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Smooth-billed Ani *Crotophaga ani*

Although it lacks the grace of many of its regal cousins in the cuckoo family, the Smooth-billed Ani has a great personality and is a strange and interesting bird. It often appears clumsy and awkward, as it moves through trees and bushes, and emits a plaintive call not unlike that of a guinea pig. Smooth-billed Anis are gregarious, associating as pairs or, more often, in flocks of as many as 15 individuals. They maintain year-round territories. Within the flock, a dominance hierarchy regulates the behavior of the individuals and may affect the reproductive success of pairs. A common resident of tropical South and Central America and the West Indies, the Smooth-billed Ani is a recent colonizer of subtropical Florida.

Habitat. The Smooth-billed Ani inhabits open grasslands, pastures, sparsely wooded parklands, undeveloped lots in cities and suburbs, and the scrubby edges of roads, cultivated fields, marshes, and canals. Short-grass areas form the core of the Smooth-billed Ani's territory. Its diet consists of seeds, berries, insects and their larvae, snails, and small lizards taken from the ground or from trees (Howell 1932, Loflin 1984).



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A Smooth-billed Ani flock includes monogamous pairs that build a communal nest and share breeding duties. The bulky nest, constructed of twigs and lined with leaves, is located in tangles, shrubs, palms, or trees. Each female lays 2 to 7 glossy greenish-blue eggs. Nests have been found with as many as 35 eggs, deposited in layers separated by leaves. The dominant female lays her eggs last. These eggs are presumed to have the best chance for successful hatching. Incubation lasts 14 days, and both sexes participate. The young fledge in 7 to 10 days but flightless young have been observed climbing in and around their nesting area 5 days after hatching (Loflin 1984).

Seasonal Occurrence. Breeding can occur from March through October and may be associated with food availability.

Status. The first breeding record of Smooth-billed Anis occurred in Miami in July 1938 (Sprunt 1954). In the 1940s and 1950s this species became well established south of Lake Okeechobee. And by the 1970s it was locally common throughout the southern peninsula. More recently, severe freezes have reduced the number of individuals and extirpated the species from much of this range (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992). Today, the Smooth-billed Ani is a rare to locally common breeder in south Florida from Cape Canaveral south to Dade County. It is most widespread and common in Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, and southeastern Hendry counties. Its loud call, indifference to human habitation, and gregarious behavior make breeding relatively easy to confirm.

M. C. Wheeler

Sponsored by Lucille Solan

Smooth-billed Ani

