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BOOK REVIEWS

BIOMETRICS OF BIRDS THROUGHOUT THE GREATER CARIBBEAN BASIN.—Wayne J. Arendt, John Faaborg, George E. Wallace, and Orlando H. Garrido. 2004. Proceedings of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, Vol. 8, No. 1. 33 pp. and CD. ISSN: 0511-7550. $25.00; available from the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, 439 Calle San Pablo, Camarillo, CA 93012, USA; website: www.wfvz.org.

The smallest bird in the world is generally thought to be the Bee Hummingbird (*Mellisuga helenae*) from Cuba. Just how small is it? An average of about 2.15 g (n = 4), according to the authors of this amazing compilation of morphometric data. And according to this database, it has some rivals in mass. Try the Blue-tailed Emerald (*Chlorostilbon mellisugus*) with a slightly lower mean weight of 2.12 g (n = 5). But the Bee Hummingbird remains the overall champion. After all it only has a 2.5 cm mean tarsus length, nearly half of its closest rival.

You could get lost playing with the vast descriptive statistics of these proceedings, but the authors had more important ideas for this dataset. They list seven major uses for morphological datasets such as this one, each backed by a daunting laundry list of citations: 1) avian genetics and evolution; 2) systematics; 3) energetics; 4) ageing and sexing; 5) morphology and ecomorphology; 6) conservation and management; and 7) avian biogeography, and population and community ecology. I quickly thought of another use for the data: setting measurement ranges for each species to avoid errors in both the actual measurements as well as data entry.

The authors present biometric data for about 30,000 individual birds of 276 species in 15 orders, 45 families, and 144 genera on 30 islands. This represents around 45% of all the bird species found in the Caribbean basin!

A data set of this size didn't come about overnight. The authors and contributors spent more than 40 years compiling these data. Most of the measurements were taken from live individuals during banding operations. Almost half of them come from a banding station in the Guanica dry forest in southwestern Puerto Rico. A third of the records come from Cuba and Cayo Coco, a small satellite island.

The heart of the proceedings is the accompanying CD-ROM that includes a morphometrics table summarizing the descriptive statistics for each species, and also all individual species' "raw" data files. The user simply inserts the CD-ROM and follows the directions on the screen. I found it easy and intuitive to follow. It does require Adobe Reader, which is included on the disk for installation. However, this is an older version and I recommend users simply

visit the Adobe internet site for the latest version.

Each species is listed in the morphometrics table in phylogenetic order following nomenclature used by the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds (7th ed., 1998). Perhaps one misgiving is that only English names are included. The table has Adobe PDF bookmarks listed by order, and for Passeriformes, the families are also listed. Species are shown grouped by island, and the sample sizes of all birds measured per island are given. For species inhabiting more than one island, descriptive statistics are given for all islands combined, followed by each island, and further separated by gender and age when available.

Most impressive was the willingness of the authors to openly share their raw data. The individual species' data files consist of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets with the complete set of raw data for each. For those users without this software, this could present a problem. However, Microsoft does offer a free Excel Viewer on their web site. Within each file, records are listed by date, island, banding site, and habitat. The authors do include a summary table in the book listing the islands, banding sites, and major vegetation associations in which the birds were mist netted or collected. It would have been helpful for the authors to include latitude, longitude, and elevation for each site.

The authors acknowledge the lack of data testing gender and age, especially for rare and endangered species, non-forest species, and broad-ranging species. The authors intend to continually to add more data and encourage others to do so as well. With the information age this may become a reality.

Perhaps the next phase of this data set could be completed via a cooperative internet based project such as the Avian Knowledge Network (AKN), an international organization of government and non-government institutions focused on understanding the patterns and dynamics of bird populations across the Western Hemisphere. The AKN is bringing together observational data on birds. This includes data from bird-monitoring, bird-banding, and broad-scale citizen-based bird-surveillance programs.

As the authors readily admit, "…it was difficult for us to standardize everything. Despite the inconsistencies, we hope that researchers will benefit by having the "raw" data to use in analyses of their own." I am certain that we will see this monumental data set cited over and over for many years to come.—KENT MCFARLAND, *Vermont Center for Ecostudies, PO Box 420, Norwich, Vermont, 05055 USA; e-mail: kmcfarland@vtecostudies.org*.

A LA DÉCOUVERTE DES OISEAUX D' HAITI.—Florence E. Sergile. 2005. Société Audubon Haiti. 188 pp. ISBN: 99935-2-558-8. $45; available (payable by check) from Florence Sergile, 3407 NW 54th Lane, Gainesville, FL 32653, USA.

Haiti is arguably in greater dire need of immediate, concerted conservation efforts than any other Western Hemisphere nation. The country's burgeoning human population, fueled by decades of socioeconomic hardship and political instability, has unwittingly brought about massive ecological degradation. The richly diverse avifauna of the island of Hispaniola is relegated in Haiti to a few remnants of intact habitat. To a situation that at times appears hopeless, Florence Sergile's *A la Découverte des Oiseaux d'Haiti* provides an uplifting glimmer of hope. Part entertainment, part teaching tool, part rallying cry for conservation, longtime Haitian bird expert and committed educator Sergile has created a remarkable, inspirational piece of work. Under the aegis of Haiti's leading bird conservation group, Société Audubon Haiti, and with financial support from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this book promises to change the way Haitians perceive their country's avifauna.

Sergile's engaging, attractive, and sturdy spiral-bound book is aimed primarily at Haitian children, but is designed for use by school teachers and interested adults as well. Written entirely in French, with bird names given in Creole, it is both user-friendly and technically sound. From the front inside cover flap, which briefly and clearly explains how to use the book, to the four pocket-sized inserts of common birds inside the back cover, the book is geared towards being fun and practical to use. It is liberally illustrated with colorful diagrams and sketches, as well as beautifully-reproduced images of birds from the 1998 *A guide to the birds of the West Indies* by Herb Raffaele and others. This blend of informal art with technically accurate, aesthetically striking illustrations of Haiti's birds is effective and instructive.

A textbook this is not. Technical ornithological information is well-integrated with the informal, hands-on "how-to" aspects of the book, in ways that should enable users to learn about avian biology without being overwhelmed or bored by it. Throughout the book, an engaging cartoon *Chingolo* appears to provide useful information and tips on birds, their biology and natural history, and how to observe and appreciate them. This lively *p'tit oiseau* speaks in a first-person voice and addresses its audi-