

## BOOK REVIEWS

THE BIRDS OF HISPANIOLA: HAITI AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC.—Allan Keith, James Wiley, Steven Latta, and José Ottenwalder. 2003. British Ornithologists' Union Check-list No. 21. 293 pp. The Natural History Museum, Tring, UK. ISBN 0-907446-26-4. \$63.00.

BIRDS OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND HAITI.—Steven Latta, Christopher Rimmer, Allan Keith, James Wiley, Herbert Raffaele, Kent McFarland, and Eladio Fernandez. 2006. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 287 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-691-11890-1. \$35.00. French and Spanish editions (*Les Oiseaux d'Haiti et de la Republique Dominicaine* and *Aves de la Republica Dominicana y Haiti*, respectively) are available from Fondo para la Conservación de la Hispaniola.

Hispaniola is a large mountainous island smack in the middle of the Caribbean and the West Indies. Its montane forests contain many endemic species and it is a crossroads for migrants, wanderers, and vagrants of many kinds. The history of the islands is very colourful, and redolent of all the romanticism, hope and glory, tragedy and dismal consequences of European colonialism in the Caribbean. Anybody interested in the birds of the West Indies could not fail to be fascinated by the birds on Hispaniola, and be delighted by the available literature. Of course there are field guides that cover the birds of the West Indies, the most recent by Raffaele *et al.* (1998) being the most complete and comprehensive, and which embraces all the birds of Hispaniola. However, it is the dedicated book that is most useful, and in the case of Hispaniola there are no less than two quite excellent books, one of which is available in English, French, and Spanish editions. I think this might be a unique situation for the New World. I apologize in advance if these reviews seem adulatory, the books in question are simply first class, and exemplary.

*The Birds of Hispaniola* is the definitive source of virtually all the material the ornithologist might need before getting down to the behaviour of the birds themselves. There are five coloured maps showing relief, rainfall, topography of the island, and vegetation types. No less than 34 excellent colour photographs show the various habitats, and there are another 32 first class photographs of birds, three or four to a page. The Introduction has 66 in-

formation-packed pages: a tight but most informative history of each of the two countries forming the island, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, reads with the interest of a good novel. The environmental situation in the Dominican Republic is dire, but Haiti is clearly a basket case, the deforestation there being possibly the worst case in the world. Further sections deal with sections on geography, climate, and weather, vegetation, and the forests. The section on migration is large and packed with details and data.

The actual Checklist of species gives short, precise details on status, habitat, and breeding records for each species, but this is not a field guide for birders, there are no descriptions and nothing on behaviour. Each species account gives a list of the museum collections that have specimens, and gives the total numbers of specimens (but not catalogue numbers) divided by the two countries. There are seven important appendices, including a gazetteer, and the bibliography alone makes the book essential for the student or ornithologist intent on researching birds of Hispaniola.

*The Birds of the Dominican Republic and Haiti* is the field guide, published in French, Spanish, and English editions. Three of the authors of the earlier BOU Check-list and additional colleagues built upon the earlier work to produce a classic field guide that follows the style and layout of Raffaele *et al.* (1998). There are two maps in black-and-white (roads and places, and topography). Introductory chapters deal with topography and habitats, endemics to subspecies level, conservation issues, national parks, species in danger, and a short history of ornithology on Hispaniola. There are 57 plates of more than 300 species; each plate has brief field notes on the opposite page, including the local names. The identification plates are taken from Raffaele *et al.* (1998), and have been redesigned. Unfortunately the images are smaller than in the West Indies guide, but are better spaced and possibly easier to use as a result. They are perfectly drawn, showing all principle plumages and there are smaller images of birds in flight where that helps identification. Following what appears to be a tradition, started by ffrench (1973) and then by Raffaele *et al.* (1998), there are full-page portraits of endemics in natural habitat, painted very well by Barry Kent MacKay. Unfortunately, these birds are not included in the

identification plates, and so must be included by the user when turning the pages to identify an unknown bird.

The species accounts are concise and complete, headed with the common name, scientific name, small map of the island showing where the bird occurs, and a brief descriptor (usually a single word) of status. The text gives a pretty full description of each species, including juveniles, and avoids unnecessary details. This is followed by a paragraph on similar species, sensibly discussing the confusion species and not repeating parts of the description just given. Then follows qualitative notes on distribution, status, breeding (including nest and eggs), extra-territorial distribution, and finally, other names including Creole and island vernaculars.

Whilst one volume is clearly designed for the scientist and ornithologist, and the other for visiting birders and local people, I am personally very happy to have both books, and I find them perfectly complementary.—ROBIN L. RESTALL, *Colección Ornitológica Phelps*, Caracas, Venezuela; and c/o Aerocav 1330, P.O. Box 025304, Miami, FL 33102-5304, USA.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- FFRENCH, R. P. 1973. A guide to the birds of Trinidad and Tobago. Livingston Publishing Company, Wynnewood, PA. 470 pp.  
RAFFAELE, H., J. WILEY, O. GARRIDO, A. KEITH, AND J. RAFFAELE. 1998. A guide to the birds of the West Indies. Helm, London.
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#### REVIEWERS OF VOLUME 20

We thank the following individuals for reviewing manuscripts (more than one indicated in parentheses) for volume 20: Martin Acosta, P. A. Buckley, Christopher Clark, Dennis Denis, Andrew Dobson (2), Martin Acosta, Ruud Van Halewijn, Jessica Hardesty, Steven Holliday, Susan Koenig, James

Kushlan (3), Daniel Lane, Catherine Levy, William Mackin, Douglas B. McNair, Lourdes Mugica, Robert L. Norton, Kurt Radamaker, Robin L. Restall, Antonio Rodríguez, Adrienne Tossas, Pascal Villard, Jeffrey Wells, and Joseph M. Wunderle.