

BOOK REVIEWS—RESEÑAS DE LIBROS—RESENHAS DE LIVROS

Edited by John G. Blake

(To whom books for review should be sent)

Birds of Trinidad & Tobago. M. Kenefick, R. Restall, & F. Hayes. 2007. Helm Field Guides. Christopher Helm Publishers Ltd, London, UK. 256 pp. 107 color plates with species accounts. ISBN 978-0-7136-8544-2. Soft cover. Price \$33.78

After a decade of extensive museum research and bibliographical revision, *Birds of northern South America, An identification guide* (Restall *et al.* 2006) appeared in 2006 and provided, for the first time in a single publication (two volumes), an extensive amount of information and illustrations relevant to many bird-rich countries. Given the enormous number of illustrations produced for this book, it is not surprising that a series of spin-off publications would follow and, logically, *Birds of Trinidad & Tobago* seemed like an appropriate first choice: manageable richness in an accessible Neotropical region.

The book was launched in 2007, only a year after BNSA. Its size (21.6 x 13.2 cm) and weight are appropriate for a field guide, making more likely that it will actually be taken into the field. Regarding the organization, BT&T contains a concise but reasonably complete introduction to the country's resources, including geography, climate, and habitats. This introduction is followed by a couple of pages that treat the main habitats and a chapter about taxonomy and nomenclature. Additional pages deal with bird identification and reports and there are seven pages

(with two maps) about the bird-watching sites of the country.

The main bulk of the book represents the 107 plates, the sequence of which follows AOU nomenclature. Illustrations are on side with text facing on the opposite side. The texts for the species' accounts are concise and focus primarily on aspects of plumages important for identification. Additional information is given about size, wingspan (for many flying birds), voice, a discussion about similar species, and status. Most of the illustrations were taken from BNSA, but with many images repainted or corrected; there are more than 100 new illustrations (R. Restall, pers. com.). As with BNSA, plates of this guide illustrate more than a single plumage per species, with many juvenile and immature plumages shown. In addition, vagrant species have been included. In some plates, the size difference is separated with a line. Also, in groups, such as the ducks, seabirds, raptors, and for a few species of other families, illustrations of flying birds are provided. The book ends with a checklist to the birds of T&T and information regarding the *Rare Bird Committee*, containing a report of the species needing more evidence of occurrence.

The organization of the book is appropriate as is the amount of information given in the introductory section. But, in my opinion, discussions like the concept of a species or a race seem odd and out of the scope of a field guide. The chapter about bird identification is

complete and summarizes the possible variations of plumage within a given species, although illustrations in this chapter would have helped the user to perceive the concepts and discussions involved.

Regarding the plates, most are well spaced with good size and proportions. The number of illustrations is incredibly high, being indeed the strength of the book. I particularly liked the ones of the boobies and gannets (Plate 9), raptors (Plates 17–29), smaller plovers (Plate 35), vireos and greenlets (plate 85) and the New World warblers (Plates 99–103). As the authors mentioned in the book, many illustrations have been corrected (e.g., immature Jabiru in plate 16) but there are still plates that will need to be improved in future editions, including the tiger-herons and bitterns (Plate 10), ibises, spoonbills and Limpkin (Plate 15), and some of the tyrant-flycatchers (Plates 76–78). One additional minor correction is the eye color of Gray-headed Kite.

An additional comment about the plates relates to the nightbirds. Plates 59, 60, 61, and 62 could have shown more illustrations, or the size of the illustrations could have been expanded. Also, I consider that nightjars and nighthawks should not have been shown only in flight. Indeed, in the field with poor light conditions, what the observer can perceive is the flight pattern, the wing tips and the colour of tail, especially if there are contrasting white spots or feathers; one can rarely distinguish plumage details. On the other hand, when the bird is perched, and natural history information is provided, the observer has higher chances of identifying the bird; thus, illustra-

tions of perched Caprimulgidae would have enriched the book.

Regarding the species accounts, I thought the amount of text given to the plumage and the discussion of similar species or behavior and habitat information could have been better balanced. Although it is understandable that for T&T avifauna, the observer may not need to choose among various similar species to identify what one sees, for conservation issues it would have been important to provide more natural history information and less plumage description.

Nevertheless, despite the above comments, which correspond to less than 10% of the species in the book, this publication stands out as a new concept of a field guide, where the number of illustrations per species increases the probabilities for accurate field identification. It is also important to highlight that the book is dedicated to Richard French, the author of the pioneering *A guide to the birds of Trinidad & Tobago*.

Given the above, I strongly recommend *Birds of Trinidad & Tobago*. It is certainly a step forward for understanding the avifauna of the country and an eye-opening publication for both residents and visitors. — David Ascanio, Apartado Postal 78006, La Urbina 1074, Caracas, Venezuela.

REFERENCES

- Restall, R., C. Rodner, & M. Lentino. 2006. *Birds of northern South America, An identification guide*. Christopher Helm Publishers Ltd, London, UK.