

BRIEF NOTE

Smooth-billed Ani (*Crotophaga ani* L.), a New Species of Bird for Ohio¹

E. BRUCE McLEAN, ANDREW M. WHITE, AND TIMOTHY O. MATSON, Department of Biology, John Carroll University, University Heights, OH 44118 and Department of Vertebrate Zoology, The Cleveland Museum of Natural History, 1 Wade Oval Drive, Cleveland, OH 44106

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.

OHIO J. SCI. 95 (5): 335-336, 1995

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 congeners 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

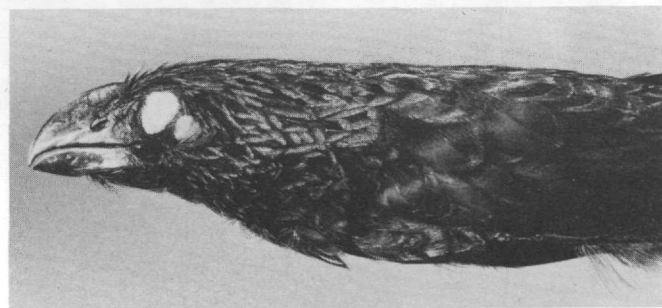


FIGURE 1. Smooth-billed Ani (*Crotophaga ani* L.) CMNH 68471. Ohio, Cuyahoga County, Westlake. 25 November 1993.

¹Manuscript received 17 July 1995 and in revised form 16 October 1995 (#BN95-14).

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. The authors thank Daniel J. White for recognizing the importance of a specimen and bringing it to our attention. We also thank M. Ralph Browning (NMNH), David Willard and Thomas Schulenberg (FM), and J. V. Remsen and Steven W. Cardiff (LSUM) for confirming diagnoses and helpful comments. Thanks are

also due Dan Flocke of The Cleveland Museum of Natural History for photography of the specimen.

LITERATURE CITED

- American Ornithologists' Union 1983 The A.O.U. Checklist of North American Birds. 6th ed. American Ornithologists' Union, Lawrence, KS. 877 pp.
- Balch, L. G. 1979 Identification of Groove-billed and Smooth-billed Anis. *Birding* 9: 295-297.
- DeSante, D. and P. Pyle 1986 Distributional Checklist of North American Birds. Artemisia Press, Lee Vining, CA. 442 pp.
- Howell, S. N. G. and S. Webb 1995 A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America. Oxford University Press, New York, NY. 851 pp.
- Lowery, G. H. 1974 Louisiana Birds. 3rd ed. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, LA. 651 pp.
- Peterjohn, B. G. 1989 The Birds of Ohio. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN. 237 pp.
- Stiles, F. G. and A. F. Skutch 1989 A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. 511 pp.