I do not imagine that it can be classed as being as common as the Oriole. This Red-winged Blackbird resembles the Oriole in shape and size and formation of bill. It is a troupial all right, but with all respect to my friend Rigoberto, I do not think we should press its claim to be the Banana Bird. Half the point of this little book is that every resident bird should be known by its proper name; and if any bird has a pet-name, let us not confuse the issue by giving that pet-name to any other. The female Red-winged Blackbird, which I also saw, is streaked brown and grey.

VIKEOS or GREENLETS

These birds, from 4 to 7 inches in length, are much more often heard than seen. Almost the same colour as the leaves and twigs of the trees among which they hop about and yet

cunningly conceal themselves, Vireos nevertheless are inquisitive, peering out at you, and probably laughing at your vain attempts to spot them. Unless seen at very close quarters, these are not specially beautiful birds to look at, but they have the merit of singing, or at least chirping, sweetly and incessantly. You may generally take it for granted that if there is a bird chirping away loudly in a tree and you cannot see it, it is one of the vireos. They build hanging nests, described as pendant cups.

1. **Belize Vireo**—(6"—7"). Such is the name James Bond gives to this bird of yours in his book, *Birds of the West Indies*. In some places, he says, it is called Sweet Bridget or Shear-bark. It is greeny-brown above, and lighter-coloured below, its eggs being almost immaculate.

2. **Black-Whiskered Vireo**—(6½"). Common in some of the West Indian islands, this Vireo is somewhat darker than the Belize, but otherwise very much the same. You may spot the white line over its eye and the black line through the eye, but unless using binoculars you would have to be close up for that. The bird is sometimes called Cheap-John's-stirrup, after its piping song constantly repeated, and in Cuba, more prettily, Bien-te-veo.

3. **Chit-Chak**—(7"). Unless I am much mistaken, which is always possible, this is a green-and-yellow bird with a white throat. Without being sure of the throat, I think I saw a pair of these birds along the western main road beyond the cemetery, and another single specimen up north. With a little imagination, they might be mistaken for Golden Warblers, or even for Canaries, slightly faded.

4. **Yellow-Eyed Vireo**—(4½"). As already stated, I do not like inventing names, but I have been compelled to do so in this case, and even to coin a scientific name, *Vireo turneri*, for it was Mr. H. W. Turner who discovered, and introduced me to, this bird. Having studied thoroughly all that James Bond has to say about Vireos, I am in a position emphatically to state that, while our little bird resembles in many points two birds described by him, it is certainly not the same as either. As a matter of fact, moreover one of the birds is labelled by Bond, not as a resident in Honduras (British Honduras is not mentioned), but merely as *a winter migrant*, and the other bird as coming no nearer you than the Cayman islands. In size all three birds more or less agree, though I should have put ours (at sight)

at 4 inches rather than $4\frac{1}{2}$, for it was really very small. The top of the head of our bird was deep black, whereas Bond claims nothing like that for either of his. We described our bird as having greeny-brown upperparts which corresponds closely enough to Bond's olive-green tinged with grey. The wings of our bird were said to be beautifully marked, which again tallies with Bond's description of two white wing bars. But when it comes to the underparts, our birds was soft yellow, whereas of Bond's birds, one indeed had yellow underparts, the other white; but the one with the yellow had a longer bill, was indeed called Thick-Billed Vireo, which at once ruled it out of the picture altogether, for the bill of our little bird could hardly have been smaller: it was short and sharp, and its tail also was tiny. One of Bond's birds had, like ours, a yellow eye-ring, but because the iris was whitish the bird was actually called White-eyed Vireo; so there is nothing against the appropriation of Yellow-eyed Vireo as the name for our little bird.

Vireos may be shy birds, but if our Yellow-eyed be true to type, they do not worry about concealing their nests. This one's nest was hanging from a branch of quite a small bushy

tree, which gave us the chance to watch, and listen to, the tiny bird, in our endeavour to find out what it was. "Cheep-cheep," it kept repeating, rather like the notes of a nuthatch. These Yellow-eyed Vireos seem to prefer short trees to tall ones, and I caught another pair down south, nesting just in the same way as those in Mr. Turner's garden, and even more exposed to the public view. This was in the yard of Holy Innocents' School up the Stann Creek Valley, and *both* birds were busily engaged in building their hanging nest. It was indeed dangerously conspicuous, and I implored the good Pallotine Sister in charge of the school to keep her eye upon the nest, and to see that none of the small boys in her charge had *their* eyes upon, lest with the awful instinct of the young, they should proceed to destroy it.

As migrants have been mentioned, we may notice in passing that the Solitary or Blue-headed Vireo may visit you in the winter, as also the aforementioned White-eyed Vireo, which would be easily distinguished from our Yellow-eyed by its having neither black head nor yellow underparts.

TANAGERS

1. **Blue Tanager**—($7\frac{1}{2}$ "). This bird seems to resemble exactly the corresponding bird in Trinidad. Unfortunately, it is not nearly as common, though I saw it I think in every district. It is fairly bright blue, but its head actually is so pale as often to appear white. Tanagers for the most part are sprightly and active, and apart from the Indigo or Blue Finch which is much smaller, this is the only all-blue bird you have.

2. **Palmiste**—($7\frac{1}{2}$ "). This bird again is quite like its compère in Trinidad. Grey and brown in colour, with rather dark wings, it flies up into the palm trees, and sings a little, though not so readily as the one in the West Indies, nor is it anything like so common.

3. **Silver-Beak or Soldier-Bird**—($7\frac{1}{2}$ "). If not exactly resembling the Silver-beak of Trinidad, it is certainly no less beautiful but correspondingly rare. It is about as large as the Palmiste, which, in spite of the numbers in inches I have printed, is slightly larger than the Blue Tanager. The silver on the silver beak of the bird in Trinidad is a matter of contention, but there can be no doubt whatever about your bird in British Honduras having a

completely silver beak. Its wings are dark, and as far as I remember its head as well, but the back and the breast are brilliant red, a bird that strikes you like a flash of flame, as it flies across the road in front of you. The female, as usual, is not so brightly coloured.

This, I made out at last, is the bird the people call Soddors or Sodgers, and the *Handbook* Soldier Bird. I saw it more than once, but I remember its brilliance specially near San Antonio, on the road up from Punta Gorda. This bird should be one of your show-pieces.

4. **Semp**—(4½"). This is a much smaller bird, and also has its counterpart in Trinidad. In British Honduras it is sometimes called Little Banana Bird, presumably on account of its resemblance in colour to the Golden Oriole. The Trinidad bird has its back bright dark blue, its forehead and breast bright yellow, almost orange; while the female is green with pale yellow breast. Out of Belize these pretty little birds can be seen, not commonly, but almost anywhere.

But do I hear you grumbling that you have seen this little Tanager, and that it had a *black* forehead? All right. There is no need to get annoyed about it. As a matter of fact you

should be very pleased, because it was not the Semp at all you saw, but a much rarer tanager called in Trinidad the Louis d'Or or Yellow-capped Euphonia. This has a black forehead, the yellow on the head being pushed further back. So it is up to you now to tell us whether you have both these little beauties in British Honduras, or only one, and if so which one—"Over to you."

FINCHES

Seven finches I can put you on to; others you will have to identify for yourselves. One of the characteristics of a finch is its bill, which, whether large or small, is not sharp and pointed but solid and strong, because the bird feeds largely on seeds.

1. **Small Black Finch**—(4½") In Grenada this bird is called Blue-black, which is indeed a much better name for it, because when you see it properly and in a good light, you will observe that it is in truth glossy blue-black. You may first notice it actually as the little bird continually jumping up from the branch and back again, chirping as it does so. The female which is brown, and has the same sort of stout little bill, takes no part in the antics of her husband, but she is often near-by.

2. **Bamboo Cracker**—($4\frac{1}{4}$ "). This I take to be the name of another little Black Finch, one that does *not* jump up and down. As far as I could observe, it has a tiny spot of white on each of its wings. I was told it had a white bill: I should have called it shining horn-coloured, but it was at all events the normally prominent finch-like bill. I was also led to believe that it made a loud noise, especially in any bamboo cluster. The good-luck to hear this, however, was not mine; but what I did hear, and indeed attracted my notice, was the continuous singing of the little bird. So, not wanting to multiply without warrant the number of birds I had the good fortune to observe, I have taken this little singing Black Finch to be identical with the Bamboo Cracker.—E. & O. E.

3. **B.H. Black-and-White Finch**—(5"). This common and attractive little bird is not the same as the bird of this name in Trinidad, which there, however, is also called the Moustached Finch. Your bird has no moustache, but it does wear a conspicuous white collar, almost visible even at the back of its neck. The female, which always seems to be near-by, is a brown bird, very prettily marked on the wings. I once heard this Black-

and-white Finch described as the Rice Bird, but so many of your birds seem to be given this pet-name, that perhaps the less said about it the better. This pretty Finch has got quite enough to recommend it already, and, as you must have noticed, it sings very sweetly.

4. **Cardinal** — *Cardinalis virginianus* — (6"). Yes, with my own eyes I saw this gem of a bird, so well known further north. Fortunately I was in company with a number of Jesuit Scholastics who are my witnesses that I was not dreaming and am not now romancing. We were travelling north, and were on the south side of the river south of Orange Walk. It was the month of June: the bird was in full view, perched on a branch by the road-side; and it was singing lustily. These three points, especially the first and the last, show beyond the possibility of doubt, that the bird is a resident—surprising news as this may be to the ornithologists. As you are probably aware, the Cardinal is brilliant red all over, with a spot of black about its chin and beak. And it wears, as we had pleasure in observing, a magnificent red crest.

5. **Indigo or Blue Finch**—*Passerina cyanea*—(4½"—5"). I was told that this bird also was

a resident, and it is only with residents that we are really concerned. Being all blue, it would be easy to identify, but actually I did not come across it myself. The female is brown with lighter brown on its breast.

6. **B.H. Purple Finch**—($6\frac{1}{4}$ "). This bird bears some resemblance to the Purple Finch of U.S.A. It has reddish head and breast and rufous back, while its brownish tail, as far as I could see, was fringed with white. The female was streaked brownny-grey. A beautiful bird, but very rare.

7. **Grosbec**—($7\frac{1}{2}$ "—8"). I never got a good sight of this bird, but I am almost sure I saw it, with that characteristic white line over its eye, and with some suggestion of yellow about it, albeit a brown bird. The female is more drab, but also has the white line over the eye. Grosbec means nothing more than the finch bill, except that in this case it is rather large, being in proportion to the size of the bird.

8. **Grass Birds**—(4"). On the Pines Ridge, as well as in other places, I saw numbers of these little birds, very difficult to distinguish. Some were prettily marked with a line on the side of the face, and a spot of chestnut on the

top of the head. They reminded me of American Kinglets, and a woman near-by said they were called Rice Birds!

WOODPECKERS

As you travel about the country you will notice nearly half-a-dozen different kinds of Woodpeckers, most of them of striking appearance. I cannot say that the first three, described below, exactly resemble those in other places. All I can do is to leave it to those who are interested, to improve upon what I have written by their own more leisurely observation. I should not have used the word *striking* just now, for of course this epithet applies to Woodpeckers in more senses than one; and, as likely as not, you will be attracted to them by the hammering noise they make with their beaks, tapping at the bark of trees like an electric drill.

1. **B.H. Red-Crested Woodpecker**—This is one of the largest Woodpeckers I saw. It will immediately be identified by its enormous and brilliant red crest. Whatever the colour of the beak, the bird is by no means unlike the pictures one sees of the famous and now almost extinct Ivory-bill Woodpecker. Your crested

bird is not, I believe, uncommon in certain districts, *e.g.*, south of Corozal. I myself saw it but once, and had no time to remain and watch it. I cannot tell you whether it had any distinctive colour on its rump or any other part of its anatomy. My one impression was that of a large dark woodpecker, with a powerful bill and the most wonderful red crest I had ever seen—counting in the top of its head as red, as well as the crest. Can this possibly be the Pileated Woodpecker — *Ceophloeus pileatus*? Surely not, for this is a thousand miles from its acknowledged area.

2. **B.H. Red-Headed Woodpecker.** Notice the name, for this somewhat less large Woodpecker had no crest but a magnificent red head: one could see it a long way off. That it is otherwise black or dark, with a white rump, you will make sure about later: it is the grand red head that gets you. But again I ask, how can this possibly be the Red-headed Woodpecker of the States, so far away from its proper beat—*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*?

3. **B.H. Yellow-Headed Woodpecker.** The yellow may sometimes appear white, but in this case, although the head is the immediate source of identification, there is colour in other parts

of the bird to attract your notice. What is that I see on the back? Even with the wings closed there are signs of some red there, so that I am led to believe that the Yellow-headed Woodpecker has the additional attraction of a red, or a partially red, rump.

4. **Mexican Woodpecker**—*Dryobates scalaris*—This is the only Woodpecker with its back regularly barred with black and white. The top of its head, its crown, is red. A thick black line passes through its eye. If I am not mistaken, its rump is white. The female, which I also saw, is just the same, save that her crown is not red but black.

5. **Common Sapsucker**—*Sphyrapicus varius*—This is another black and white Woodpecker; but only the forehead, and not the entire crown, is red. I think I noticed also a tiny spot of red at the top end of its white rump. It has creamy-white underparts, but perhaps the most distinguishing feature is the conspicuous white patch on each of its wings. The female in this case, which I did not see, is mostly brown, with no red.

British Honduras Woodpeckers are indeed worth watching.

CREEPER OR HEWER

1. **B.H. Wood-Hewer.**—One such specimen I saw several times. These birds resemble small woodpeckers *minus* the woodpecker bill. This one was brown all over, and alighted on trees just as the woodpeckers do, and proceeded to creep up; but unlike the woodpecker, it was, and I suppose should be, quite quiet.

SHRIKE

1. **B.H. Bush-Shrike.**—I constantly heard and got, I fancy, one glimpse of a bird resembling the Trinidad Pintade or Black-crested Bush-Shrike. It is a small bird, speckled black-and-white, the female being (in Trinidad) rich brown with a brown crest, both having very small tails. The male has a kind of chuckle as a call; but I was soon to discover that the B.H. Yellow-breasted Trogon makes almost exactly the same noise. So we must not be too quick to judge by mere chuckles, and this Bush-Shrike may, after all, be non-existent in British Honduras.

COTINGA

1. **Benedictine** — (9''–10''). The Jesuit Fathers and Secular Priests are well known in

British Honduras; but who ever heard of Benedictines there! Allow me then to introduce you. I saw them near Nazareth near Punta Gorda, lovely birds and very distinguished. I can pour out information about them, and in my enthusiasm I am in good company. "Only the true lover of birds," wrote a great naturalist years ago, "will realise what an effort it took to tear ourselves away from this pair of birds, whose eggs and young appear to be as yet undescribed."⁽¹⁾ Actually the eggs have been described,⁽²⁾ the clutch generally consisting of two.

Once again I saw the Benedictines, south of Corozal, where the young men I was with called them Police Birds!

The famous Léotaud describes this bird in his French book on the Birds of Trinidad, published in 1866. "The whole of its body is a pretty grey, light grey, even lighter below, specially on its throat. This colour shades easily into the black which covers the back of the head, the sides, the wings and the tail. Its beak is blood-red from the base to the last third (*i.e.* near the tip), which is black. Round

(1) William Beebe quoted by Chubb in his **Birds of British Guiana**, London.

(2) In the **Ibis** October, 1936, London.

the eyes and lores (bare parts near the beak) it is red like the beak. The iris is black as are the feet. The female has more black on its head, and the underparts are practically absolutely white. The bird likes to keep away from human habitation, not seeking other companions, but the female herself is nearly always closeby. Its cry is feeble and plaintive, but it also has a raucous caw. It feeds on insects," and nests in holes, made by the woodpeckers, probably, in rotten or partly rotten trees.

Any comments of my own? Yes: if ever you cannot see the red face and the red beak, be not alarmed. It may be a young bird, or the female, or even the male itself out of condition. Item: In some birds you may find that the wings when closed appear to be whitish rather than black. But if you look carefully, you will notice a dark line running down them, and the moment the bird flies, you will see that the wings, even if still apparently light-coloured below, are definitely black or quite dark above.

CHATTERERS

You claim to have Chatterers in British Honduras. But are they the gorgeous Red-and-orange-and-black Chatterers of British

Guiana, called Fire Birds (the female plainer); or are they the Purple-breasted of Cayenne; or again the dusky Pampadous, with their white rumps?

1. **Cock-of-the-Rock** — *Rupicola crocea*. Hardly elsewhere than in the Cockspur Mountains, if there, will you meet this resplendent fellow of flaming orange colour, with black wings and tail, both wings and tail being quite unusually fashioned. His head, moreover, is surmounted by a great semi-circular crest with a narrow border of red, not at, but near, the end. If you ever see it, you are not likely to mistake this bird for any other!

2. **Umbrella Bird** — *Cephalopterus ornatus*. This large black bird of South America will not be difficult to spot if also it lives in your mountains. It is adorned with a huge crest recalling the appearance of an open umbrella, also with hanging wattle down the front of its neck covered with feathers. A strange bird it must be rather than beautiful.

3. **Bell Bird** — There are several kinds of these, and the lucky people who go up into the mountains may possibly come across one or other. You will hear, as I have (but not in

British Honduras), the beautiful bell-like notes, but seeing the bird is quite another matter. And in some respects they are better heard than seen; for with the hideous wattle below their chins, hanging like an unkempt beard, they are not nice to look at. And when in anger or excitement they erect that beard and make it bristle, they must indeed look fearful. The Bell Bird I know is black and white, the female greenish.

OWLS

1. **Barn Owl**—This is, generally speaking, brown.

2. **Horned or Screech Owl**—Generally speaking, white.

3. **Monkey Owl**—One was said to have occupied the campanile at Orange Walk, but no description of its colour or any peculiarities could be given.

4. **Little or Pigmy Owl**. This, by its very tininess, attractive bird, may be seen by day as well as by night. But it is not at all common with you, and I did not see it. Its note is a soft and melodious hoot continually repeated.

NIGHTJARS AND NIGHTHAWKS

1. **Who-are-you.** This bird is very common on the roads by night; and, if it speaks at all, utters a sound something like *Who-are-you*. It will allow a car to approach dangerously close before taking to its wings. It lives more or less on the ground, and nests there, though its food, of course, consists of flies and insects. If you ever slaughter one by accident, or catch sight of one on the ground by day, you will see that it is speckled brown with a whitish neck, so that it is sometimes called White-necked Nighthawk.

2. **Wide-awake.** I am not ashamed to say that I cannot identify this bird for you, because the name gives one so poor a clue. It may be the migrant Nighthawk from North America, which (in the season) may be seen sometimes in the evening around sunset, and may be recognised, if you are looking up at it from below, by the white marks under its wings. Or, it may be the famous Potoo or Poor-me-one, which takes on the appearance of the broken tree stump on which it might seem to be asleep. In reality it is *wide-awake*, and possibly even incubating an egg. This bird is a Nightjar, is quite large, and lives not on the ground but in

trees. Its song, *Poor-me-all-alone*, a recent admirer elaborates as *Poor-me*, two sharp notes; then *All-alone*, equally spaced and perfect; in all, six sad notes on descending scale, the last being a kind of chuckling sigh, "a long way the most beautiful of all the beautiful things in the bush."⁽¹⁾

ANI

1. **Smooth-Billed** or **Common Ani** or **Cow Boy**—(13"—14"). This large black bird, with small wings, long tail, and parrot-like, or Roman-nose-like, bill, is called Smooth-billed as opposed to the Groove-billed variety found further north. It is called Common as opposed to the rare larger variety met with for example in the Caroni swamps in Trinidad. Finally, in British Honduras it is called Cow Boy in allusion to its practice of accompanying cattle on the ground, devouring insects disturbed in the grass or undergrowth by the grazing quadrupeds. These birds go about in small flocks. are very noisy in the West Indies, in British Honduras very quiet. They build a nest in common, quite a number of females taking it in turn to sit upon the huge clutch of as many, sometimes, as twenty eggs. What

(1) Leslie Brown. *op. cit.*

is pandemonium? Send a boy up the tree after one of these nests, and you will get the answer. *Experto crede.*

CUCKOOS

Of these birds, so plentiful elsewhere, I have very little to say, and that only by way of conjecture.

1. **Black-headed Green Cuckoo**—(11"). This bird, generally in pairs, I saw constantly. For a long time I was quite unable to place it. Then it dawned on me that it was a cuckoo. I knew there were cuckoos in British Honduras, for the *Handbook* said so. But this was one I had never set my eyes upon before, which may explain my being so slow in identifying it. As for any description, I can add no more than what is contained in the name I have conferred upon it.

2. **B.H. Chestnut Cuckoo**—(10"). I caught sight of this bird but once, and take it to correspond to the cuckoo of that name in Trinidad. Its entire plumage seemed to be a rich brown.

TROGONS

1. **Small Yellow-bellied Trogon**—(10"—12"). I saw quite a number of these birds up and

down the land, singly or in pairs. When looked at from behind, they may often appear to be completely black. Closer observation, however, will reveal, at least in the male, beautiful shades of purple, blue and even green. These Trogons have something like a Cambridge-blue eye-ring, in which they differ from those in Trinidad, which have an eye-ring of yellow. Both birds, male and female (and in both countries) have rich yellow lower breast and underparts, as well as beautifully formed tails with square ends, which are coloured underneath black and white, the white in some cases appearing up the sides of the tail as well.

2. **Red-bellied Trogon**—(12"—13"). I was informed that this slightly larger Trogon, which is found in Trinidad as well as further north on your mainland, may be seen also in the mountains of British Honduras. For anyone familiar with the Yellow-bellied Trogon, this bird would be very easy to identify, being similar in form and behaviour, the yellow belly being replaced by brilliant red. Trogons are slow-moving birds, and not too timid.

N.B.—The famous Quezul across the border in Guatemala is a trogon, but not one, I imagine, that you would come in contact with on every tree.

MOTMOT

1. **King of the Woods or Time Bird**—(14"). This bird is very like, if not identical with, the one found in Trinidad, but it is by no means so plentiful. I saw one up north, and another across the Mexican border, but neither attracted my attention, as they might have done in the islands, by their low musical hoot. The bird has a reputation for beauty, and lives up to it. To say that it has a black head, green back and rufous breast is entirely insufficient to describe its appearance, because you must know that these colours positively glitter and glisten when any light at all catches them. The sky-blue patch on the head would alone be sufficient to class the bird as something quite out of the ordinary. To identify it, however, no description of colour is in any way necessary, for you will at once recognise the bird first by its somewhat sluggish movements, but secondly by the curious cut of the tail, which, incidentally, it sometimes moves about like a band conductor beating time—whence its name in some localities of Time Bird.

For some reason unknown, the bird pecks off the tiny feathers, or barbules, towards the end of its tail, leaving the two long quills quite

bare just at that spot. The feathers right at the end of the tail it does not touch, with the result that the tail appears to have a sort of button or blob at the end of it. This bird, I believe, feeds on worms, and builds its nest (elsewhere, at all events) by excavating a deep hole in perpendicular earth banks.

JACAMAR

1. **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**—(12"). This bird I saw once only, near Orange Walk. I could not help wondering whether the specimen in front of me was quite the same and quite as beautiful as those to be seen so commonly in Trinidad and especially Tobago. It may have been slightly off colour, and also to be sure, it was in the dark shadow of trees that I watched it. Normally, this bird resembles a gorgeous kingfisher, or, in some people's eyes, a very large hummingbird. It has a fine black head with prominent sharp-pointed bill. Its throat should be white, while the remainder of its underparts, including under the tail, rich buff. Its back is green with copper reflections, just like those of a hummingbird. It feeds on flies, darting out from its perch to catch them, often returning to the very same perch again. In Trinidad I have seen it taking a dust bath, and

heard there its piping call, and examined (as far as that is possible) its nest, which is a hole burrowed deeply into an earth bank.

PUFF BIRDS

The Jacamar which we have just been considering, belongs to the family *Galbulidae*; but the Puff Birds, which constitute the family *Bucconidae*, are very closely related to the Jacamars. They have very similar feeding habits, but the Puff Birds are very different in colouration and have short wide beaks. Though forest birds like the Jacamars, the Puff Birds haunt the recesses of the forest rather than the outskirts. There are many kinds, for the most part black or brown or rufous. I believe that you have the last named species in British Honduras, the rufous being relieved by extensive areas of white, and the bill being either yellow or red. These birds get their name from the habit they have of puffing out the plumage of their heads.

MACAWS

1. Red Macaw.

2. Blue Macaw—Both these large and beautiful birds are often known in British

Honduras just as MAC-caw Parrots, with emphasis on the Mac. They are too well known to need description. The Red might be described in a word as red and green; the Blue as blue and yellow. Many may be seen up and down the land in happy captivity, the captivity often consisting merely in a clipped wing, which keeps them near the home of their captors. They are ready to amuse you, and still more ready, of course, to accept choice morsels and good food, without the trouble of their having to scrounge for these themselves in the forest. If you want to see them at large, I know of one place to send you, beyond San Pedro, where some Maya Indians live, many miles up the road from Punta Gorda.

Parrots

There are several varieties of Parrots, and the following is a very tentative list.

1. **B.H. Red-headed Parrot**—Green, with red on its head and in its wings.

2. **B.H. Yellow-headed Parrot**—Green, with yellow on its head, red in its wings, and dark blue on its back and on its tail.

3. **B.H. Blue-headed Parrot**—Green, with blue on its head, and other colours about it elsewhere.

4. **B.H. Blue Parrot**—With much blue about it, another name for it being Mangrove or Mango Parrot, and it is larger than the others.

5. **B.H. Green Parakeet**—Larger than “Love Birds” (Budgerigars), but small by comparison with parrots, this bird is very common.

TOUCANS

1. **Bill Bird**—I have little doubt that this is the well known Sulphur-and-white-breasted Toucan. It has red also, on its breast, on its rump and around its vent. Apart from the lovely colouring, it will be recognised at once by its enormous bill, the upper mandible of which is slightly serrated, like a nut-cracker, which of course it is. Actually the bill or beak is of very light material, and if you see these birds in the mountains you will be surprised to find how agile they are in their movements among the trees, their beaks not impeding them at all.

2. **Phyllis**—This is a much smaller Toucan, and quite common locally. The first I saw was

on the outskirts of Stann Creek village, not far from the coast. Like the larger Toucans, this is an attractive bird. Whoever you are, you must just stop and have a look at it. Its breast starts with a little red, but at once becomes solidly yellow. Its rump on the contrary is brilliant red, its tail dark. The upper mandible of its (also) enormous bill seems to be white or very light-coloured, and is serrated in this case like a saw or rough set of teeth. The lower mandible is black or at least dark. Phyllis does not grace the West Indies with her presence, belonging as she does to British Honduras and the neighbouring countries.

VULTURES

1. **Black-headed Vulture**—All black, very common, and known as John Crow.

2. **Red-headed Vulture**—All black except its head, much rarer, and sometimes (incorrectly) called King Crow. Both Black-headed and Red-headed Vultures, I am informed, are hatched out pure white. A few of the latter, how, where, when and why, we are not told, *remain white*; an observer said he had seen about four such in the course of six years. *This bird then should be:—*

3. **King Crow**—Pure white; and the story goes, a story I was surprised to find accepted, that when a dead animal of any size is spotted, the Black Crows all gather round, but none will venture to begin the feast until the local White King Crow arrives and opens the proceedings.

HAWKS

In British Honduras, hawks are plentiful, varied and by no means timid; nevertheless I found them exceedingly difficult to identify.

1. **B.H. Chicken Hawk**—This is not the same as the Broad-winged Hawk of the West Indies, and seemed to me to do a bit more whistling. Query:—May Chicken Hawk be the British Honduras name for Marsh Hawk?

2. **Lion Hawk**—This is said to be larger than the preceding, and has a large bill.

3. **Wheik Hawk**—May this be the local name for a bird known elsewhere under another and a commoner name?

4. **Curassow Hawk**—The same query applies.

5. **Snake Hawk**—This, I am told, may be the very light-coloured, almost white, bird,

with black at the extremities of its wings, which I saw at Stann Creek, hovering over the sea coast, facing the eastern breeze. I watched a pair of them in fact.

6. **B.H. Buzzard**—I coined this name for a pair of hawks I saw among the pines up Stann Creek Valley. I watched them for a long time, but was quite unable to identify them. They were dark, except below, where they showed buff colour near their legs and belly. The feathers had a rough or ruffled appearance, and the wings, especially the edges of the wings, looked very ragged.

7. **Mexican Black Hawk**—At last I am on sure ground again. I was able to admire this great bird at my leisure on the river at Orange Walk. It might be mistaken by the unobservant for the ordinary John Crow. But although it is, generally speaking, a black bird, and although the extremities of its wings are ragged, like the John Crow's, anyone keen on birds will soon see the difference. This bird's head is not the ugly head of a vulture: it has white markings on its tail and under its wings, and, if not its bill always, its feet are

orange coloured. You will notice too, that it is not looking for its food among the dead, for it feeds on crabs.

8. **Osprey or Fish Hawk or Billy Hawk**—By the last of these three names is this bird known in British Honduras. Much in evidence in June, I claim it as a resident, albeit in some other places it is classed as a migrant. It is dark brown above, with a spotted white breast. It has a fine head like an eagle's and a fierce looking beak. Nevertheless, it is no match for the Frigate Bird who preys upon it; but then, unlike the Red-footed Boobies, it is solitary and on its own, and can hardly be condemned as cowardly when it gives way to a much more powerful foe. The Billy Hawk may be recognised by its behaviour, if you see it when the bird is looking for food. It will hover over the sea among the cays, and as soon as it spots something good, will shoot straight down, sometimes at an angle of 45°, and snatch a fish from just below the surface of the water. The snatching is done with its long and powerful talons.

MAGPIE

1. **Piam Piam**—Not to allow the foreign reader to be deceived as I was when I first

read this name, let it be known that each of these words is to be pronounced as a single syllable, to rhyme, therefore, with Jam Jam! The birds of this name are large, noisy and fairly common. They have dark brown or even black heads. Black breasts also they have, but the underparts then become white. Their legs are supposed to be black, but sometimes, especially in the young, seem to be yellowish.

PIGEONS AND DOVES

1. **Blue Dover Pigeon**—I take this to be the bird that resembles the dark blue Ramier of the West Indies.

2. **Canga Bird**—I take this to be the large and pretty brown-coloured bird, even with some cinnamon about it, which coos very much like the Ramier, perhaps even more loudly. This is the bird, I believe, that is supposed to sing out at every hour. I did not succeed in establishing this claim for the bird, nor did I hear of any suggestion that it competed with the Motmot for the title of Time Bird.

3. **Ring Dove**—

4. **Rocky Dove**—One or other of these must be the smaller Dove with red legs, or very rich purple legs, to be seen sometimes in captivity.

5. **Red Dove**—I take this to be the Red Ground Dove, common enough and quite pretty.

6. **Grey Ground Dove**—Slightly less common than the Red Ground Dove, it is a pretty little thing with pink legs, and unmistakable as a diminutive pigeon.

7. **White-crowned Dove**—This is a dark bird, with a fairly conspicuous white crown. Sailing among the cays, I got a clear view of one flying over the sea.

GAME BIRDS

1. **Cocrico or Cha-Cha-Lake**—A black bird, and in shape not unlike a pheasant. In early mornings or evenings a flock of them will make a noise as loud as parrots, repeating over and over again *cocrico, cocrico*.

2. **Blue Partridge**—

3. **Red Partridge**—

4. **Yellow-billed Rail**—*Arimides ypecaha*—It is possible you have this rail as a resident.

Olive Green above, it has chestnut nape, while rump and tail are black. Its underparts are greyish, except the throat which is white, and the belly carrying a wine-coloured tinge. The bill is yellow, the legs scarlet. It is an aggressive bird and, unlike the normal rails, has the whirring flight of a partridge.

5. **Quail or Bob-white**—Dark with slightly striped belly; a white face with a thick black line through the eye. In Trinidad, it gives vent to a very loud call, going *up* the scale.

6. **Curassow**—A huge bird supposed to have a crest or comb of feathers. I saw a specimen in captivity, but noticed no crest or comb; so it may be that this is in evidence in the male alone, and even then perhaps, specially in the mating season.

7. **Clucking Hen**—As large as a rooster, I was told but resembling what, or sporting any special colours of its own, I was unable to discover.

8. **Wild Turkey**—*Meleagris ocellata*—This is one of your famous birds, and confined, be it noted, to British Honduras, Guatemala and Yucatan. I was lucky to unearth the following full and fine description of the Wild Turkey.

"Its plumage glows with matallic reflections of brassy-green and greenish-copper, passing into steel blue on the rump, while the tail feathers are marked with brilliant ocelli of metallic green-blue and copper. The head and the caruncle, which hangs over the beak, are blue, while red, berry-like excrescences are scattered over the neck. The curious tuft of bristles so conspicuous in the common turkey is wanting in this bird. It is one of the wildest and shyest of birds, and of great speed on the wing. During the breeding season the male makes a sonorous, drumming noise, and then utters his peculiar 'song' which recalls the rapid peaking of a distant woodpecker or the song of the great bull-toad." (1)

RESIDENT RIVER BIRDS, DUCKS AND WADERS

1. **Dipper** — *Cinclus mexicanus unicolor* — (7¾"). As the Latin name suggests, this little water-bird is all of one colour, black or very dark mouse-colour, while, according to the books, its legs may sometimes be very pale pink. I was indeed lucky to spot this Dipper or Water Ouzel, if that alternative name may be applied to this particular Dipper. It was

(1) Pycraft, loc. cit.

on the river just beyond Benque Viejo by the Guatamalan frontier, and behaved as dippers normally do. The bird was standing on a bare boulder, low enough in the river to be washed at times by the flow of the water, acting quite like a wren, dipping and curtseying, and then it flew off in search of food. It feeds on *mollusca* and insects: it can dip and dive, and even, I believe, use its wings under the water. Both wings and tail are short, and its beak also short and straight. if the bird gives tongue at all, it is only to utter "sip-sip."

2. **Ringed Kingfisher**—(15"—16"). This fine looking bird, known in some of the West Indies, has a dark head, crested, and a magnificent bill. There is a broad white ring round its neck and throat. Its back also is dark, breast and abdomen are chestnut, but the female's breast, which is grey, is so spotted with white as sometimes to give the impression of *being* white. The bird makes a noise like that of a rattle, and is always worth while watching. The smaller *Belted Kingfisher* will doubtless visit you as a migrant between October and May, but having told you it is belted, I must restrain myself from describing it, albeit a special friend of mine.

3. **B.H. Black-and-White Kingfisher.** This is a much smaller bird than either the Ringed or even the Belted Kingfisher. I saw it several times, and it is described by its name. The Little Green Kingfisher of the West Indies is black and white, but I do not think that this is the same bird. Nor do I believe that it is the same as the Black-and-White Crested Kingfisher, *Ceryle rudis*, mentioned by Pycroft among his birds of this part of the world. I may be wrong. The green back of the West Indian bird (and I have seen it) is so dull that it may easily be mistaken for black. Only the male, moreover, has the dark brown breast, and that again, in the distance that I saw the bird in British Honduras, might readily pass as black; whereas the female is spotted black-and-white *all the way down* its underparts. I cannot say that I remember a crest on the British Honduras bird, and the Little Green Kingfisher has no crest either. So I leave it to you to decide.

4. **Mexican Cormorant or Sea-Water Sheg.**—Cormorants and American Darters or Snake Birds are very much alike, but they can nevertheless be fairly easily distinguished. Both of these large birds often appear to be entirely black. Both have long necks and often

broad-looking tails. Both frequent rivers and estuaries, feed on fish, and can swim about, mostly under the water. Both, finally, till you measure them, appear to be about the same size. But certainly *one* distinguishing mark of the Cormorant is that its large bill is definitely hooked, and with this it can seize surprisingly big fish.

5. **American Darter** or **Snake Bird** or **Fresh-Water Shag**. Too much emphasis must not be laid upon this distinction of fresh-water from sea-water. For you may meet the Cormorant far up a river, where the water can hardly be salt or even brackish; while, on the other hand, the Snake Bird (also known as Anhinga) is sometimes to be seen around the salty water of river mouths and estuaries. But the Anhinga is not entirely black: it has some white about it, at least under the wings, which, thoughtfully, it will often hold more than half open, as it stands perched upon some rock or bush. Sometimes, moreover, you will notice a Darter whose entire neck and even shoulders are light brown, almost cream coloured. This will be a female. Finally you will notice that the bird's bill is sharp and pointed, for the Anhinga strikes only at small fish, albeit, I learn, it can

swallow a baby alligator or a young fresh-water tortoise, not to mention water snakes and newts.

6. Of **Ducks, Teal and Grebes** (one of the last named being known as Diving Dopper) I have no information. A few may be residents, my having seen none being no argument, still less proof, to the contrary; but the vast majority of them, of course, must be migrants.

7. Of **Waders**, the **Jacana**, known among you as **Georgie Bull**, is one of the commonest. It has a brilliant yellow head-shield and bill, its head is blackish, body and closed wings ruddy purple-brown, but in flight the wings are bright yellow or white. Its feet, however, are its fortune, for so enormous are the claws that it can walk about the lily leaves and water weeds unperturbed by any unpleasant sinking feeling. A flock of these birds at rest or in flight is a pleasing spectacle.

8. The **Little Blue Heron** often appears to be black, and in many places is called Gaulin. The young birds are white, even when full-grown.

9. The **Little Green Heron** has a stouter bill, sides of head and neck rufous, striped breast and bright orange or yellow legs. Top of head and wings green.

10. The **White Egret**, as opposed to the *young* Little Blue Herons, always remains white.

11 and 12. Of the **Great White Heron**, as well as of the **White Crane**, the same is to be said.

13. The **Yellow-Crowned Night Heron** you can recognise not only by its yellow or white crown, but by the conspicuous white mark on the side of its face. (Is this bird locally known as Toby Full Pot?!).

14. I am not sure that I saw any of the **Bitterns** which surely frequent your swamps, but the Little Bittern, at least, is like the Little Green Heron, save that it is very dark brown.

15. In the swamps also you may find the **Scarlet Ibis** (is this the bird that is called locally Top-na-chick?), but I doubt its being anything but a migrant.

These and other birds, most of them if not all, migrants, have local names which I was quite unable to allot or assign. Carpenter Bird in Trinidad is the local name for any kind of Woodpecker, but apparently not in British Honduras. Which is the *Barking* Gaulin? Are your Crab Catchers the same as the migrant Oyster Catchers? Then there are the Coopers and Blue Jackets, Frenchmen, Poor Joes and Fishermen!

16. One last resident is the pretty little **Ruddy Turnstone** which you may see in the cays, along the coast or even some way up the rivers. Its upperparts are chestnut, throat black, underparts white. There are black patches on the head, and in general it will strike you as a brown, black and white bird, with white under wings and the most lovely orange legs and feet. Its bill is black, and with it it may be seen turning things over, probably in search of food, possibly also to give me a hint to turn over a new leaf, and bring this book to an end.

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