

FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF CUBA, SECOND EDITION. Arturo Kirkconnell and Orlando H. Garrido. 2024. Comstock Publishing Associates, Ithaca, NY. 243 pp. ISBN 9781501755811. \$29.95.

The now classic, first edition of the Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba, published in 2000, has been recently updated in an all-new second edition. Authored by two of the foremost ornithologists of Cuba and the Caribbean, Arturo Kirkconnell and the late Orlando Garrido, this second edition is more accurately described as a completely new book. The number of species covered has jumped from 354 in 2000 to 380 in 2024, new artwork, species accounts, and maps have been added, and an entirely new design and layout for the book contributes to the excellence of this field guide. The book also benefits by drawing on some of the best features from several other works by these authors, including *Birds of Cuba: a Photographic Guide* (Kirkconnell *et al.* 2020a) and *The Birds of Cuba: an Annotated Checklist* (Kirkconnell *et al.* 2020b). The result is an authoritative, accessible, and ultimately pleasing field guide to one of the most exciting islands for birding in the Caribbean.

The book begins with nearly 40 pages of standard introductory material, including sections on geography, climate, geology, the origins of the Cuban avifauna, and migration of birds through Cuba. This section contains informative lists of some of the species migrating to or through Cuba, and especially interesting lists of where concentrations of these migrants often occur. Not to be overlooked is a discussion, too, of seasonal migration within Cuba by permanent residents, a theme not always well understood in the region. An excellent section on the vegetation of Cuba describes 24 habitats or sub-types of habitat, including key indicator species, and where each habitat is distributed across Cuba. Many of these habitat descriptions include high quality photographs to better illustrate the character of the landscape.

A discussion of conservation is also of interest, especially the sections on the role of exotic species and illegal commerce as contributors to avian declines. A total of 29 species are listed as Vulnerable, Endangered, or Critically Endangered, although it is not clear if these were determined by a national entity or an outside source. Little is mentioned in this guide about measures being taken towards conservation of birds in Cuba, but a map indicating the distribution of 211 protected areas covering an impressive 20% of the country is included.

Finally, for the birding visitor, Kirkconnell and Garrido present 41 sites for birdwatching across the country. These appear to be the same sites listed in Kirkconnell *et al.* 2020a, albeit with some minor modifications to their species lists. In most cases, not enough detail is provided for actual navigation, but the distribution of sites and the species lists may help some visitors in creating itineraries for their own birding adventures. A list of endemic

taxa, including endemic subspecies, may also be of interest to trip planning, and is found in the appendix. Additional recommendations in terms of advice for a safe and rewarding trip are also included here.

The color plates, maps, and species accounts undoubtedly form the core of any field guide, and here these elements are high quality! The relatively large format for a field guide (~23 × 15 cm) allows the authors to publish larger images of the birds alongside large range maps and more complete species accounts. Maybe it is my aging eyes, but I appreciate very much the larger format! Even though the book is now beyond the size of my jean's pocket, I think most birders carry their books and other gear in a shoulder bag, and this guide will fit perfectly there, or even in the pocket of a small day pack.

With this new, more traditional format, gone from the second edition are the odd shadow images that appeared on the facing page of each plate in the first edition where the species, sex, and age of each image was printed. Instead, one can now see all of the identifying information for each species on the double-page spread. In addition to English, local, and scientific names, species accounts include size references, descriptions of body form, plumage, colors, and other morphological traits, habitat, unique behaviors that can aid in identification, status in Cuba, and voice. These descriptions are, in my estimation, extremely thorough and well done. Where appropriate, male, female, and juvenile individuals are all described and illustrated, as are breeding and nonbreeding plumages. Range maps are included for all breeding native species.

The illustrations for this new second edition of the Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba come from a variety of artists. Many appeared in the first edition, but here are often digitally rearranged to meet more recent taxonomies, flipped as a mirror image for aesthetics or ease of comparison, or otherwise modified and improved. As we have seen in many field guides to Caribbean island avifauna, many of these illustrations appeared first in *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies* (Raffaele *et al.* 1998). The willingness of Herb Raffaele, his co-authors, and the artists of that book to allow the continued use of those images for > 25 years is remarkable! Quality images of birds are neither easy nor inexpensive to acquire, so having access to this body of art has allowed many, many islands to create their own, locally focused field guides that have advanced birding and conservation considerably.

That said, many new images of birds are found in this field guide. A total of 11 artists appear in the plates, with Cuba well-represented. As may be expected with contributions by multiple artists, there is to my eye some variation in quality of images. Some depictions suffer from slight differences in the relative size of body parts (like bills), and others appear to be unnaturally elongated in their body form, but these are not common and are minor issues which will not affect identification or appreciation of the birds.

I jest here, but my only complaint with the Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba is this: do we really need yet another book on the birds of the Caribbean that has a tody on the cover? I ask this as someone who has put a Hispaniolan tody on the cover of more than one of my own books! I know they are endemic, they are very cute, and they just scream Caribbean adventure. I also know the Cuban Tody is the best looking of the genus with those beautiful blue neck patches. However, we have many other handsome endemics as well; maybe in the third edition of the Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba we can look forward to highlighting some of those species!

Overall, I find this to be an excellent field guide, highlighted by its user-friendly design, authoritative species accounts, and large, handsome illustrations. The color reproduction is top notch, and although softbound, the covers and binding appear durable. As is common, the typeface is small, especially in the species accounts, but it is clean and readable. I would recommend this field guide without reservation to anyone traveling to Cuba, or to those who may bird vicariously from home or have other reasons to explore the avifauna of Cuba. In many ways,

I see this book as a feather in the cap of Caribbean ornithology, and a model for future field guides from our region.

Literature Cited

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