

BOOK REVIEWS

FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO.—Martyn Kenefick, Robin Restall, and Floyd Hayes. 2008. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, and Christopher Helm, London. 256 pp. ISBN 978-0-7136-8544-2. \$32.70.

Break-out field guides, which are extracted and expanded from field guides covering larger areas, have come of age. Dividing a massive book into more easily used subparts is sensible and highly practical. Birders can elect to carry with them high quality, smaller and lighter books containing information specific to the areas being studied. Moreover, field guides covering narrow geographic regions can be updated more often, more easily, and at less expense than books covering larger areas. The Kenefick-Restall-Hayes (KRH) field guide reviewed here is one such break-out work, the first of several country-specific works proposed from the monumental two-volume *Birds of Northern South America: An Identification Guide* [BNSA], by Robin Restall *et al.* (2006a, b).

In the 140-yr history of bird study in the two-island republic of Trinidad & Tobago (T&T), the KRH is a needed and important contribution, and a book well worth owning. Its coverage is complete while being neither overwhelming nor intimidating.

Léotaud (1866) wrote the first ornithological summary of Trinidad, *Oiseaux de l'Île de la Trinidad* (in French), followed 28 yr later by Chapman's (1894) "The birds of the island of Trinidad." Four decades later, Roberts (1934) published "List of Trinidad birds with field notes" and Belcher and Smooker (1934, 1935, 1936a, b, 1937a, b) published a six-part monograph, "On the Birds of the Colony of Trinidad and Tobago." Finally, Junge and Mees (1958) published "The avifauna of Trinidad and Tobago."

Herklots (1961) produced the first true field guide to the birds of T&T, *The Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*. Since then a new or revised field guide to the birds of T&T has appeared about once every two decades: Richard ffrench's (1973) *A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago*, in 1991 a significantly updated version of that work (ffrench 1991), and now in the 2000s the new KRH field guide. Each has been a significant improvement over its immediate predecessor, with ffrench's (1980) guide having made the most significant leap forward in both

quality and coverage. For nearly 30 yr the ffrench guide has been the standard work carried afield by birders visiting this twin-island paradise; indeed, many consider Richard ffrench to be the father of T&T ornithology. In 2002, a score of scientists published a monograph in his honor (Hayes and Temple 2002). Appropriately, the KRH guide is dedicated to Richard ffrench. A third edition of the ffrench field guide is in preparation.

Hayes and Kenefick began work on an early version of the book in 2000. It was formally commissioned by Christopher Helm in 2006 and appeared 2 yr later. To create the KRH, the authors wrote a section for each species detailing its description and status in T&T. Hayes wrote most of the introductory chapters and prepared the maps and graphs. Kenefick (mostly) and Hayes wrote the species descriptions. Restall crafted the illustrations and edited the drafts. Two versions are available: the British version (Christopher Helm) and the American version (Yale University Press), differing only in front and back covers and copyright pages.

All three authors are eminently qualified to write such a book. Martyn Kenefick, a freelance birder and amateur ornithologist, leads birding tours to such diverse locations as Kenya and Kazakhstan in addition to T&T, where he resides. Robin Restall, a former executive director of the Phelps Ornithological Collection, Caracas, Venezuela, is now a director of the Phelps Foundation. In addition to coauthoring the BNSA he also wrote *Munias and Mannikins* (Restall 1996). Floyd Hayes, professor of biology at Pacific Union College and editor-in-chief of *Journal of Caribbean Ornithology*, conducted ornithological and taxonomic field work in Paraguay for 3 yr and in T&T for 9 yr. He is a charter member of the T&T Rare Bird Committee (TTRBC). Hayes and Kenefick both have served as Secretary of that august committee.

The KRH consists of an introduction, acknowledgments, and then sections on geography, climate, habitats, taxonomy and nomenclature, bird identification, how to use the book, documenting and reporting bird sightings, ethics, security, where to watch birds in T&T, species accounts, an official checklist of the birds of T&T, information about the TTRBC, and an index. Despite inclusion of all of this information, one of the positive attributes of this book is its small size. At 13.5 × 21.5 cm (5.25 ×

8.5 in) and 256 pages, the KRH weighs only 0.4 kg, equivalent to a Peterson field guide. Those of us who visit T&T frequently appreciate the reduced size and weight, although some of us regret the use of the small font size. The layout mirrors that used in the Peterson series, with text on the left and illustrations on the right.

The KRH provides trinomial (subspecies) names where known, but does so inconsistently. For example, under “Bird Names” we find that *Thamnophilus doliatus tobagensis* is the endemic subspecies of Barred Antshrike on Tobago and that *T. d. fraterculus* inhabits Trinidad. The “How to use this book” section states that where more than one subspecies occurs on the islands, the name of the more common race is listed and subsequently described. However, in the text the species is simply called *Thamnophilus doliatus fraterculus*, with no clarification of which island *fraterculus* inhabits and no reference at all to the occurrence of *tobagensis*, the endemic Tobago subspecies. Mention of both subspecies in the text would have been preferable, or perhaps a list could have been provided of species or subspecies recorded on Tobago only.

The dynamic nature of ornithological nomenclature, compounded by differing spellings between British and American English, led to other problems in the KRH. In some cases the KRH provides both the American and British common names; for example, *Riparia riparia* is listed as “Bank Swallow (Sand Martin),” and *Pluvialis squatarola* is given as “Black-bellied (Grey) Plover.” This parenthetical technique is excellent for eliminating potential confusion, especially for visiting birders using bird checklists. I believe that the use of “grey” for species described from the Eastern Hemisphere (e.g., Grey Heron [*Ardea cinerea*]) is perfectly acceptable. However, I am strongly opposed to a publisher changing the spelling of formally designated common names of Western Hemisphere species such as Gray-headed Kite (*Leptodon cayanensis*) to Grey-headed Kite simply for the sake of consistency. This practice is as egregious as having someone change my surname from Murphy to Murphey because many other people spell it that way. The same holds true for Tricolored (not Tricoloured) Heron (*Egretta tricolor*). These common names have been formally recognized and approved by the American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU), which governs nomenclature on our side of the pond. Names of South American species are covered by the AOU’s South American Classification Committee (SACC). Some might find this issue trivial, but for the sake of sta-

bility and consistency I think that AOU-approved spelling should be used for Western Hemisphere species.

Other nomenclatural problems are more serious. According to the authors, the publisher of the BNSA requires that BNSA taxonomy and nomenclature be followed in the production of all spin-off field guides, allowing perfect referencing back to the parent work. Unfortunately, the KRH contains no mention of that stipulation, so the reader erroneously concludes that the authors themselves created or at least approved of at least nine “new” common names used in the KRH. The KRH changes names by dropping hyphens (Whistling-Ducks, Tiger-Herons, and about 15 other groups) and uses common names coined in the BNSA that have not been submitted to the AOU (Grey-lined Hawk [*Asturina nitida*], Northern Crested Caracara [*Caracara cheriway*], Amazonian Violaceous Trogon [*Trogon violaceus*], Amazonian White-tailed Trogon [*T. viridis*], Southern House Wren [*Troglodytes musculus*], Crowned Ant Tanager [*Habia rubica*], Masked Cardinal [*Paroaria nigrigenis*], and Highland Hepatic Tanager [*Piranga lutea*]). Astoundingly, neither the common nor the scientific name of one species included in the KRH—the Ring-necked Seed-eater (*Sporophila insularis*)—appears anywhere in the SACC checklist; initially described as a subspecies of the Gray Seedeater (*Sporophila intermedia*), the authors believe it merits elevation to species rank based on data presented in Restall (2002), but a proposal for species recognition was rejected by the SACC.

The KRH states, “We have adopted the official English and scientific names used by the [AOU SACC], using British spellings” (p. 13). This is true regarding British spellings but, as explained above, is manifestly incorrect regarding adoption of SACC names. The usage actually is based on the International Ornithological Congress’s endorsed list of recommended English names, which the AOU overwhelmingly voted *not* to adopt. I see this as a most unfortunate end-run around the SACC, which exists in part to standardize names of Western Hemisphere species. In the BNSA, Restall *et al.* (2006a:9) wrote, “Our ‘recognition’ of any taxon is absolutely not an authoritative, formal treatment with scientific credentials. The last thing we would wish is to be accused of having exhibited the ‘taxonomy by field guide’ syndrome. The species limits presented here are simply what we have accepted, for our purposes of identifying taxa, in as unequivocal way as possible.”

Nomenclatural matters aside, the KRH provides superb species coverage, illustrating and describing all 467 species documented through mid-2007, including such ephemeral sightings as Orange-fronted Yellow-Finch (*Sicalis columbiana*) and Scaled Dove (*Columbina squammata*), both seen only in 1926. Many species are illustrated that have never before been depicted in a T&T field guide. Moreover, depicted are not only the usual adult breeding-plumage male with accompanying female, but also shown for many species are juvenile males and females. Up to six images are included for some species, such as some of the warblers. These illustrations will be immensely useful to birders visiting T&T during the boreal autumn and winter months when flocks of passage or wintering migrants often include more juveniles than adults.

The artwork ranges from excellent (passerines) to average (shorebirds). Some species are depicted incorrectly; for example, Western Reef-Heron (*Egretta gularis*) does not have a strongly decurved bill and Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) has different proportions than those depicted. I was puzzled as to why many shorebirds are illustrated and described only in juvenal and basic plumage, even though during springtime they often appear in T&T in alternate plumage. The layout of species on some of the plates seems awkward, with small illustrations in large areas of white space. For example, on the "Oilbird, Potoo and Nightjar" plate, the Oilbird (*Steatornis caripensis*) image is large (9 cm), whereas that of the pair of White-tailed Nightjars (*Caprimulgus cayennensis*) barely spans 3 cm despite large areas of available white space. I understand the reason for this, which is inherent in field guides derived from more comprehensive works. In the source book, all individuals in a species group are illustrated at the same scale. When images from such groups are extracted for use in a spin-off field guide and are grouped with images from unrelated groups, the scales among the groups may vary. Enlarging an image from the source publication to more than 120% is impossible without severely degrading it. The alternative is to have the image repainted at a different scale.

After studying the illustrations in the field guide, many birders turn next to "Similar Species," a feature I have often wished had been included in the ffrench (1973, 1991) guide. The KRH provides excellent coverage of every difficult species through the use of Peterson-system lines on the illustrations and by the comprehensive nature of its "similar species" descriptions. This feature will be of great

value to birders trying to distinguish among tricky groups such as small flycatchers and female hummingbirds.

Finally, the "Status" section of each species description provides an incredibly important resource for the visiting birder. It conveys not only a general sense of how frequently a particular species might be expected to be seen, and where, but also provides, for rarer species, specific information such as "six sightings in the last 12 years," "two sightings on Trinidad, the most recent at Waller Field in 1943," and "no acceptable records from Tobago for at least 100 years." Armed with this resource, visiting birders will be prompted to take a second look at their purported Orange-breasted Falcons (*Falco deiroleucus*), determining them to be the Bat Falcons (*Falco ruficularis*) they really are.

I recently led my 56th birding tour to T&T. During our trip we all used the KRH in the field for the first time. I can attest to its immense usefulness in the field. Those of us who have used the ffrench (1991) guide for years often have, for reasons of weight and convenience, removed the plates and had them bound separately for field use. The modest size of the KRH obviates that need, accelerates the speed with which one can locate desired species, and the vastly increased number of illustrations compared with the ffrench guide affords users a higher likelihood of finding a match quickly and identifying a bird correctly.

I like the ffrench (1991) guide and look forward to purchasing the rumored third edition if it ever appears. ffrench's (1991) guide contains a vast amount of information, and I continue to refer to it for information on seasonality and nesting. But for more than 30 yr I have longed for a more portable, Peterson-like field guide to the birds of T&T. I already find myself longing for a second edition of KRH with all of the wrinkles ironed out, but I believe that my desire has been met. My final analysis: if you plan to bird in T&T, you will want to own this book.—WILLIAM L. MURPHY, 7835 Tufton Street, Fishers, IN 46038, USA; e-mail: billmurphy8@sbcglobal.net.

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- BIRDS OF NORTHERN SOUTH AMERICA: AN IDENTIFICATION GUIDE (2 volumes).—Robin Restall, Clemencia Rodner, and Miguel Lentino. 2007. Yale University Press, New Haven, and Christopher Helm, London. Volume 1: 880 pp., ISBN 978-0-300-10862-0, \$95.00. Volume 2: 656 pp., ISBN 978-0-300-12415-6, \$65.00. Volumes 1 and 2: \$150.00.

This is quite simply a remarkable book, owing to its thoughtful design, attention to detail, and its inclusion of all subspecies and plumage variations found throughout the region of coverage. Bound as two volumes, *The Birds of Northern South America* is a complete guide to all 2,308 breeding, regularly visiting and vagrant species occurring in Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana. More pertinent to readers of this journal, the book also covers the birds of the islands of Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, Trinidad, and Tobago— islands which are considered zoogeographically South American. As we have seen in a few other recent bird guides, the authors and publishers have chosen to separate the species accounts in one volume, with the plates and range maps in a second volume. With such a huge avifauna to cover, this facilitates portability, but as the authors make clear, the guide is not primarily intended for use in the field, but as a companion volume and complement to national field guides and as a reference for ornithologists and museum staff. In these respects the book excels.

Each volume of this guide is prefaced by identical introductions to taxonomy and nomenclature, molt and ageing, how to read the species accounts and plates, and bird topography. In the first volume, there also follows a discussion of climate, and vegetation and habitats of the region. A glossary of 40 habitat types varies from coastal marine and mangrove habitats to the *paramo* of the high Andes, and certainly provides an indication of why we see such remarkable diversity in the region. Also included is a brief overview of avian diversity, an ornithological history of the region, a presentation of Nearctic, austral and intra-tropical migrants, and a lucid overview of the state of avian conservation in northern South America.

Volume 1 presents succinct species accounts that complement well the plates of Volume 2. These accounts include English and scientific names, a reference to the plate(s) illustrating the species, and descriptions for identification. The descriptions emphasize the most typical representative plumage of