

BIRDS OF THE UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES—Roger Riddington (ed.). 2020. T & AD Poyser, London. 336 pp. ISBN 978-1-4729-7726-7. \$45.00.

One book covering birds on 16 islands or island groups as far flung as Montserrat, Gibraltar, the British Indian Ocean Territory, Ascension Island, and the Falkland Islands (or is it las Islas Malvinas?), might seem too strange to be true. However, these geographically diverse islands are united as “essentially remnants of the British Empire,” sharing the British monarch as their head of state, and together boasting a fantastic assemblage of avian diversity and conservation priority species.

Based on articles published in *British Birds* magazine since 2008, and supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), *Birds of the UK Overseas Territories* includes many island accounts relevant to readers of this journal. These include the Caribbean islands of Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and Turks and Caicos Islands, as well as nearby Bermuda.

The importance of these islands to avian biodiversity and conservation cannot be overstated. Across these 16 island groups, birdlife includes six albatross species, nine of 17 penguin species, and a total of 45 species considered globally threatened, three of which are Critically Endangered. Highlighted species important to the Caribbean region include the Bermuda Petrel (*Pterodroma cahow*), West Indian Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna arborea*), Forest Thrush (*Turdus lherminieri*), and Montserrat Oriole (*Icterus oberi*).

This is not a field guide, and while it would be helpful to someone planning to visit any of these islands, it is not quite a bird-finding guide either. Rather, this book highlights the unique birds that call these islands home, the key habitats on which they depend, and the relevant Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (per BirdLife International). Each island account features conservation efforts that have been undertaken to meet the unique threats these birds face—a major strength of the book. While individual island accounts vary somewhat in the topics addressed, many include interesting sections on geography, cultural and economic history, ornithological history, and other important flora and fauna present on the islands. Summaries of resident bird species occurring on the islands are typically divided among seabirds, wetland birds, and landbirds, and most Caribbean islands summaries feature passage migrants as well. While tables provide lists of breeding birds and their global conservation status for each island, they lack comprehensive descriptions of distribution, abundance, or other ecological data for most species beyond the birds of highest conservation concern.

As might be expected, several themes run through these accounts. One is how important islands and their endemics are to global biodiversity and how valuable oceanic islands are as breed-

ing sites for all kinds of seabirds. Another theme is that many islands host large numbers of migrants, especially shorebirds and waders utilizing coastal habitats—such as beaches, wetlands, and mangroves—that are quickly being lost to tourism and agricultural development. These islands, too, often host large numbers of introduced species, including many predatory mammals such as rats and mongoose, which have devastated island bird populations for centuries. Finally, climate change is widely viewed as the newest threat to these islands and their birds, with effects ranging from increasingly frequent and more powerful hurricanes, to habitat transformation, to changes in ocean currents impacting critical food supplies for nesting seabirds.

However, islands have also been at the forefront of developing conservation approaches to combat these threats, many of which are highlighted in *Birds of the UK Overseas Territories*. Locally based conservationists, island governments, and British-based organizations have all helped develop and further these conservation initiatives. This book highlights these efforts by providing accounts of the specific threats islands face, how they are being addressed, and, critically, what more needs to be done for conservation.

This is an authoritative book, with recognized experts authoring accounts, including Andrew Dobson, Jeremy Madeiros, Patricia Bradley, and Clive Petrovic, familiar to many BirdsCaribbean members. It is also an attractive book, full of nicely reproduced photos of select species in true colors, and printed on heavy, quality paper. I have few criticisms of the book, although its arrangement alphabetically—from Akrotiri Peninsula through Turks and Caicos—annoys me more than perhaps it should. Why not group the islands by region, with, for example, all of the Caribbean islands together in one section, and the South Atlantic islands in another section? But this is only a minor concern.

The only thing that I really question about this book is its intended audience. As neither a field guide, site guide, or ‘coffee table’ book of photographs, this book is a hybrid: a scholarly celebration of the value of these diverse islands for birds, and an account of the conservation efforts underway. The closest statement I could find that reflected a purpose came from the editor, who writes, “it will serve as an important baseline for what promises to be a critical period for these disparate and varied parts of the world.” Perhaps so, but wouldn’t the original articles as published in *British Birds* serve the same purpose?

The editor goes on to suggest that conservation will be promoted because this “is a book for the reader to marvel at what nature has to offer.” But I, for one, can’t help but wonder if the marvel is not just at the natural wonders of these “remnants of the British empire,” but rather that one can still boast about birds in the overseas territories of the UK. Perhaps I have a unique perspective, but from this side of the pond, even though the editor claims, “the book covers the territories as they currently exist and makes no comment on sovereignty or other related issues,”

the very existence of this book as a diverse collection of accounts of the birdlife on far-flung island territories, suggests otherwise. Nevertheless, sovereign or not, the birds of these islands are remarkable, and the many conservation efforts commendable.

—Steven C. Latta,
*Department of Conservation and Field Research, National Aviary,
Allegheny Commons West, Pittsburgh, PA 15212, USA; e-mail:
steven.latta@aviary.org.*