

## REPORT OF A GREATER ROADRUNNER (*GEOCOCCYX CALIFORNIANUS*) IN NORTHWEST FLORIDA

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On or about 21 January 2001, Ed Case of Gulf Breeze, Florida received a phone call from Max Griggs, a resident of the Barrineau Park area of Escambia County, Florida. He explained that the previous summer he and his friend J. D. Barber had seen a Greater Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*) at his residence and blueberry farm.

On 4 February 2001, we visited with Mr. Griggs and his friend J. D. Barber at his residence. The residence is adjacent to La Floresta Perdida Wildlife Management Area which is a pineland forest extending west from his home for about 35 miles (56 km) to the Mobile River Delta in Alabama. His house sits on cleared land with an acre or two expanse of lawn and occasional shrubs. His blueberry farm is behind the house, and consists of several acres of bushes trimmed up from the ground so that the area beneath is clear, with rows spaced about 8 ft (2.4 m) apart. At the time of the sighting Mr. Griggs was on his tractor and the bird paid little attention to him or Mr. Barber.

He described the bird as large, having a crest, long tail, and brown streaking. He said it ran short distances in spurts, stopping periodically. He called Mr. Barber's attention to it and they watched it together. Mr. Griggs stated he knew what it was when he saw it since he had seen them before in Texas where he visits his family. When queried whether he might have mistaken it for another species such as a pheasant, he was emphatic that he knew pheasants and there were no pheasants in his area. He also explained that he hunted wild turkeys and that it was certainly not that species, Northern Bobwhite, or any other species common to his area. He had a Peterson Eastern Field Guide and pointed out that it was unequivocally the Greater Roadrunner pictured therein. Mr. Barber agreed with him. He was able to pinpoint the date, 18 August 2000, from notes in the logs of his blueberry cultivation activities.

The closest zoo is in Gulf Breeze, about 25 miles (40 km) away and separated from the site by Pensacola and Escambia bays. They have never had a roadrunner. To our knowledge, Mobile, Alabama, about 55 miles (88.5 km) away, has no zoo, and the next closest city of size is Montgomery, Alabama, about 130 miles (209 km) away. While Greater Roadrunners occur east to northwest Louisiana and Arkansas, the origin of this bird will never be known. The Mississippi River presents a substantial barrier to natural vagrancy in the eastern United States for

this terrestrial species. A.C. Bent (1964, Life Histories of North American Cuckoos, Goatsuckers, Hummingbirds and their Allies) says, "...a flying roadrunner is as much out of his element as a swimming chicken." However, this report cannot be ruled out entirely due to the witness's credibility, detailed description, and prior experience with the species.

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