

BIRDS OF ARUBA, BONAIRE, AND CURAÇAO: A SITE AND FIELD GUIDE.—Jeffrey V. Wells and Allison Childs Wells. 2017. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. 488 pp. ISBN: 978-1-5017-0107-8. \$39.95.

Formerly known as the Netherlands Antilles, and today frequently referred to as the ABC Islands, Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao have received a mini-infusion of birdwatching resources of late. In 2009, Prins *et al.* published their comprehensive *Checklist of the Birds of Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire, South Caribbean*, and in 2011, de Boer *et al.* published their Princeton field guide, *Birds of Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire*, based in part on Restall *et al.*'s 2006 field guide for nearby northern South America. Why another guide to the islands' birds was necessary may not be clear, although a closer look at the Wells and Wells book may offer an answer.

As the subtitle of the handsome *Birds of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao* indicates, this is more than a guide to bird identification—it is a *site* guide and a *field* guide. While it is not unusual for a field guide to recommend a few top birding locations, the site guide portion of this book covers nearly 70 pages and covers each island separately. This site guide is very well done, and includes useful and detailed maps, instructions for finding the sites and navigating within the sites, and birds one might find at each location. I expect one could arrive on any one of the ABC islands and feel entirely comfortable with their birding options during their stay. Clearly, this feature of the guide was written by authors who know these islands and have spent many wonderful days of birdwatching. The quality of the site guide alone makes this a standout feature!

The field guide portion of this book—only 120 pages of the total book length—is easily accessed through the all-important plates for species identification, which are quickly located by the blue tabs or margins at the top of each page. Spread across 59 plates, 294 species are well illustrated by Robert Dean who has previously illustrated guides to Costa Rica and Panama. I think the illustrations are very well done, and are spread nicely within a plate so that they are not excessively small or cramped. I find the colors on some depictions a little “washed out” but I also suspect that that is a problem with the printer rather than the artist. I would prefer to see more examples of the variation that occurs in plumages with sex, age, and season, as one finds, for example, in the de Boer *et al.* (2011) field guide, especially for the migratory species that pass through or over-winter in sometimes surprising plumage variations. But for most birds encountered, the plates are easily adequate for identification.

Identification of birds to species is also facilitated by thoughtful descriptions of each species which appear on the page facing each plate. These short descriptions include size, status, and a description of key field marks. Mention may be made of voice,

flight patterns, or other behavioral cues that aide in identification, as well as tips on how to distinguish a species from similar species. In my opinion, these sorts of condensed descriptions are not easily rendered unless you really know the birds, and clearly the Wells' know these birds.

A more thorough and very complete treatment of each species is also included in comprehensive species accounts located in a separate section of the book. These accounts cover in great detail physical descriptions of the bird, voice, similar species, status, and range. Here is another area that really sets this guide apart, as the quality, depth, and detail of the species accounts is not often seen in a field guide. Of note too is the section on a species' status, which benefits from the publishing history noted above, as well as other valuable resources that the Wells' have drawn on.

A final section of the book—more than 30 pages in length—addresses conservation issues on the ABC islands. A conservation section has become somewhat expected in field guides these days, but like everything else in this guidebook, the conservation issues are comprehensively presented. While certainly appreciated here, I wonder whether such an inclusive summary might be published elsewhere to find a broader audience.

Birds of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao concludes with a species checklist, a bibliography, and an index. The checklist is titled as an “annotated” checklist, though it is actually a simple checklist by island. The bibliography should be useful to researchers or others with an interest in the literature behind this handbook. The index includes both English and scientific names for all of the species, but perhaps unfortunately it does not include alternate names in Dutch or Papiamentu, although they do appear prominently in the species accounts. I am unaware as to how much either alternate may be used in the ABC islands, but it seems including them in the index would be valuable to some users of the guide.

I would certainly recommend that anyone with an interest in birds who is considering a trip to Aruba, Bonaire, or Curaçao would benefit from having a copy of this guide. While considerably longer and heavier than the competing Princeton field guide, the excellent, comprehensive site guide is a definite bonus, and the illustrations and excellent species accounts are of considerable value. This comprehensive guidebook is a tremendous contribution to ornithology and conservation in the ABC islands, and I congratulate the authors on their accomplishment.

Literature Cited

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