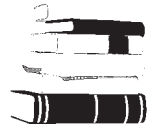


Reviews

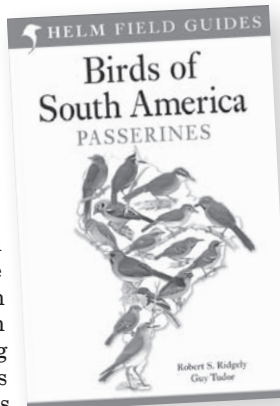


Birds of South America: passerines by R. S. Ridgely and G. Tudor, 2009. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 750 pp, 121 colour plates, many colour maps. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-4081-1342-4. UK£35.

Publication of the first two volumes of *The birds of South America* in 1989 and 1994 represented a turning point for Neotropical ornithology. Never before had so much detail on the natural history of Neotropical passerines (i.e. some of the most difficult birds in the world to identify) been presented so compactly. I still vividly remember getting my copy of vol. 2 and, to this day, it is one of those bird books that I can simply pick up and read over and over. The quality of the plates was something that I had never seen before in any field guide. In my opinion, however, the real success was the text, the standard of which is still probably second only to Hilty & Brown's (1986) Colombia guide. Ridgely & Tudor's greatest skill was to present so much critical identification and taxonomic information in a concise format, which anyone, no matter how experienced, could use. The only problem was their size, which prevented all but the most fanatical from actually carrying them in the field. One could hardly imagine having all the information presented in a concise, paperback guide for field use. So, most of the Neotropical birding community settled back and began the long wait for vols. 3 and 4.

That wait continues, but now we have the much-needed, compact and updated field guide version of vols. 1 and 2. This book details the 1,981 species of South American passerines replete with an incredible amount of new information that has arisen since vol. 2 was published. Of course, it is only natural to compare this volume with the originals, but readers should not expect a field guide *exactly* like vols. 1 and 2.

The contents are arranged in a fairly standard format—first the plates and then the text. It begins with a straightforward five-page introduction outlining the plan of the book, which is essential reading for all users. We then cut to the chase, with a simple one-page explanation of the new distribution maps before the plates. Distribution maps are arranged on the pages facing the plates. I'd like to see all symbols and notations for species range maps



standardised across the Americas, but I do find these (using a simple five-colour shading, and three-colour dot scheme) easy to use. In many cases the distributions of two species are shown on one map (using different colours for each). Even so, there are sometimes so many species on a plate that the maps spill onto an adjoining page, but such cases are neatly highlighted using colour arrows.

Taxonomy is generally a mixed bag of SACC, IOC and the author's expertise, but readers are acutely aware of the challenges taxonomic choices pose in writing such a guide. Basically, readers can expect a similar approach as to that in the original volumes. Some might be very critical of this, but I find the style useful because it unashamedly promotes debate (and many of us are guilty of not making more efforts to contribute to the SACC proposal system).

The rationale for taxonomic treatments is presented in a separate section at the end, following the species accounts. This information provides a tantalising glimpse of possible splits and lumps, and where debate exists for certain complexes. Unfortunately, this text lacks any cross-referencing to enable the reader to flip easily between the species account and relevant taxonomic note (a criticism also applicable to the two-volume *Birds of Ecuador*). This begs the question, if there was space for a separate section of taxonomic notes, why not place the relevant text under the appropriate species account anyway?

Ridgely & Tudor have maintained several splits from the original volumes, e.g. Necklaced *Synallaxis stictothorax* / Chinchipe Spinetails *S. chinchipensis*, whilst also proposing new ones, e.g. splitting Rusty-breasted Antpitta *Grallaricula ferrugineipectus* into two forms, northern Rusty-breasted and the southern Leimebamba Antpitta *G. leymeabambae*. Many interesting revisions are included, too many to mention here, but including an updated *Atlapetes* and reverting to the genus *Rhynchotraupis* for Cone-billed Tanager. Elsewhere, for English names, they revert to Striated Antthrush for *Chamaeza nobilis* after proposing Noble Antthrush in vol. 2, and use far more suitable vernacular names for some species, e.g. Peruvian Treehunter *Thripadectes scrutator* and Golden-eyed Flowerpiercer *Diglossa glauca*.

The composition of the species accounts is very concise and includes length, relative abundance, habitat, regional distribution and elevation, identification, behaviour and voice. For the overwhelming majority, the authors have condensed all the necessary information without compromising the ability to identify species. Of course, it's tempting to be critical of what is or is not included in some cases because one cannot help continually comparing the content with the original volumes. However, the purpose of this book is principally identification and, in my opinion, for such a scale, the species accounts coupled with the plates and taxonomic notes more than achieve this.

The new book contains 121 plates, including all original 83 plates by Guy Tudor and illustrations of 406 new species that were not included earlier. Some plates show better illustrations of distinct plumage characteristics or 'improvements' to the original volumes (e.g. White-bearded Antshrike *Biatas nigropectus* on Plate 20). As a result, the presentation of the plates has been greatly improved (e.g. Plate 1 now contains miners and horneros, Plate 7 the tit-spinetails and thistletails, etc). But first—the majority of plates are fantastic, as good as the originals, and strike the important balance between detail, portraying the correct jizz of the species (in most cases) and having just the right number of illustrations per plate.

Obviously, it is impossible to list here all the new illustrations, but here is a selection: Dark-bellied Cinclodes *Cinclodes patagonicus*, Pink-legged Graveteiro *Acrobatornis fonsecai*, Hoffmann's Woodcreeper *Dendrocolaptes hoffmannsi*, Upland Antshrike *Thamnophilus aroyae*, Ancient Antwren *Herpsilochmus gentryi*, São Paulo Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes paulista*, Chestnut-capped Piha *Lipaugus weberi*, Tepui Greenlet *Hylophilus sclateri*, Yellow-scarfed Tanager *Iridosornis reinhardti*, Cherry-throated Tanager *Nemosia rourei*, Santa Marta Brush Finch *Atlappetes melanocephalus*, and a fantastic plate with new illustrations of six *Poospiza* warbling finches. I'm sure we could all suggest species that that we feel *must* be illustrated in a book of this nature, but this is just a natural reaction to seeing some of our favourite or globally threatened species omitted. In some cases, it's common sense not to illustrate numerous endemic *Scytalopus*, given the similarities in plumage (although *HBW* vol. 8 makes a fine attempt). Nevertheless, I can't resist airing some from my own personal 'missing' wish list: Russet-mantled Softtail *Thripophaga berlepschi*, Creamy-bellied Antwren *Herpsilochmus motacilloides*, Ochre-fronted Antpitta *Grallaricula ochraceifrons*, Stresemann's Bristlefront *Merulaxis stresemanni*, Bahia Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes beckeri*, Foothill Elaenia *Myiopagis olallai*, Chocó

Vireo Vireo masteri, Black-spectacled Brush Finch *Atlappetes melanopsis*, and so on!

Some illustrations have not been revised since the original volumes, for instance the four Andean cotingas on Plate 67 (Red-crested *Ampelion rubrocristata*, Chestnut-crowned *A. rufaxilla*, White-cheeked *Zaratornis stresemanni* and Bay-vented *Doliornis sclateri*) whose depictions do not properly reflect their true sluggish, horizontal postures (even sometimes when feeding), instead they are too upright. Rarely are species numbered incorrectly on the plates compared to the maps (e.g. Green *Chlorophanes spiza* and Red-legged Honeycreepers *Cyanerpes cyaneus* on Plate 90) reflecting the high editorial standards in the production of this book. Sandwiched between the plates and species accounts are three pages of colour maps representing each South American country and one of the whole continent. Their content and detail do the job but I can't help feeling that these would be best placed nearer the introduction.

With the number of country-specific field guides currently available or in preparation, it is initially hard to see how to find space for this book in your luggage, but given the difficulty many people have in identifying the spinetails, woodcreepers, antbirds, tyrant flycatchers or seedeaters in many parts of South America, I would strongly encourage you to consider taking it. And for all us Neotropical birding fanatics, it may be worthwhile yet to keep some space on the bookshelf for those long-awaited vols. 3 and 4!

Huw Lloyd

Go west for parrots! A South American odyssey by Rosemary Low, 2009. *Mansfield: Insignis Publications. 319 pp, several black-and-white photographs and maps. ISBN 0-9531337-6-1. UK£14.95 including postage & packing (available from Insignis Publications, PO Box 100, Mansfield, Notts. NG20 9PR, UK).*

Rosemary Low has been travelling the globe to observe psittacines in the wild for decades. Although billed as a 'South American odyssey', this book encapsulates her adventures throughout the Neotropics, not just south of the Darién Gap. One might also venture that her journeys have been scarcely Homeric, although they have reached most corners of the region. Each chapter reports a particular trip or trips to a given country. All revolve around her quests to observe parrots in the wild, be they Hyacinth Macaws *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus* in the Pantanal and Yellow-eared Parrots *Ognorhynchus icterotis* in the Colombian Andes, indeed special birds both, but whilst parrots receive pride of place, other birds and wildlife are frequently in the frame.

In an age where Man is now depressingly 'close' to our fellow inhabitants of planet Earth, travelogues such as this need to be especially remarkable, either for their literary qualities or for the outstanding experiences of the writer, or, if I permit myself to be greedy, for both. Sadly, there seem to be no modern Beebe's in our midst, men (or women) capable of true lyricism in relating their experiences, with the added capacity to effortlessly find humanity in the world of an ant. Perhaps it is because what is left of the natural world is so much 'closer' to us than it was in Beebe's day, for it is indeed the case that we have 'nature surrounded' on all sides, as Nigel Collar said recently. When William Beebe set forth on his 18-month-long Asian pheasant-hunting bonanza, deliciously retold in *Pheasant jungles*, it was still perhaps truer to say that humans were surrounded by nature.

Am I alone in thinking that a great many of us could write *Go west for parrots!*, or at least similar? I suspect that Rosemary Low will be deservedly better remembered for her contributions to parrot conservation than for books such as this. Perhaps I am unfairly biased. My favourite parrot doesn't get a look-in here, the magnificently blue Lear's Macaw *Anodorhynchus leari*, inhabitant of the splendidly harsh Raso da Catarina in far northern Bahia. While that bird lacks a birder's travelogue, the region does possess its own very different piece of travel writing, of sorts, the Brazilian polymath Euclides da Cunha's account of the siege of Canudos, *Os Sertões*, published in English as *Rebellion in the backlands*.

Guy M. Kirwan

A field guide to the birds of Brazil by Ber van Perlo, 2009. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 465 pp, 186 colour plates, c.1,800 maps. ISBN 978-0-19-530155-7. Paperback. UK£22.99 / ISBN 978-0-19-530154-0. Hardback. UK£95.00.

A trip to Brazil is an incredibly exciting, yet simultaneously daunting, prospect for visiting birders. The fifth-largest country in the world hosts 1,825 bird species² including 234 endemics, yet when I first visited the country as recently as 2003 there was no definitive English field guide, which meant that extensive reference to *HBW* during pre-trip planning was obligatory. Seven years on and we have three pretenders to the mantle of the Brazil guide: Deodato Souza's *All the birds of Brazil*, first published in English in 2003, followed by Tomas Sigris's *Field guide to the birds of Brazil* (2008), and now Ber van Perlo's *A field guide to the birds of Brazil*. Naïve would-be purchasers might think themselves spoilt for choice, but it only takes a token glance through all three to realise that we are still waiting for a book of the calibre of existing field guides to Peru, Venezuela, Colombia, etc. I'm

reliably informed that the wait for a definitive volume won't be indefinite, but for now we are left to choose between these three, so what does van Perlo's guide have to offer?

It is presented in traditional format, with (very) concise text and colour maps facing the plates. The book is a rather awkward size and the publishers are guilty of considerable space wastage, whilst the larger format does not render it 'pocket-sized'. There is almost invariably a large gap (c.30 mm) at the base of each page and a (22-mm) grey header at the top. More thoughtful planning could have considerably reduced the book's dimensions and weight, and this could have extended to filling in the numerous 'white spaces' in the text, on the plates and in the endpapers. A 22-page introductory section is helpful, although the line drawings of major habitat types are simply too 'sketchy' to be of any use (black-and-white photographs would have served much better). Field guides are best judged on the quality and accuracy of their plates; holistically speaking, I think van Perlo's illustrations are, on the whole, an improvement on his predecessors. They do, however, often look rather 'hurried' and at times almost unfinished, but still manage to convey the species' jizz and key features—in many cases where previous books had failed. Coverage is near-exhaustive with 1,796 species treated; no obvious candidate species is left untreated, including bizarrely Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus* with (rather unhelpfully) the wild type illustrated!

Chickens aside, some plates are genuinely pretty good, despite landing some criticism; the woodcreepers are better than many other depictions (but still a long way behind *HBW*) and most of the antbirds are identifiable (although not a patch on Eduardo Brettas' illustrations in Sigris). Others, however, are well below par, the plate including (bizarrely) *Piprites*, *Corythopsis* and *Anthus* is perhaps the worst in the book; both *Piprites* look like Emberiziids and attention to detail on the pipits is lacking. Arguably the most important groups to get right in Neotropical field guides are the woodcreepers and tyrant flycatchers. The confusing juveniles of *Legatus*, *Myiodynastes* and *Griseotyrannus* are not illustrated and, in common with most field guides, treatment of the separation of Social *Myiozetetes similis* and Rusty-margined Flycatchers *M. cayanensis* is poor (reviewed by Restall³). A birder confronted by a *Tolmomyias* or *Hemitriccus* will likewise struggle to reach a correct identification using this book. The inclusion of vagrant records is certainly to be applauded, but should a line have been drawn at the inclusion of species not on the official CBRO list and which have only doubtfully occurred in the country, e.g. Fairy Prion *Pachyptila turtur* and American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*? Time spent

producing multiple depictions of these species would have been better spent illustrating other plumages such as the aforementioned flycatchers.

The distribution maps are generally excellent, in fact taken as a whole the book is almost worth buying for these alone. As might be expected, however, there are several that need revising. For instance, from a glance at the map, a naïve birder might assume that the chance of seeing Harpy *Harpia harpyja* and Crested Eagles *Morphnus guianensis* is equally possible in any part of the country, yet these species are incredibly rare away from extensive Amazonian forests. Pearly Antshrike *Megascictus margaritatus* is erroneously mapped as occurring east of the Madeira drainage (as is presumably also the case with Plum-throated Cotinga *Cotinga maynana*), and the range of Brown-banded Puffbird *Notharchus ordii* is seriously under-estimated. Northern Slaty Antshrike *Thamnophilus punctatus* is erroneously mapped for Rondônia, and the texts state that White-browed *Leucopternis kuhli* and Black-faced Hawks *L. melanops* are not thought to be sympatric, despite evidence to the contrary (e.g. Amaral *et al.*¹). Nonetheless, the ‘nature’ of ‘Black-faced’ Hawks south of the Amazon has yet to be adequately resolved (B. M. Whitney pers. comm.). Looking at the ranges of some species that meet around the Teles Pires contact zone near Alta Floresta (my former Amazonian ‘patch’), some species are incorrectly mapped (based on published data). These include White-tailed Cotinga *Xipholena lamellipennis*, here shown as occurring on the east bank of the Teles Pires, when it does not cross the Serra do Cachimbo, and both White-browed *Myrmoborus leucophrys* and Bare-eyed Antbirds *Rhegmatorhina gymnops*, which both occur on the west bank of the Teles Pires.

Real textual errors are comparatively rare, but considering the brevity of many accounts this shouldn’t be a surprise; the account for Cherry-throated Tanager *Nemosia rourei* simply states ‘unmistakable’, yet the single word and sole depiction belie much published information on variation in this species⁶. In a similar vein, I would certainly not describe Merlin *Falco columbarius* as an inhabitant of ‘open woodland’, as this species utilises just about any habitat except closed-canopy forest. Wilson’s Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor* is not restricted to ‘coastal waters’ (they are not mapped as such), and there is no ‘dark form’ *sensu stricto* of Great Skua *Stercorarius skua* as all individuals are dark compared to their southern relatives. The description of Cryptic Forest Falcon *Micrastur mintoni* does not mention (or illustrate) juveniles or subadults, which typically show two white tail bands and invite confusion with the (allopatric) Lined Forest Falcon *M. gilvicolis*⁷, instead the text merely conveys the notion that the single white

tail band in this species is diagnostic. A significant linguistic mistake is the near-ubiquitous use of ã instead of ã.

The book closes with several lists and appendices, including a mini Portuguese dictionary. The utility of these sections is compromised by mistakes, numerous errors and omissions beset the map of protected areas, and the bibliography is ‘peppered’ with bizarre entries such as Harrap & Quinn³ and del Hoyo *et al.*⁴. It is a shame that this book is beset with such errors as it does represent ‘value for money’ (ignoring the ridiculous price of the hardback edition) and in many regions of the country it might represent the best bet for correctly identifying the birds of this megadiverse country.

Alexander C. Lees

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Pantanal wildlife: a visitor’s guide to Brazil’s great wetland by James Lowen, 2010. *Chalfont St. Peter: Bradt Travel Guides*. 172 pp, many colour photographs and some maps. ISBN 978-1-84162-305-4. UK£16.99 / US\$25.99.

Not perhaps for the hardest-core birder, but a valuable reference for any would-be visitor to South America’s best-known wetland, from the general ecotourist to the less-blinkered birder. Full colour throughout, brief introductory sections treat selected topics including the now-obligatory ‘conservation’ and are followed by chapters devoted to different biota, with mammals and birds covered

most comprehensively. The region's two most famous inhabitants, Jaguar *Panthera onca* and Hyacinth Macaw *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus* get most individual mentions, and rightly so. The book closes with 40+ pages of useful advice for the visitor, including a reasonably detailed list of places to go and what might be seen at each, which despite the book's title acknowledges that the Pantanal spans (small) parts of Bolivia and Paraguay too. The photographs are generally very good, with a creditably high percentage by Lowen himself. Complaints are few, but it's a shame that the publisher fails to treat the names of birds, etc., as proper nouns, for it is not the author that is guilty of such crimes! The bibliography is undoubtedly useful, despite its brevity, but perhaps should also have included the Jacques Vielliard CD to the bird sounds of the region (see review in *Cotinga* 15: 73).

Guy M. Kirwan

Annotated checklist of the birds of Suriname by *Otte H. Ottema, Jan Hein J. M. Ribot and Arie L. Spaans, 2009. Paramaribo: WWF Guianas. 144 pp, black-and-white illustrations and two colour maps. ISBN 978-99914-7-022-1. E-mail orders to: vriendenvanstinasu@planet.nl. €10 (The Netherlands), €15 (rest of the world), postage & packing included.*

The first survey of the birds known from Surinam appeared in the early 20th century when F. P. & A. P. Penard published *De Vogels van Guyana (Suriname, Cayenne en Demerara)* in two volumes (1908–10), dealing with the birds of what we now call the Guianas. The study of the avifauna of Surinam was reanimated by the arrival of François Haverschmidt in 1946. For nearly a quarter of a century, he lived and worked in the country, first as a judge, later as President of the Court of Justice and the country's Acting Governor. He used almost all of his free time to study birds. In 1955, he published a *List of the birds of Surinam*, an updated review of all birds known in the country at the time. Subsequently, in 1968, he produced his famous *Birds of Surinam*, reprinted in 1971. Following his death, in 1987, a new edition, largely rewritten by Gerlof F. Mees, was published as *Birds of Suriname* in 1994.

Since the 1970s, an increasing number of birdwatchers and ornithologists have visited Surinam. Using mist-netting, video recording and sound-recording calls and songs, they have established the presence of several species new for the country. The present checklist, a small booklet of 12.0 × 19.5 cm, lists all 739 species and subspecies known to occur in Surinam to date. It is based on a database maintained by the second

author, with more than 125,000 entries up to 1 July 2009.

Following a Foreword by Dominiek Plouvier, regional representative of WWF Guianas, is an introduction that provides a brief summary of the country's geography, accompanied by a map, and an overview of its ornithological history. There follows a description of the six life zones: estuarine zone, coastal plain, northern savanna area, lowland forest, highland forest and southern savanna area.

The symbols used in the checklist are explained. Sixteen different habitats are considered, indicated in the list as primary or secondary habitats. The reliability of a species' inclusion is subdivided into: occurrence proven by specimen, photograph, video or sound-recording; an occurrence known from reliable sight records; or occurrence known from sight records by experienced birders, but with some doubt concerning the identification. Status is subdivided into breeding; presumably breeding; northern and austral migrant; wanderer; vagrant; and unknown, with abundance treated within the following categories: common, uncommon, rare and accidental (vagrants).

For each species its scientific and English name is given, along with its preferred habitat(s), the reliability of its occurrence, its status, and its abundance in each of the seven life zones. The second half of the checklist comprises eight interesting appendices. Appendix I, hypothetical species, lists 35 species mentioned in the literature for Surinam, but for which no convincing records exist. Appendix II, new country records, presents details for 61 taxa added to (and one removed from) the country's bird list since the publication of *Birds of Suriname* (1994), which listed 679 taxa. Appendix III, rarities, presents information on vagrants and those species with three records at most. Appendix IV, data on northern and southern migrants, lists 72 species and subspecies known to occur in Surinam as either northern (57) or austral (15) migrants, with details on their seasonal occurrence, and the earliest and latest dates they have been observed. Appendix V, notes on selected species, presents data on species of specific spatial distribution or habitat choice, whose status have changed in recent years or are heavily hunted, or which are incorrectly indicated in the literature either as regular non-breeders or definite breeders. Appendix VI, erroneously cited species, lists 43 species cited for Surinam in the literature for which genuine records are lacking and which are unlikely to occur based on their known distribution. Appendix VII, endemics and near-endemics, deals with the few taxa that are endemic (three) or near-endemic (19). Appendix VIII, species of concern, mentions eight species considered Near Threatened by BirdLife International (*Threatened birds of the world*, 2008).

None of the 727 species occurring in Surinam is globally threatened. A list of references and an index complete the work.

The aim of the checklist is to provide local and visiting ornithologists with concise information on the bird species found in Surinam, their status, in which life zones and habitats they occur, and their relative abundance in the various life zones. It is obvious that the authors have achieved this. However, the checklist is also a must for birdwatchers and ornithologists with a general interest in the birds of the Guiana Shield, as the avifaunas of south-east Venezuela, Guyana, French Guiana and north-east Brazil possess many species in common with Surinam.

Johan Ingels

Where to watch birds in Costa Rica by Barrett Lawson, 2009. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 365 pp, 100 black-and-white maps. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-4081-2512-0. UK£19.99.

Costa Rica often attracts first-time birding visitors to the Neotropics. Despite its small size, the country supports many habitats and by travelling just a short distance the change in avifauna can be great. Previously, anyone planning their own trip had to rely on the outdated *Travel and site guide to birds of Costa Rica* (Sekerak & Conger 1996) and internet trip reports that often only cover the well-known sites. Barrett Lawson's book offers much fresh information on this fascinating country and includes numerous, until now, lesser-known sites.

The book aims to be a complete travel guide rather than just a 'where to find birds' list. The introduction provides a brief overview of Costa Rica's geology, geography and climate, and habitats, which will prove useful to those 'new' to the Neotropics. Then come the usual recommendations concerning logistics, health and safety etc., and an explanation as to how the country has been subdivided into six regions and the birds to expect in each. Eight sample itineraries are suggested and a map shows the main birding sites and towns with travelling times. Rather unnecessary is a chart to convert driving times in minutes (on the map) to hours—most birders know that 180 minutes equates to three hours!

Next come the site descriptions listed under six headings—Caribbean Lowlands, Caribbean Middle-Elevations, North Pacific, South Pacific Lowlands, South Pacific

Middle-Elevations, Lower Mountains, Upper Mountains, Coastline and Central Valley. The sites described under the coastline section could have been treated within the geographic region into which they fall, but this is a detail. Each section comprises an introduction, a list of regional specialities and list of 'common birds to know'. Then follow the site descriptions, each detailing elevation, trail difficulty, reserve hours, entrance fee and an estimated time to devote to the site. Most sites have access maps but a detailed trail map is not typically included. A list of target birds and 'birds to expect' are given for each site. Having experienced Costa Rica's road signs, I would commend the detail in the maps—using these, you will not get lost as often as I did! The list of sites is comprehensive and contains many little-known sites, although there are a few omissions, e.g. Hacienda Solimar, in Guanacaste. For sites, such as Cinchona and Virg n del Socorro, badly affected by the recent earthquake—readers are recommended to check www.birding.cr.com for up-to-date information.

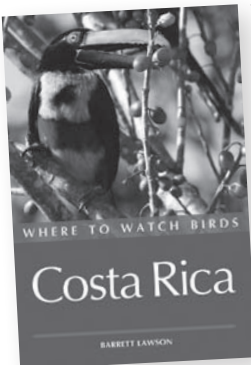
There follows 'where to find endemics and other sought-after species', which cross-references each listed species to the sites where it can be expected. Unfortunately, the author has chosen to do this using the site number, e.g. Braulio Carillo is site 1B-4, with no reference to site name or page number, which entails having to search to find the relevant page. Listing the site name and page number would have been more effective. Finally, there is a Costa Rican checklist with each species' abundance given for eight selected sites.

Lawson's book is a well-researched tool for those planning to visit Costa Rica on a birding holiday. In some ways, it perhaps attempts to offer too much information but overall the book is an essential and much-needed guide for your birding trip.

Gordon Ellis

The birds of Barbados by P. A. Buckley, Edward B. Massiah, Maurice B. Hutt, Francine G. Buckley and Hazel F. Hutt, 2009. Peterborough: British Ornithologists' Union & British Ornithologists' Club. 295 pp, 78 colour plates, five black-and-white figures and 12 tables. ISBN 978-0-907446-29-3. UK£40.00.

This latest volume in the excellent BOU Checklist series is immediately familiar by the cover and largely so in terms of contents. There are two main sections, the Barbados ecosystem and the systematic list. The Barbados ecosystem has many subheadings too numerous to list here but including the usual synopses of geology, climate, vegetation, history and migration. The systematic list section looks familiar too and for each species lists the English name, the scientific name (with source),



an abbreviation for status and local name(s) where they exist. This is followed by three subheadings for distribution, world, West Indies and Barbados. After that nearly all species possess a comments section, which in most cases relates to taxonomy, and finally the whereabouts of specimens are listed, where appropriate. There are 24 appendices, 12 tables, five figures and 78 colour plates of which 38 are of birds and the rest mainly of habitats.

The standard of production of the book is excellent and I could find only two typographical errors—both on the same page and both in the scientific names of plants.

I am a great fan of the checklist series and I really wanted to like this one, but I struggled with it for several reasons. To start with, there is the comparison with St. Lucia and the Cayman Islands. We are told that 'it is useful to compare the contemporaneous Barbados avifauna with theirs', but I cannot see that it is. Following this statement are several pages of discussion (with tables) of these comparisons, which are also referred to in some species accounts. There also six appendices devoted to such comparisons. The authors then inform us that the differences between the islands 'may be explained by a combination of several factors', which to me is self-evident. I can find no conclusions that tell us anything other than that their avifaunas are similar in some ways and different in others.

Another main reason for my reservations is the amount of conjecture that runs throughout the book. I have always viewed the checklists as a benchmark of what we know at the time of writing, yet almost everywhere you turn here are assumptions and guesses. Under 'Oversummering Migrants' we read that 'Brown Pelican [*Pelecanus occidentalis*], Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*, American Oystercatcher [*Haematopus palliatus*] and perhaps American Coot [*Fulica americana*] are also potential overwintering breeders in the Lesser Antilles, including Barbados', or to put it another way, none of these species breeds on Barbados or anywhere near it! The comments section for Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* states there are 'Six South American records, including two in Brazil plus overwinterings in Argentina in 1997–98 and perhaps in 1990–91. The Barbados adult [a breeding-plumage bird in May] probably overwintered in South America after having arrived the previous autumn as a juvenile'. There is no indication of why there is doubt about an overwintering in Argentina and no evidence for the Barbados bird having arrived previously. Surely it could just have easily been caught up in adverse weather migrating north? There are many similar examples of presumption that in my opinion are unnecessary.

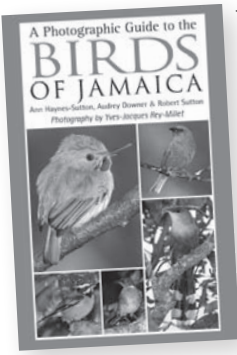
The appendices boast more examples of conjecture. Appendix 9 is a list of species by 'likely proximate geographic origin of non-pelagic, non-introduced elements of the Barbados non-breeding avifauna' followed by Appendix 10 showing the same for the breeding avifauna. Appendix 11 lists potential Barbados non-breeding taxa by zoogeographical origin, while Appendix 12 surveys potential Barbados breeding species, some of which have not yet been recorded on the island. So in four appendices there is not a single fact. Furthermore, the entire business of predicting future vagrancy is undone by the 'Note added in proof' on p. 75, which details the occurrence of Grey-hooded Gull *Larus cirrocephalus* in May 2009 (a species not mentioned anywhere else in the book) and Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* in February 2009, which the authors tentatively ascribe to a European irruption but elsewhere in the book predict as a Atlantic-Caribbean visitor. I will give just two more examples in the species accounts. The Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda* comments section states 'Molecular analysis will probably prove this 'sandpiper' to be a straight-billed curlew'. This adds nothing to knowledge of the species in Barbados. Slightly different is the comments section for Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*, 'Unknown whether it had been previously overlooked or its winter range has changed in Lesser Antilles'. This too, adds nothing but in a different way.

So here we have a book that is full of useful information and with a section of suggestions for future research to fill the gaps in our understanding of the Barbados avifauna—exactly what I demand from a BOU Checklist volume. But, it is shot through with, in my opinion, conjecture and irrelevance. Should you buy it? Yes, of course you should because it is basically a very good checklist—just try not to get as annoyed with some parts as I did!

Andy Mitchell

Photographic guide to the birds of Jamaica by Ann Haynes-Sutton, Audrey Downer and Robert Sutton, photography by Yves-Jacques Rey-Millet, 2009. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 304 pp, many colour photographs and figures. ISBN 978-1-4081-0743-0. UK£24.99.

This is a replacement for the previous book with a similar name by two of the same authors, published in 1990 by Cambridge University Press. It is a chunky book and once you open it you can see why. The introduction runs to 18 pages with sections on climate, geology, habitats, composition and origins of the avifauna, migration, breeding, moult, conservation and history of ornithology. There are then five pages of useful information for the



visiting (and resident) birder, followed by the bulk of the book—236 pages—the species accounts. The appendices include several lists, namely endemic species, endemic subspecies, probably extinct species, scientific names of plants mentioned in the text, and a few others. There is a selected bibliography and an index of species, English and scientific names combined.

The first question is, of course, are the photographs any good? Well, yes they are and generally there are more than one of each species—even Spotted Rail *Pardirallus maculatus*, although neither was taken in Jamaica. Some of the common migrants such as shorebirds and *Dendroica* warblers only have one photograph, but the endemics get two pages to themselves and sometimes as many as four photographs. Some of the images of woodland species have been taken with flash and the bird looks ‘frozen’, but overall the photographs show each species to advantage (for identification) and from different angles. Most, but not all, different plumages are shown, juvenile, female, winter, etc. and it would be quite difficult to misidentify a bird in Jamaica using this book! It has been very well edited and I found only a few errors without meticulous searching, for instance the scientific name of Jamaican Owl *Pseudoscops grammicus* in the index has the final ‘s’ missing from the specific name, captions to two of the photographs of Ring-tailed Pigeon *Patagioenas caribaea* have been transposed, and the caption for the ‘extra’ photo of White-chinned Thrush *Turdus aurantius* on p. 288 omits the species name.

The species accounts include local name, taxonomy, description, similar species, voice, habitat and behaviour and, in a separate box, range and status in Jamaica. There is also a Jamaican range map, which is very clearly printed but I am not sure how useful they are. I personally find the layout of each page rather untidy with text winding around photos of varying sizes. I am also not sure why the range and status in Jamaica information is presented in a separate box with a different background colour.

So what is this book? Is it a field guide? Well, partly, yes (and the authors offer it as such). The photographs and text are sufficient to identify any species recorded on the island, although being hypercritical, in many cases female and immature plumages are illustrated using smaller photographs, yet these are often where confusion can occur. But there is also a large amount of material that isn’t relevant to a field guide and adds to size and weight. Also the binding is such

that the book closes itself which isn’t helpful when you are watching a vireo at Hardwar Gap trying to pick out the key features! Neither is it a definitive book on the birds of Jamaica and it doesn’t pretend to be. I just think that the island’s birds (and birders) deserve a monumental ‘Birds of Jamaica’ telling us everything known to date about this fascinating island’s avifauna.

It is obvious that this has been a labour of love and the publishers have responded with a very well-produced book that is a fitting monument to two of the authors who sadly died prior to publication, Robert Sutton and Audrey Downer.

Andy Mitchell

The bird-life of Mustique in the Grenadines
by Michael Paice and Rob Speirs, 2009. *Mustique Island: The Mustique Company*. 221 pp, many colour photos and maps. ISBN 978-976-8212-35-1. c. UK£26.00 (only for sale on the island or via www.basilmustique.com/Shop/Scripts/default.asp).

This privately printed book is essentially an illustrated checklist of the birds of Mustique. It contains a short chapter on ornithological history followed by detailed notes on habitats. The bulk of the book is given over to the species accounts, which for each species list: status in St. Vincent and the Grenadines; world range; description (including different plumages); voice; diet; and finally a comments section most likely to cover where and when you might see the species on Mustique. The last part comprises some keys to difficult species such as white herons and egrets, small sandpipers and terns. This is followed by a chapter entitled ‘A plea for the mangroves’—and very good it is too—and one on conservation, ending with the usual bibliography, indices, etc.

Clearly a labour of love about an island that doesn’t attract much attention from either ornithologists or birdwatchers, the book is well written (apart from an outbreak of ‘less’ rather than ‘fewer’, with three occurrences on p. 6 alone!) and profusely illustrated with colour photographs throughout. The style is easy and consequently rather pleasant to read with none of the dryness that can permeate this kind of book—rather Caribbean, in fact!

It is aimed at a broad spectrum of visitors, enabling less-experienced birdwatchers to identify what they see, whilst containing a wealth of information on the 108 species recorded. Several of these are new records for the island and some are new to St. Vincent and the Grenadines as a whole. Overall, this is an excellent book and a very welcome addition to the library of books on Caribbean birdlife.

Andy Mitchell

Bird sounds of Argentina and adjacent areas: Disc 1 Patagonia, Antarctica and the South Atlantic Islands by S. Imberti, J. I. Areta, M. Pearman, J. Mazar Barnett, G. Pugnali, I. Roesler, D. Monteleone, H. Casañas and H. Rodríguez Goñi, 2009. Salthouse: WildSounds. DVD featuring 600 recordings of 163 bird species. UK£24.99.



This is the first disc of a forthcoming series of five DVDs in total, covering Argentina and adjacent areas. Presented here are 600 recordings of 163 species from southernmost South America: Patagonia, Antarctica and the South Atlantic Islands. One of the great attractions of this disc is the opportunity to hear some species that are rarely included on audio compilations such as this: penguins (seven species), albatrosses (five species) or Procellariidae (six species). Anyone listening for the first time to the vocalisations of a group of Gentoo Penguins *Pygoscelis papua*, or a displaying Light-mantled Albatross *Phoebastria palpebrata*, will be surprised or amused by these unusual sounds. Virtually all of the species inhabiting this region are presented here, including the rarest: Hooded Grebe *Podiceps gallardoi*, Pink-footed Shearwater *Puffinus creatopus*, Rufous-tailed Hawk *Buteo ventralis*, Austral Rail *Rallus antarcticus*, White-bellied Seedsnipe *Attagis malouinus* and South Georgia Pipit *Anthus antarcticus*, to mention a few.

More than just the impressive list of species presented, the value of this collection also lies in the excellent quality of every one of the recordings. Several vocalisations are usually presented for each species; for example, up to ten for Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans* and Chucao Tapaculo *Scelorchilus rubecula*. These are grouped by type: song, call, alarm call, chicks, etc.

Reading the DVD on a computer, the files are presented in a very user-friendly way. One can use your browser of choice, Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox or Opera. The DVD is bilingual (English and Spanish) and in both languages it is possible to order the sounds by taxonomic sequence, common or scientific names, or English 'family' name (e.g. Sparrow, House). Nomenclature, taxonomy and English names follow the *Annotated checklist of the birds of Argentina*, by Juan Mazar Barnett & Mark Pearman (Lynx Edicions, 2001). Some revisions will be

reflected in the forthcoming publication by Mark Pearman, *Field guide to the birds of Argentina and the south-west Atlantic* (Christopher Helm / Princeton University Press). Some very recent splits are included, such as Patagonian Forest Earthcreeper *Upucerthia saturator* and Lemon Doradito *Pseudocolaptes 'citreola'*, as well as distinctive subspecies like *Vanellus c. chilensis* and *V. c. fretensis* (Southern Lapwing), *Gallinago paraguaiiae magellanica* (South American Snipe), and *Melanodera m. melanodera* and *M. m. princetoniana* (White-bridled Finch).

The files are easily uploaded to any type of MP3 player, but the track names are displayed according to the English bird names, with the 'family' name given first, which I find rather unwieldy and which system I hope will be modified in the rest of the series.

Users will be surprised to find several species from central Chile and the Juan Fernández Islands included here, given the work's title. Their appearance can be considered a 'happy' bonus, although these species are generally represented by rather few recordings and better coverage would be appreciated. In sum, this is a wonderful work, and hopefully the other volumes will appear soon.

Fabrice Schmitt

Richard P. ffrench (1929–2010)

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Richard ffrench. Richard was best known as author of the one of the first modern-day Neotropical field guides *A guide to the birds of Trinidad and Tobago* (1973). After three years on Barbados in the late 1950s Richard moved to Trinidad where he taught at St Peter's, the Texaco Refinery school at Pointe-a-Pierre, until 1984. As well as writing his field guide he undertook research into migrant waders, terns, Scarlet Ibis *Eudocimus ruber*, wintering Dickcissels *Spiza americana* and the nesting habits of Pearl Kite *Gampsonyx swainsonii*, and authored several papers. Richard was a founder member of the world-renowned Asa Wright Nature Centre in Trinidad's Northern Range, and was President of the Board in 1970–71. When he retired, Richard returned to live in the UK but maintained his interest in Neotropical ornithology by leading bird tours to the region and through his involvement with NBC, serving as Advertising Officer in the 1990s.