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BRIEF NOTE

Smooth-billed Ani (Crotophaga ani L.), a New Species of Bird for Ohio

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ABSTRACT. A smooth-billed ani (Crotophaga ani L.) is reported from Ohio for the first time. The specimen (CMNH 68471) also represents the first inland state record for the United States. Confirmation of specific identity was obtained because of the significance of the record and some equivocal characteristics of the specimen. Care in field identification of extralimital anis is suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Smooth-billed anis (Crotophaga ani L.), are resident in central and southern Florida and south through the Antilles, Central America, and northern South America. Casual or accidental individuals have occurred in Louisiana, Georgia, North Carolina, and New Jersey (American Ornithologists' Union 1983, Balch 1979). Groove-billed anis (C. sulcirostris Swainson), are resident in southern Texas and southwest Louisiana and south through Central America and coastal South America. Individuals wander regularly in autumn and have been reported in more than 20 North American states and provinces, including several inland records, e.g., South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and four Ohio records (American Ornithologists' Union 1983, Balch 1979, DeSante and Pyle 1986, Peterjohn 1989). The purpose of this note is to report the first record of a smooth-billed ani in Ohio.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A freshly dead smooth-billed ani was brought by a cat to a house in Westlake, Cuyahoga County, OH (lat. 41°28'16", long. 81°53'42") on 25 November 1993, and was given to White. Initially brought to John Carroll University, it was taken to The Cleveland Museum of Natural History where it was prepared and cataloged (CMNH 68471) and its tentative identification was confirmed by Matson. We contacted appropriate agencies to reduce the possibility that the bird was an escaped captive. Owing to some equivocal characters and the importance of the record, we sought further confirmation from the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC (NMNH), The Field Museum in Chicago (FM), and Museum of Natural Science at Louisiana State University (LSUM).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A smooth-billed Ani (Crotophaga ani L.), a new species for Ohio and inland North America, was obtained. Figure 1 shows the bill shape and characteristic broad, lighter (buffy) edging on the nape and upper back feathers of the specimen. Queries to zoos and the International Species Inventory System (ISIS) revealed no record of captive smooth-billed anis. This, and the very emaciated condition of the bird, led us to conclude it was a true vagrant.

Some of the individual's characters seemed atypical to us and to curators examining it, although within the range of variation for the species. Its length was well below average length for smooth-billed anis, but its skull was not fully ossified and it was a young bird, probably a first fall male. It lacked the high-arched culmen typical of the species, but this feature is apparently highly variable. Remsen (pers. comm.) comments that the variability is so great that its usefulness is limited to extreme cases. Grooves were entirely lacking from the bill, but are sometimes lacking in young groove-billed anis according to many, e.g., Howell and Webb (1995), Lowery (1974) and Stiles and Skutch (1989).

Moreover, while all congenerics including the greater ani (C. major Gmelin), resident from Panama to Argentina and perhaps in northeastern Mexico (American Ornithologists' Union 1983), show a strong tendency to extralimital vagrancy in much of their range (Remsen, pers. comm.), groove-billed anis are assumed far more likely vagrants in North America, and there is no previous inland record for smooth-billed ani. Consequently, we sought confirmation from institutions with larger collections of anis. Comparisons at the NMNH, FM, and LSUM yielded confirmation of specific diagnosis, as...
well as evidence that some putative distinguishing characters of the two North American species are variable, overlapping, and sometimes difficult to separate in the field, especially in young individuals.

Since many recent bird distribution records are based on well-documented sightings without a specimen, both anis occurring in the U.S. are capable of considerable vagrancy, and some field characters appear to vary significantly, this record suggests that all anis outside their breeding range should be examined closely to determine specific identity.

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LITERATURE CITED