

FIRST RECORDS OF CARIBBEAN MARTIN (*PROGNE DOMINICENSIS*) FOR TRINIDAD, WITH  
COMMENTS ON ITS SUPPOSED MIGRATION TO SOUTH AMERICA

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**Abstract.**—We report the first records of the Caribbean Martin (*Progne dominicensis*) for Trinidad. We saw an adult male from 14 April to 15 May 1999, another male (photographed) from 9 April to 27 May 2000, and two adult males from 11 February to 7 April 2001. All observations were at Galera Point, the northeastern tip of Trinidad, only 35 km from its nearest known breeding locality in Tobago. There is little evidence that the Caribbean Martin migrates to South America through Trinidad from the Lesser Antilles or Tobago.

**Resumen.**—PRIMEROS REGISTROS VISUALES DE LA GOLONDRINA DE IGLESIAS (*PROGNE DOMINICENSIS*) PARA TRINIDAD, CON COMENTARIOS SOBRE SU MIGRACIÓN A SUDAMÉRICA. Se relata los primeros registros de la Golondrina de Iglesias (*Progne dominicensis*) para Trinidad. Observamos un macho adulto del 14 de abril al 15 de mayo de 1999, otro macho (fotografiado) del 9 de abril al 27 de mayo de 2000, y dos machos adultos del 11 de febrero al 7 de abril de 2001. Todas las observaciones fueron hechas en la punta de Galera, la punta noreste de Trinidad, a solamente 35 km de la localidad de nidificación más cercana en Tobago. Existe poca evidencia que la Golondrina de Iglesias emigra a Sudamérica por Trinidad desde las Antillas Menores o Tobago.

**Key words:** Caribbean Martin, distributional records, migration, *Progne dominicensis*, South America, Trinidad

THE CARIBBEAN MARTIN (*Progne dominicensis*) is resident from January to October in the Greater Antilles (except Cuba), Lesser Antilles, and Tobago, and is thought to migrate to South America from October to December (e.g., Ridgely and Tudor 1990, American Ornithologists' Union 1998, Raffaele *et al.* 1998), though small numbers winter in Barbados (M. Frost and E. Massiah, pers. comm.). It is a regular migrant in Curaçao and Bonaire, occurring only during fall (8 September to 13 October) and spring (7 to 30 May; Voous 1983), suggesting that it passes through the islands on its way between the Greater Antilles and South America. Vagrants have been reported from the southern Bahamas and Cayman Islands (Raffaele *et al.* 1998).

Although there are sight records of the Caribbean Martin from coastal Guyana (without details; Snyder 1966), there are no other records from South America except from the continental island of Tobago, 118 km from the South American continent, where it is resident from January to October (French 1991). Thus, the wintering destination of Caribbean Martins remains a mystery.

Situated only 19 km from the South American mainland, the continental island of Trinidad is along a potential migratory pathway connecting the Lesser Antilles and Tobago with South America. Here we report the first records of Caribbean Martin from Trinidad and comment upon its status as a possible migrant through Trinidad.

OBSERVATIONS

At 12:16 hr on 14 April 1999, Murphy found an adult male Caribbean Martin sweeping the air above Galera Point, the northeastern tip of Trinidad, among about a dozen birds including several Gray-breasted Martins (*P. chalybea*), several Short-tailed Swifts (*Chaetura brachyura*), and a lone Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*). The bird was immediately pointed out to Hayes and C. Ramjohn and was studied as it repeatedly swooped within 5 m of us and soared, nearly motionless at times, into northeasterly winds.

The bird was a metallic, steely blue on the back, head, breast and flanks. The belly was immaculate white, sharply demarcated from the dark breast and flanks and broken only by the dark legs. The primaries and secondaries appeared black. The tail was slightly forked. When relocated by Hayes, B. Sanasie, and C. Shameerudeen on 24 April 1999 and observed intermittently from 08:44–17:55 hr, Hayes noted that it was slightly larger than associating Gray-breasted Martins. It was last seen by Hayes at 07:11 on 15 May 1999.

Another (or perhaps the same) male Caribbean Martin was found by Hayes on 9 April 2000 at Galera Point, where it was observed from 12:51–13:20 hr and photographed (Fig. 1). It was subsequently seen by Hayes and G. White from 09:45–10:10 hr on 16 April 2000, by Hayes, B. Sanasie, and B. Taylor from 10:21–11:35 hr on 23 April 2000, by I. Samad on 1 May 2000, and by Hayes

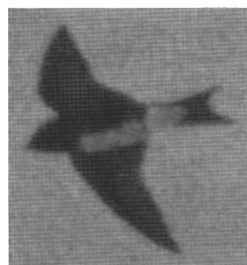


Fig. 1. Adult male Caribbean Martin at Galera Point, Trinidad, 9 April 2000. Photograph by Floyd E. Hayes.

from 10:14–11:00 hr on 27 May 2000.

On 11 February 2001, Hayes, N. Hacking and B. Hayes found two male Caribbean Martins at Galera Point, where they were observed from 09:45–10:31 hr. The birds frequently chased each other. Only a single male was seen by M. Kenefick on 2 April but Hayes noted two from 14:34–15:33 hr on 7 April 2001.

#### DISCUSSION

The adult male Caribbean Martin is readily separable from the Gray-breasted Martin, which is resident in Trinidad, by its slightly larger size and dark breast and flanks sharply demarcated from the white belly (Ridgely and Tudor 1990, French 1991, Raffaele *et al.* 1998). Female and immature Caribbean Martins closely resemble female and immature Gray-breasted Martins, respectively, and are difficult to distinguish in the field. The male Caribbean Martins observed at Galera Point associated with slightly smaller martins thought to be Gray-breasted Martins, based on our intimate familiarity with the species from previous field work in Trinidad. However, it is possible that some of the birds present were female or immature Caribbean Martins.

Hayes has noted Gray-breasted Martins entering and leaving crevices presumably used for nesting on rocky outcrops along the northern coast of Trinidad, including an islet just off Galera Point. However, we never observed any evidence of courtship or nesting in the male Caribbean Martins. Furthermore, the male Caribbean Martins observed appeared to be pure individuals lacking any evidence of hybridization with the Gray-breasted Martin. Such hybridization has never been documented but, if were it to occur, it could do so either in Trinidad or Tobago.

During the last several years, Hayes often scanned Gray-breasted Martin flocks elsewhere in Trinidad, including a large flock at Piarco International Airport, for Caribbean Martins, but failed to find any. Galera Point is only 35 km from Crown Point, Tobago, the nearest known breeding locality of the Car-

ibbean Martin. Because our observations of Caribbean Martin occurred only at Trinidad's closest point to Tobago, within a narrow range of dates (11 February to 27 May) and without any evidence of courtship or nesting, we suspect that the martins were non-breeding individuals merely wandering across from their nearest known breeding locality in Tobago. There is no substantial evidence that the Caribbean Martin migrates to South America through Trinidad from the Lesser Antilles or Tobago.

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