

BOOK REVIEW

THE BIRDS OF BARBADOS: AN ANNOTATED CHECKLIST—P. A. Buckley, E. B. Massiah, M. B. Hutt, F. G. Buckley, and H. F. Hutt. 2009. British Ornithologists' Union Checklist 24. 295 pp. ISBN 978-0-907446-29-3.

Since the passing of Maurice and Hazel Hutt, long-time residents and bird enthusiasts on Barbados, an in-depth account of their records and correspondence has been a grail for those interested in West Indian ornithology. The Hutt's were joined by other resident birders on Barbados in recent years including Wayne Burke, Martin Frost, and Eddie Massiah. Many other noted ornithologists and birders have contributed to the mountain of data that swell this checklist to 295 pages. The 78 plates, 24 appendices, page upon page of references, and indices to names add richness to the status of birds reported from Barbados that sets a very high standard for any text attempting a similar endeavor.

There has always been a great interest in what marsh or wetland birds might show up at Barbados owing to the tradition of the hunting clubs still in existence despite international pressure to cease. Recent shootings elsewhere in the Lesser Antilles of high profile, radio-tagged Whimbrels (*Numenius phaeopus*) sent quivers of fear through conservationists and scientists trying to understand shorebird migration in this hemisphere. For Maurice Hutt, the shooting clubs became checkpoints in the 1960s in determining phenology of passage migrants. Ringed birds from North America and Europe were not unusual for Hutt to recover. The specimen record of Eskimo Curlew (*N. borealis*), collected at one of the shooting marshes in 1963, for example, provided some hope that the bird might not yet be extinct. Hutt's freezer was a gold-mine of feathery nuggets.

Barbados's location far enough east of other Lesser Antillean islands and lacking high peaks of remnant rainforest to attract birds and perhaps sequester its own endemic avifauna, presents an opportunity to concentrate birds in habitat islands in a densely populated and highly agrarian terrain. This pressure on the landscape has been manifest since 1627, when colonial plantocracies cleared nearly the entire island of woody vegetation in the span of 40 years, or breeding seasons as I like to call them, for the sake of sugar cane.

Barbados is currently home to only 18 landbird species, of which only one is endemic and only re-

cently differentiated. Perhaps the island's sexually monochromatic Barbados Bullfinch (*Loxigilla barbadensis*) provided a clue to endemism for Paul and Francine Buckley to embark on DNA studies to determine its separation from the Lesser Antillean Bullfinch (*L. noctis sclateri*) on its nearest neighbor, St. Lucia, 120 km away. The island's isolation and relatively monotonous landscape compared to St. Lucia is a West Indian example of finch speciation reminiscent of Peter Grant's studies on Darwin's finches in the Galapagos Islands. Kudos to Buckley *et al.* for deciphering the radiation.

The isolated island is the siren's call to Eurasian vagrants and South American species over-shooting their austral migration. This isn't to say that these forms don't find themselves on other islands of the Lesser Antilles, but that they seem to show up first at Barbados, where they may be eagerly awaited by keen-eyed and knowledgeable observers. Two compelling forces seem to be working in this regard: well trained observers in the British birding tradition and a rather flat, pastoral landscape with a myriad of manicured wetlands for hunters. These oddly compatible pastimes have produced some of the region's most outstanding bird occurrences in the hemisphere. I won't go into the details of the Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), and Southern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) breeding at Barbados, which seem to be precursors of North American invasions of various strength and success, because the authors already do it so well.

Notwithstanding its depth of detail, the book is in my opinion the best example of an island check-list. Indeed, it should be considered the model for any such attempt. The material was acquired from various professional sources to which the authors applaud their contribution. The collection of photographs is outstanding and reminds me of nothing less than a National Geographic special. While I have been to Barbados to meet Maurice Hutt and later Eddie Massiah, I was immediately transported back when parsing through these pages. *Birds of Barbados* is a must have for anyone interested in island biogeography, West Indian ornithology, and how to write a bird check-list. Consider it essential reading for any student, young or not so young.—ROBERT L. NORTON, 8960 NE Waldo Rd., Gainesville, FL 32609, USA; e-mail: corvus0486@aol.com.