

Hummingbird Species Abound in Caribbean

Just as the flowering trees steal the show among the flora of the Caribbean, so are the birds most delightfully conspicuous among its fauna.

And of the avi-fauna the many species of hummingbirds are easily the number one attraction for the roving naturalist.

Since every living creature seeks out that habitat which provides it with the most abundant food supply, it is natural that hummers abound where there is such a profusion of tubular flowers with their ever-ready store of nectar.

Each morning as we looked out over the terraced garden of our son's home we could observe several of these tiny birds, their quivering bodies even more vivid than the flowers they visit.

HERE WE FREQUENTLY saw the verdant hummer, the smallest bird in Jamaica with its chartreuse iridescent body and its brown-

spotted throat. The smallest bird in the world is the "bee" hummer of Cuba and the Isle of Pines. Slightly more than two inches long, it is frequently mistaken for a bee, in spite of its incredibly bright plumage.

The streamer-tailed hummer or so-called "doctor bird," which is the most spectacular of Jamaica's indigenous avi-fauna, enjoys the distinction of being the island's national bird.

On memorable trips into the Blue Mountains we frequently saw his kind feasting on the great yellow bunches of the nectar-bearing flowers of the Agave plant whose raceme reaches some 30 feet into the air.

THE BODY OF the male doctor bird is a bright kelly green. His spectacular "scissors tail" which is three times the length of his body is a shining coal black as is his tufted head. His brown wings show epaulets of black, and his long curved bill is orange-red.

There are some 200 species of birds known to Jamaica. Among these we noted many migrants which are familiar summer birds with us, including the oven bird, northern water thrush, mocking-

bird, vireo and American redstart, together with flycatchers, orioles, warblers and ground doves. Of these, 52 are counted as permanent residents of the island.

Many of Jamaica's birds have amusing local names. A small species of grackle is commonly called the "kling idling" and it is easy to see why the local thrush is known as "hopping Dick."

NATIVES HAVE DUBBED a black-crested dove "mountain witch," and there are banana, coffee and orange "quits" which feed on the fruits of the suggested trees.

Loggerheads, feather toques and goat suckers are other bird names which come from the structure and suggested habits of the particular species.

It may be one of nature's protective measures that few birds of the Caribbean are accomplished songsters. However, the Jamaican nightingale has a varied and pleasing voice, and a species called the "solitaire" which is found only in lonely mountain forests sings a beautiful and haunting strain.

Serving as a frequent alarm clock during our Jamaican adventure was a flock of "Yellow billed"

parrots with bright green bodies and blue wings which set up an early morning commotion in the almond tree just outside our shuttered windows.

THE JAMAICAN "TODY," an amusing and tiny ball of green fluff with a bright red bill and a red ball of feathers under his chin, would sometimes perch in this same tree.

On a day when we escaped to the roof garden of the house to enjoy the brief tropical twilight, a large white owl drifted by on silent wings.

On an afternoon ride along Kingston's colorful harbor we observed the graceful flight of the frigate or "Man 'a War" bird with a 10-foot wing spread.

This is Jamaica's largest bird. Scavengers abound including the common turkey buzzard, "John Crow."

A species of petrel called the blue mountain duck and the bright Jamaican macaw are two of the many birds which are now extinct on the island.

AMONG THE ANIMALS to be seen in the mountains is the mongoose which was imported from

India to rid the island of cane rats and snakes. Occasionally, we saw wild pigs along the winding forest roads.

The coney, a small indigenous rodent which the Arawak Indians used for food, is almost extinct as is a large lizard, the iguana.

Fat and friendly toads and small lizards will enter the house if not discouraged.

Crocodile hunting is both a business and a sport on the south coast and along some swamps and inland streams.

Jamaica has many insects including some 90 species of butterflies, one of which is the large Papilio homerus, a real collector's item.

A termite called the "wood ant" is destructive to timbers, so that most houses are built of concrete with steel window frames, iron grill work doors and terrazzo floors.

GREAT CLOUDS of fireflies locally called "peenie-walies" light the tropical night with their elin lamps. The air is heavy with the perfume of a million flowers while the throbbing pulse of the island's teeming life ebbs and flows.

The sun drops low and the tropical day ends suddenly, too suddenly, for the transient island visitor.

Oakland Group Elects Officers

New officers were elected by the Community Concerts Association of Southern Oakland County at its recent annual meeting in the home of Mr. and Mrs. James W. Caldwell of Royal Oak.

Named were Caldwell, head of the Caldwell Music Studios, as president; Mrs. Walter Ruffer,

1869 Birmingham Blvd., Birmingham, recording secretary; Mrs. Charles C. Betner of Royal Oak, corresponding secretary; Almina Ross of Royal Oak, financial secretary; and Robert Braham of Royal Oak, treasurer.

Feb. 13, 1964

THE BIRMINGHAM (MICH.) ECCENTRIC 3-D

MRS. ROBERT MAGOR, retiring president, was in charge of the meeting. Also attending was Mrs. Thy Stacy, representative from the New York office.

Plans for the 1964-65 series were discussed including the annual membership campaign to be held April 6-11.

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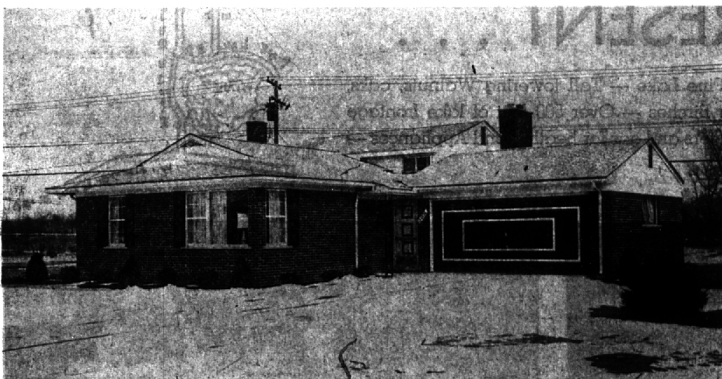
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