

BIRDS OF THE WEST INDIES—Guy M. Kirwan, Anthony Levesque, Mark Oberle, and Christopher J. Sharpe. 2019. Lynx and BirdLife International Field Guides, Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. 400 pp. ISBN 978-84-16728-17-6. €48.00.

Since my first serious birding expedition in the West Indies nearly 30 yr ago, the books by Bond (1985) or Raffaele *et al.* (1998) have been a priority on my packing list. Now, I also pack Kirwan *et al.* (2019). Following their monumental achievement in publishing the 16 volumes of *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (HBW; del Hoyo *et al.* 1992–2011), Lynx Edicions and BirdLife International have turned their attention to country and regional field guides. This new field guide covers over 700 species with more than 1,600 illustrations by 29 artists, most taken from HBW, and has accompanying texts written by a team of 8 writers. Since the publication of HBW over a period of 19 yr, there have been many taxonomic changes which are reflected in the field guide. For example, the guide includes the elevation of several Bahamian species to species status, namely, the Lyre-tailed Hummingbird (*Nesophlox lyrura*), Bahama Nuthatch (*Sitta insularis*), and Bahama Oriole (*Icterus northropi*). The publishers should be applauded for selecting the West Indies as a focus for one of their new field guides; it is a region with nearly 200 endemic species, including 6 bird families found nowhere else.

The introduction rightly acknowledges the contribution to the region's bird knowledge made by many notable ornithologists, including the 20th century legends—Wetmore, Bond, Garrido, Keith, Wiley, and Raffaele. The geography, climate, and habitat types within the region are concisely described. The latter includes "urban environment," often omitted from field guides, yet increasingly important. A conservation section outlines the well-known threats facing the region's birds, both anthropogenic and natural. The birds most at risk are listed with mention of conservation efforts by BirdLife and their partners. The potentially extinct Cuban Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis bairdii*) and Semper's Warbler (*Leucopezia semperi*) are listed as Critically Endangered—a hopeful description. However, there is no mention of the regional organization BirdsCaribbean, or its wide-ranging and extensive bird conservation programs. BirdsCaribbean is the most active bird organization in the West Indies involved in supporting ornithologists and island partners.

The systematics and taxonomy in the field guide follow HBW and BirdLife International's *Illustrated Checklist of Birds of the World* (del Hoyo and Collar 2014, 2016). This might provide a few differences from the species order with which many readers are familiar, such as that followed by Clements *et al.* (2019), but this should not pose a significant problem. The guide adheres to the traditional format of text on the left facing a page of illustrations on the right. The detail of the individual species accounts is impressive, including not only the expected text on identification,

age, sex, voice, status, habitat, and behavior, but also a discussion of subspecies, dates first seen (or last seen for Critically Endangered birds), and pointers for differentiating between similar species. Notably, it is the treatment of subspecies that sets this field guide apart from similar guides, providing a reference for possible splits in the future. The two subspecies of Ashy-faced Owl (*Tyto glaucops*) provide a good example as the guide details full accounts of *T. g. glaucops* (found in Hispaniola) and *T. g. insularis* (found in the Lesser Antilles). Annotated maps are placed next to the illustrations and quickly enable the reader to locate the presence of species and subspecies on individual islands. The authors acknowledge areas where there is a lack of taxonomic research, for example with the House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*), saying "The House Wren complex is one of the many examples of West Indian vertebrate taxa that urgently require additional taxonomic research that will in turn inform monitoring and conservation efforts."

No doubt satisfying the increasing tech-savvy generation of birders, each species has a QR code enabling access to an additional online audio-visual resource. After downloading one of the many freely available QR readers onto my phone, I scanned the code for Guadeloupe Woodpecker (*Melanerpes herminieri*). Almost instantly I was directed to HBW Alive (www.hbw.com) with numerous photos and video. What a great bonus! Additionally, there is a useful section providing advice on birding in the West Indies, with four pages devoted to birding hotspots. These might be particularly useful to those arriving by cruise ship and having limited time ashore.

A comprehensive checklist for 28 countries and territories provides the status of birds that have been reliably recorded, and I admire the authors for explaining why they have omitted certain species such as the Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus michahellis*). The collaborators on this book are to be congratulated for a superb finished product replete with an all-weather flexi cover. Any criticism of the small print size is outweighed by the sheer volume of information and attention to detail.

The West Indies region provides birders with the opportunity to see a huge range of endemics. This book will be snapped up by those who have already experienced the region's incredible bird diversity and will be an invaluable addition to the luggage of those now eager to visit.

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—Andrew Le Fleming Dobson
President, BirdsCaribbean, 48 Lantree Crescent, Trumpington, Cambridge CB2 9NJ, UK; e-mail: andrewdobs@gmail.com