

# Aliens of Xamayca

## A newsletter on non-indigenous species in Jamaica

### AVIAN INVASION WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

It is documented that invasive alien species are the main driver of recent species extinctions in both animals and plants. Therefore, there is a clear and urgent need for better biosecurity measures to prevent or mitigate the impact of future invasions and protect endangered native species. With increased global trade, more species are being transported around the world either purposefully or as stowaways, which creates more opportunities for alien species to establish themselves in new habitats outside their native range. Interestingly, some species seem to have self-introduced themselves from neighbouring locations. This article herein takes a look at some alien invasive avian species and how they got to the shores of

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#### Saffron Finch

In 1810, Reverend Shakespeare came to Jamaica along with a cage containing Saffron Finches which he had acquired in the Canary Islands en route to Jamaica. He took up residence in Hodges, St. Elizabeth, where the birds escaped or were released. When P. H. Gosse studied Jamaica's birdlife in 1846/7, he found that the Saffron Finch (*Sicalis flaveola*) had already spread from "Savanna-La-Mar to Long Hill" (probably Spur Tree).

The open pastures and commons of St. Elizabeth and Eastern Westmoreland provided weed and grass seeds in abundance as well as woodlands where the birds could find nesting areas. They normally nest in holes in high trees where it would be safe from predators. These favourable conditions made it easy for the birds to become established in Jamaica.



Saffron Finch © Ricardo Miller

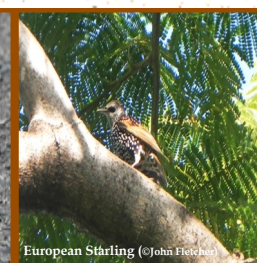
#### European Starling and English House Sparrow

The European Starling and English House Sparrow were suspected to be brought to Jamaica from Britain. The Starling became easily established because it is a habitat generalist and is able to exploit a large variety of habitats, nest sites and food sources. In Jamaica, the European Starlings are found in small flocks, usually near cattle properties. There is also a resident flock documented around Hope Gardens, Kingston.

The house sparrow first appeared in Jamaica in 1903 when it was brought in and released by Mr. W. Taylor Domville, in the vicinity of Annotto Bay in St. Mary. They became established in the area and replaced indigenous bird species by destroying their nests and young. House sparrows became fairly common along the St. Mary to Portland coast and were thought to be dependent on food scraps along the railway. This was the case until the 1950's as they disappeared when the railway closed. They have however re-established themselves in Ocho Rios. Populations at the Kinston airport may be due to new arrivals.



English House Sparrow © Ricardo Miller



European Starling © John Fielden

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## Green-rumped Parrotlet

The Green-rumped Parrotlet (*Forpus passerinus*) was brought into Jamaica about 1918 and now exists in small flocks throughout the island. It appears to be very susceptible to hurricanes, after which its numbers is documented to reduce drastically. They thrive in disturbed habitats and there has been evidence of instances where their populations increased in areas of deforestation.

It is considered widespread, commonly found in dry to arid scrub, deciduous woodland, urban parks, and cultivated areas.



Green-rumped parrotlet female (left) and male

## American Kestrel

There is no specific evidence that the American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) was introduced. This bird was not recorded by Gosse and was very rare in the first half of the 20th century. Its current status as a common resident bird may simply be due to a range expansion from neighbouring territories. It has filled an available niche and does not appear to be negatively impacting the survival of other bird species or other preys such as lizards. Nevertheless, more research would be required to ascertain its true ecological impacts.



American Kestrel (©John Fletcher)

## Cattle Egret

The Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) is originally from Africa, but has spread worldwide. This bird arrived in Jamaica about 1951, having moved from Brazil and throughout the Caribbean.

The bird is very common in Jamaica and has replaced the Smooth-billed Ani as "Cow-waiting Boy", meaning it has taken over the role of the Ani as the bird that is most often seen on cattle farms. The Ani's population

is still very abundant in Jamaica; but today, they are rarely seen on cow pastures.



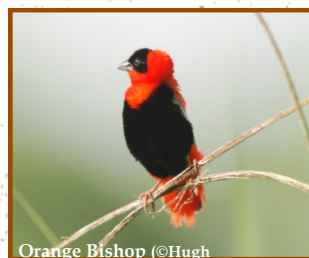
Cattle Egret

## Yellow-crowned Bishop, Orange Bishop, Chestnut Munia And Bronze Munia

In September 1988, Hurricane Gilbert blew away a cage containing four imported birds species; that is, Yellow-crowned Bishop, Orange Bishop, Chestnut Munia and Bronze Munia.

These four species survived and have expanded their ranges, but would still be considered uncommon in Jamaica. The Orange Bishop may be seen in canefields, especially in the Caymanas locality.

The Yellow-crowned Bishop can be found in a few area close to Kingston suitable for its breeding; the Dyke ponds in the north-east corner of Caymanas lands and the wetlands of the Flashes and Greater Portmore Sewage Ponds, all in St. Catherine.



Orange Bishop (©Hugh)



Somchai K.



Yellow-crowned Bishop (© Carl)



(Bronze Munia (© Jvverde)

## Shiny Cowbird

The Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*) is native to South America and was first observed in Jamaica in June 1989 approximately nine months after the passage of Hurricane Gilbert. They were observed in a cage on the north-western side of the island. By 2002, the bird had been observed in 15 locations across the island. At present it inhabits the Upper Black River Morass, particularly in disturbed areas of livestock



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production. This bird is known to also traverse agricultural areas, grasslands, riparian zones and urban areas.

This 'brood parasite' is known to negatively affect the Jamaican Oriole (*Icterus leucopteryx*) as it is not unusual to see an adult oriole feeding Shiny Cowbird chicks. The rare and endemic Jamaica Blackbird (*Nesopsar nigerrimus*), a close relative of the oriole, has been designated an endangered species due to the possible threat the cowbird may have on its population. However, there is no evidence of Shiny Cowbirds parasitizing Jamaica Blackbirds.



Shiny Cowbird (© Gabriela Olier)

## Rose-ringed Parakeet

This Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) appeared in suburban St. Andrew about 2003; probably escaped cage birds. Early estimates had the flock at about 40 birds. Today, numerous flocks can be seen on a daily basis and the population is believed to be in the hundreds or even thousands. They frequent areas such as Mona, August Town, Jacks Hill, Constant Spring and surrounding suburbs and have also been seen in Stony Hill and along the Wag Water River Valley. This valley is believed to be facilitating its expansion towards the north coast.



Rose-ringed Parakeet (©John Fletcher)

## Great-tailed Grackle

The Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus niger*) was first observed close to the Norman Manley International Airport in June 2005. The arrival of this bird is a mystery, as it is a native of Central America and is not previously known in the Caribbean. The Great-tailed Grackle is twice the size of the Greater Antillean Grackle. In 2007, a flock was observed and photographed in Portmore and in 2008, the bird was also recorded in Black River. It has since expanded its range to the Portmore and Hellshire area of St. Catherine. There is also undocumented evidence it may be in Montego Bay by the airport.



Great-tailed Grackle male (left) and female (right)

Contributor: John Fletcher, BirdLife, Jamaica & Ricardo Miller, NEPA

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# Children's Corner

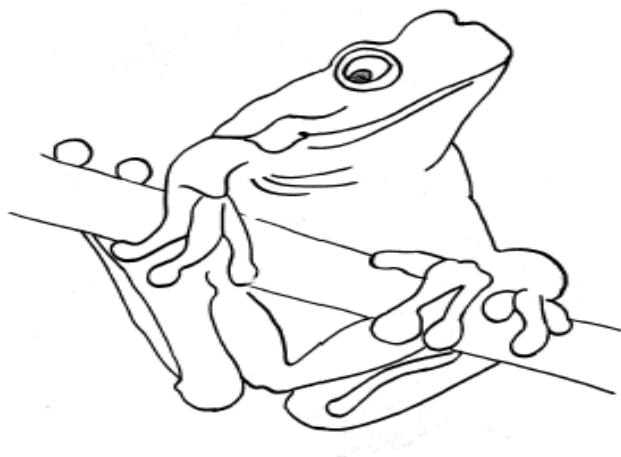
## SEARCH-A-WORD

Find the missing alien species in the puzzle below



Mongoose	White-tailed Deer
Strawberry Guava	Wild Hog
Ackee	Breadfruit
Chicken	Sorrel
Dog	Cat
Rat	Eucalyptus
Pig	Goat
Ginger Lily	Cattle Egret
Neem	Mango
Apple	Jackfruit
Cotton	Logwood
Bullfrog	Water Hyacinth

## COLOUR AND LEARN A LITTLE ABOUT ME , I AM ENDEMIC TO JAMAICA



**Frog:** I am slimy and tiny. With my pads to a leaf I cling, high up in a tree. My diet consists of insects, juicy flies and mosquitoes. Where I live in the rain-forest, there is water a-plenty to keep my skin moist. I should be prized, not despised, because I help to keep the balance of our nature.

*Picture and text adapted from  
"A-Z of wildlife and wild places in Jamaica" (Natural  
History Society of Jamaica production)*



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The Aliens of Xamayca is a quarterly newsletter that features non-native species in Jamaica.