

BIRDS OF THE WEST INDIES: SECOND EDITION—Herbert A. Raffaele, James Wiley, Orlando H. Garrido, Allan Keith, and Janis I. Raffaele. 2020. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 288 pp. ISBN 978-06-91180-51-9. \$24.95.

When the paperback version of *Birds of the West Indies* (Raffaele *et al.*) was published in 2003, it became my trusted companion for birding in the region. However, the Caribbean birding world has changed considerably since then. With more than 30 species having been added to the list of West Indian birds since 2000, a new edition of the book was more than justified. To include a total of 614 species (50 more than the first edition), this new edition has 70 additional pages. Species per page have been reduced, allowing for larger illustrations, and Dale Dyer has been added to the list of artists. His excellent illustrations feature all the newly included species as well as updated versions of many original illustrations, including all the warbler species.

The new field guide incorporates current knowledge of bird movements only confirmed this century. Notably, it includes the migration of shearwaters, skuas, jaegers, and terns off the coast of Guadeloupe and the migration of several raptor species along the northwestern coast of Cuba. Of concern to most conservationists, nearly 20 species of exotic birds are now established in the region. These birds are rightly included in the field guide so that observers can look out for them and gauge whether they pose a threat to the native bird life.

Raffaele *et al.* provide an overview of the conservation issues in the region with detailed discussion of the principal causes of endangerment and extinction: habitat loss, hunting, harvest and trade, and introduced predators. The seriousness of the current situation is illustrated via the tables of Critically Endangered, Endangered, and Threatened species. The authors also offer advice on altering our conservation values and societal behavior.

Compared to the first edition, the order of birds is similar, with species grouped by shared habitats and similar physical features. Each section is color-coded along the top of each page to help readers locate and hopefully identify a bird. For example, the first species accounts cover “Seabirds and nearshore birds” followed by accounts of “Hérons, other long-legged waders, and shorebirds.” While this does not help in learning the new taxonomic order, does it really matter? Personally, I would like all new field guides to follow the new taxonomic order, which will become the standard for bird reporting, but as Raffaele states “... this is a guide for identifying birds, for amateur and professional alike. It is not a taxonomic treatise.”

When visiting a new country, most birders hope to see its unique birds. These endemic species are clearly identified in the species accounts, although using the letter “S” to indicate “found only on one island” is a little misleading for birds like the Bahama Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis rostrata*)—found on six islands—or the

Vitelline Warbler (*Setophaga vitellina*)—found on four islands.

So how does someone new to Caribbean birding decide whether to buy Raffaele *et al.* (2020) or Kirwan *et al.* (2019; see review in JCO Vol. 32)? In both guides, each species is given adequate text covering plumage details, age and sex differences, status and range, habitat, and where appropriate, additional information on voice. Raffaele *et al.* have included the weight of each species (differentiating between male and female when relevant); however, I am not sure that many readers will find this useful for identification purposes other than for comparing weights of birds with which they are already familiar. I was pleased to see that Raffaele *et al.* include both inch and centimeter measurements, as I always think of a Bee Hummingbird (*Mellisuga helenae*) being just over 2 in rather than 5.5–6.0 cm.

Although the new edition includes about 50 additional species, it only includes 614 species in total, compared to > 700 in Kirwan *et al.* In the introduction, Raffaele *et al.* state that “... native species included in the book are those for which there is a minimum of either two specimens or photographs from the region,” under the rationale that the book would otherwise contain too many species that most observers would never see. I think this is a missed opportunity, as the occurrence of extraordinary vagrant birds in the region adds to one’s knowledge and to the excitement of an unexpected sighting while out birding. Excluded are species like Ross’s Goose (*Anser rossii*), Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*), Corncrake (*Crex crex*), Cape Verde Shearwater (*Calonectris edwardsii*), Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*), Squacco Heron (*Ardeola ralloides*), and Lined Seedeater (*Sporophila lineola*), all of which have photographic evidence. Not only do Kirwan *et al.* include these species, but they also provide details of where and when these vagrant species occurred. For example, “Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Thalassarche chlororhynchos*) photographed off Guadeloupe in May 2016 and published on eBird.” Disappointingly, the New World’s first and only European Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*) is also excluded (Saint Lucia, February 2014) from this edition, despite photographic evidence on eBird. All the vagrants included (over 60 species) are deliberately placed at the back of the book on the assumption that observers are less likely to come across these species.

If you are concerned about the amount you carry when out birding, Raffaele *et al.* is not only more compact (5.25 × 8.5 in versus 6.25 × 9.0 in) but also lighter (581 g versus 819 g) than Kirwan *et al.* Notably, the books’ prices differ greatly. A search of online bookstores (October 2020) found the Raffaele *et al.* paperback edition to be just one-third the price of the Kirwan *et al.* flexi-cover version. The Raffaele *et al.* field guide is available on Kindle and both are available in hardback.

Overall, the 2nd edition of Raffaele *et al.*’s *Birds of the West Indies* is well researched and produced. It will certainly have great appeal in the Caribbean and is a welcome addition to my library.

Literature Cited

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