

Reviews

Antpittas and gnateaters by Harold F. Greeney, illustrated by David Beadle. 2018. London: Helm. 496pp, 24 colour plates, 250 colour photographs. Hardback. ISBN 978-1-472919649. £50/\$65/c.€58.

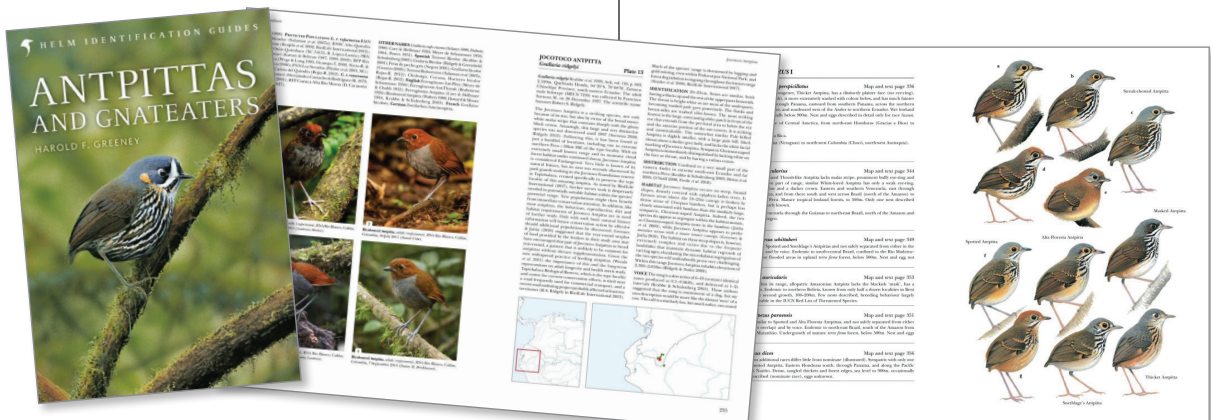
This book is quite obviously a labour of love and, for anyone familiar with the author's huge body of published work, it could never be anything but thorough. Harold Greeney is unashamedly a natural historian, a term that has regrettably become unfashionable in our modern world. This book does indeed read in places like a work of the Victorian era, with all the positive connotations that this implies, and venerable 19th and early 20th century names like Sclater, Godman, Salvin, Hartert and Hellmayr crop up repeatedly. The feel is maintained by the extensive excerpts from original descriptions that preface some of the species accounts, setting a tone of wonder and discovery that befits a group about which so much remains to be unearthed.

Distributional information forms a major part of this work. Maps are a model of clarity, with base cartography showing national borders and major rivers upon which known ranges are carefully mapped. A very useful innovation is the inclusion of marked type localities. As Greeney is at pains to point out in the introduction, researching distribution "was one of the most time-consuming aspects of this work". The maps are based on a vast compilation of records, comprising specimen data, publications, and voucher records held at archives such as xeno-canto (🔗 xeno-canto.org/) and the Internet Bird Collection (🔗 hbw.com/ibc). The half-a-billion records in the increasingly popular (and powerful) eBird system (🔗 ebird.org/) have also been evaluated, with sight records employed cautiously, emphasising to eBird

users the utility of supporting unusual records with voucher audio or visual material. In painstaking detail, sight records have routinely been verified by correspondence with the observers. The source of all records is provided; as the author admits, he did not want to condemn future revisers to repeat the process by obscuring the primary data beneath interpretative accounts. These data will be passed over by many readers, but for perhaps as many others they will be a gold mine to be exploited again and again. They are the sort of feature that sets this monograph apart from so many other similar titles covering other bird families, and their inclusion can only be applauded.

We have established that the library and museum research has been extraordinarily thorough. But Greeney's credentials as a field ornithologist are second to none. Texts are thoroughly underpinned by hard scientific data, but Greeney contributes much original observation of his own. For example, referring to Plain-backed Antpitta *Grallaria haplonota*, he relates "A pair that I observed in the foothills of Ecuador (chaplinae) appeared to increase song rates in response to darkening skies..."; a trait that will be familiar to anyone who has spent time with the species, for example, in Rancho Grande Biological Station, Venezuela, where its haunting song is a feature of the soundscape during misty hours. Indeed, much life-history information, such as nesting data, seasonality, plumage and moult, is here published for the first time. Some of this is recounted in a way that captures the naturalist's joy at observing the events, such as Greeney's personal account of a Tawny Antpitta *Grallaria quitensis* adult relieving its incubating mate on a snow-bound nest.

Taxonomy follows the American Ornithological Society, with one minor departure in the recognition of *Grallaria fenwickorum* rather than *G. urraoensis*



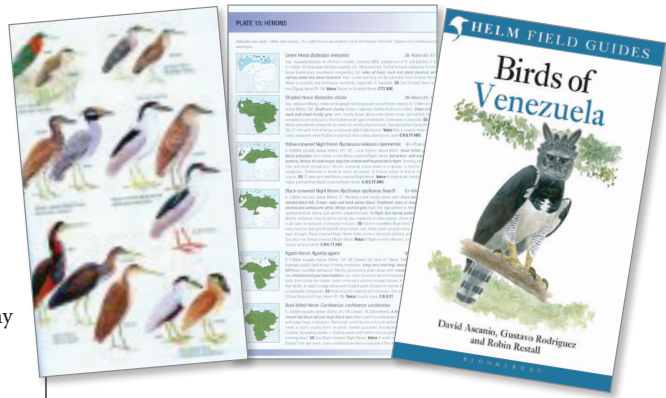
for Urrao Antpitta, in adherence to International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature regulations. The author recognises that some of the 'species' treated are therefore obvious species complexes, the component subspecies of which will in all likelihood, once the evidence is formally marshalled, be elevated to species level. Obvious examples are the Rufous *Grallaria rufula* and Tawny Antpitta *G. quitensis* complexes, which potentially comprise seven and three species respectively; the Sierra de Perijá taxon *saltuensis* of northeast Colombia and northwest Venezuela is perhaps the clearest case in point, originally assigned to *G. rufula* when described more than 70 years ago, with the remark that it "it seems possible that it may be a distinct species". All seven current subspecies of Rufous Antpitta are illustrated and, since all 156 taxa recognised in the book are treated separately and in detail, disentangling the taxa in future will not prove too much of a challenge.

With the sheer volume of information included here, it is no surprise that the odd minor error has crept in. The text states (p. 436) that the range of Slate-crowned *Grallaricula nana* "does overlap with Sucre Antipitta [*G. cumanensis*] in the east [of Venezuela]"; from which the crucial word "not" is missing. More seriously, subspecies labels have been incorrectly placed on the map for Plain-backed Antpitta *Grallaria haplonota*, surely a slip-up at the layout stage. But such things should not trouble us.

Plates are of the high quality we have come to expect from David Beadle, and are a pleasure to peruse. In this case one definitely can judge the book by its (stunning Crescent-faced Antpitta *Grallaricula lineifrons*) cover. Photographs of live birds are provided for all currently recognised species, except for Elusive *Grallaria eludens* and Grey-naped Antpittas *G. griseonucha*, where specimens are substituted. Not surprisingly, given the author's track record of publishing nest descriptions, many of the photos are of nests, nestlings or fledglings – all of which will be excitingly unfamiliar to many readers.

This is one of the best-researched avian monographs ever published, and leaves little to desire in the coverage of its subject. In fact, it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that everything we currently know about this group is contained within this book, so the only factor in deciding whether or not to acquire it is whether antpittas and gnateaters are of interest to the potential purchaser. Given the almost cult interest in these enigmatic cryptic birds, which to judge by the growing number of feeding stations is on the increase, I am confident that the book will sell itself.

Christopher J. Sharpe



Birds of Venezuela by David Ascanio, Gustavo A. Rodríguez and Robin Restall. 2017. 592pp, 248 colour plates and numerous maps. London: Christopher Helm. Softback. ISBN 978-1-408105351. £39.99/c.€45/c.\$51.

As the authors explain in their introduction, *Birds of Venezuela* started out as a spin-off from *Birds of Northern South America* (BNSA), the two-volume 2006 guide by Robin Restall *et al.* Many illustrations therefore are the same as in that earlier guide. As work on the current volume progressed and with all the taxonomic research involved it became apparent that extra artwork would be required, so many new illustrations have been painted and some earlier ones digitally retouched. The layout of a standard modern field guide has been used with maps and text opposite each plate – a user-friendly practice, though one that sometimes limits the amount of text included for each species, especially on more crowded plates (where there may be as many as eight per plate).

The first 55 pages cover the usual topics including geography, climate, habitats, maps, bird topography and six pages on 'How to use this book'. In the latter, the section on voice is particularly helpful in describing how vocalisations have been transcribed in an attempt to help people to interpret them more easily. Twelve pages are also given over to describing each family covered, giving helpful information that would be especially useful to visitors new to the Neotropics. Taxonomy and nomenclature follow the South American Checklist Committee (SACC), though the authors have chosen to keep to a more traditional order for the families, making the guide more user-friendly in terms of being able to quickly flick through the pages and find the family for which you are looking. In addition, they include two species which had not been formally described at the time of writing and elevate another eight subspecies to full species on the basis that they expect them to merit that rank in the near future. Some of these have subsequently been split by some of the world authorities, others have not (as yet!).

As was the case with BNSA, the plates contain illustrations of many subspecies – far more than is

usually the case with field guides. The accompanying text explains where each subspecies occurs within Venezuela by listing the names of the states (in code form). This level of detail is extremely useful, especially when the subspecies vary significantly (e.g. the three races of Silvered Antbird *Scelateria naevia*). In other cases, however, I wondered whether there were perhaps too many illustrations (e.g. six paintings of Stripe-breasted Spinetail *Synallaxis cinnamomea* for five subspecies and one variant, at least three of which look extremely similar). The wealth of illustrations for some species also contrasts with insufficient artwork for others. An example is nightjars (Caprimulgidae), where it is perhaps fine to provide only one illustration (of a bird in flight) for species that are seldom seen at rest (e.g. Short-tailed Nighthawk *Lurocalis semitorquatus*) – but for Sand-coloured Nighthawk *Chordeilis rupestris*, flocks of which are often seen roosting on sandbars, a perched illustration might be useful.

As with most artists some families are better illustrated than others. I was especially taken with the woodcreepers. This lookalike group is not easy to capture well, but members are finely portrayed, with each looking not only different from all the other species but also very like the bird – at least in the case of the species with which I am familiar. In a few illustrations, the posture struck me as wrong: Sword-billed Hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera* is depicted with the perched bird holding its bill horizontally, which contradicts the text ('when perched, bill held upwards'). A curiosity, behind which there must be a story, is the perched Oilbird *Steatornis caripensis* shown roosting on wires next to a pylon, rather than on a rocky ledge in a cave. Presumably the artist must have seen this on at least one occasion. Overall, however, the wealth of illustrations (particularly of subspecies) is commendable: they serve their purpose extremely well, allowing not only the species to be identified but also the race.

The accompanying texts are filled with useful information, including a succinct description with important identification features italicised, and mention of how to separate from similar species. Given space constraints these are extremely well designed and written, containing a wealth of detail crucial for correct identification of the 1,384 species included in the guide. The distribution maps have been very carefully drawn to only include the areas where the species definitely occurs; doubts are indicated by a question mark. For vagrants, individual records are marked. Although subspecies distribution is not shown, the adjacent text describes this in sufficient detail for readers to easily interpret.

Prior to the publication of this field guide most birdwatchers visiting Venezuela would have used

another field guide with exactly the same title and publisher (Hilty 2003). As that book is still in print and readily available some comparisons may perhaps be useful.

Hilty's guide is significantly larger and much heavier, so it was always a challenge to use it in the field. This is not to say that the new guide is light – it is not and is too big to fit into a pocket – so a bag would be required to carry it into the field. The plates in Hilty were painted by a variety of artists and the quality and style varied significantly. Some were by Guy Tudor, and fans of his might well regard them as difficult if not impossible to better. His plates of small flycatchers, for example, probably remain unbeatable. Being a much larger book, Hilty's text is also far more detailed than that in the new guide, often with half a page or more of small print for each species, much of which remains extremely helpful and accurate. The taxonomy is now somewhat out of date of course, and the distribution of some species may have changed, and new discoveries made for the rarer species.

Being more up-to-date taxonomically, more portable and with far more illustrations, I would say that the new guide is undoubtedly the book to take on a trip to Venezuela, but it would also be useful to have a copy of Hilty available for reference too. Taking both would be almost impossible given the combined weight, but there is now a solution. The Hilty guide is available in a Kindle edition (admittedly at quite a high price) and so for those who travel with a tablet it is possible to take Hilty in electronic form for easy reference if needed.

Sadly, at present this is all rather academic due to the current political and economic problems within Venezuela. Most bird tours to the country have now been suspended, and independent travellers are warned against visiting. We can only hope that things improve before too long so that we can once again visit this wonderful country and experience its fantastic birdlife – and put this excellent new field guide to good use.

David Fisher

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Birds of Nicaragua: a field guide by Liliana Chavarría-Duriaux, David C. Hille & Robert Dean, 2018. Ithaca, NY: Comstock Publishing Associates (a Zona Tropical Publication). 480pp, 1332 colour illustrations, 9 colour photographs, 810 maps. Softback. ISBN 978-1-501701580. £32/\$39.95/c. €36.

Nicaragua has long been in the shadow of its neighbour, Costa Rica, partly due to decades of

political instability fuelled by proxy war. During the last century, grouped with El Salvador and Honduras, it was often overlooked by travellers and birders, or given a wide berth. It still slips under the world-listers' radar simply because it has no endemic species. This is a terrible shame since the country has so much to offer, arguably more than any other in the region. It holds the largest continuous block of tropical forest north of Amazonia, habitats that are better preserved than those in neighbouring countries, a respectable 750+ species of bird (vs 925 for Costa Rica) and is the Central American country where exciting new discoveries can most realistically be expected. Without a doubt, the lack of a modern field guide has not helped the country promote its avian riches. Now that has been remedied, first by a pioneering 2014 bilingual guide (Martínez-Sánchez *et al.* 2014; on which Liliana Chavarría-Durieux was a co-author), and now by this Zona Tropical offering.

The guide covers 763 species, with full accounts accorded to every species that is known to have occurred, including vagrants such as Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata* and Tawny-collared Nightjar *Antrostomus salvini*. An appendix provides shorter text and thumbnail illustrations of 43 species that are likely to be found in future, or whose claim to form part of the avifauna rests on a single sight record, thus helping future-proof the book to some extent. Some sight records have apparently been rejected on available evidence, as with a March 2014 sight record of Sinaloa Martin *Progne sinaloae*, although for this species whose winter range is unknown (quite possibly Amazonia), it would seem at least plausible that it might migrate through Nicaragua. Taxonomy follows the American Ornithological Society; differences with the increasingly popular Clements and International Ornithological Congress lists – much favoured by eBirders and world-listers respectively – are not mentioned, but neither are they difficult to determine.

All information pertinent to a species is provided on a single page spread, making the guide quick to use in the field. The book itself is slightly larger (about 2 cm taller) than Zona Tropical's popular Costa Rica predecessor (Garrigues & Dean 2007), which puts it on the borderline of what might be called a 'pocket guide', but it is otherwise fairly similar in style and layout, all wrapped in the identical type of standard soft cover.

Text is concise, albeit a little longer than that of its Costa Rican counterpart, and clearly emphasises characters for field identification. Care has been taken to describe distribution, status and seasonality in sufficient detail for critical use. Descriptions of voice



are always idiosyncratic, and in some cases I am not sure my ears are quite attuned to those of the authors. For example, I have trouble matching the description of a “rhythmic 4-phrase song” for Pale-vented Pigeon *Patagioenas cayennensis* with the classic ‘Santa Cruz’ mnemonic that my brain ascribes.

The 2014 Nicaragua guide lacked maps, relying instead on range descriptions. This Zona Tropical guide breaks new ground, with large, colour-coded maps that permit the instant narrowing-down of possibilities. Despite their size, the maps are rather broad-brush, doubtless reflecting the resolution of the information the authors had at their disposal, especially the paucity of museum collections made in Nicaragua; their source is not specified beyond “years of field research”.

Robert Dean's plates originally appeared in Garrigues and Dean (2007), but there are many new illustrations depicting females, birds in flight, tail patterns and so on. All boreal migrants are illustrated, cutting down on the need to carry a North America field guide. As users of previous guides featuring Dean's work will know, the paintings are well-suited to the purpose of practical identification, showing diagnostic field marks.

Zona Tropical publications have made a niche for themselves with a series of well-produced field guides to Central American biota, and this latest addition will occupy a prominent place in their portfolio. I very much hope that birders will be persuaded to visit Nicaragua, and tour companies will eventually welcome it into the suite of orthodox tour destinations. With the appearance of this handy guide, crafted with love as well as expertise, there should be no excuse.

Christopher J. Sharpe

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Birds of Chile: a photo guide by Steve N. G. Howell & Fabrice Schmitt. 2018. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 240pp. 1,300+ colour photographs. Softback. ISBN 978-0-691167398. \$29.95/c.£23.

This addition to the marketplace of tools for identifying Chile's birds comes from two well-known tour guides who are no strangers to the Neotropical Bird Club, having co-ordinated our fundraising tour in 2016 (Jeffers & Schmitt 2016) and publishing regularly in *Neotropical Birding* and *Cotinga*. Nor are field guides to Chile's birds absent from the collective Latin American bookshelf: *Birds of Chile* (Jaramillo *et al.* 2003) is, personally speaking, one of the best bird guides ever; more recently, Couve & Vidal's *Aves de Chile, sus islas oceánicas y Península Antártica* was reviewed in *Neotrop. Birding* 22: 68–69.

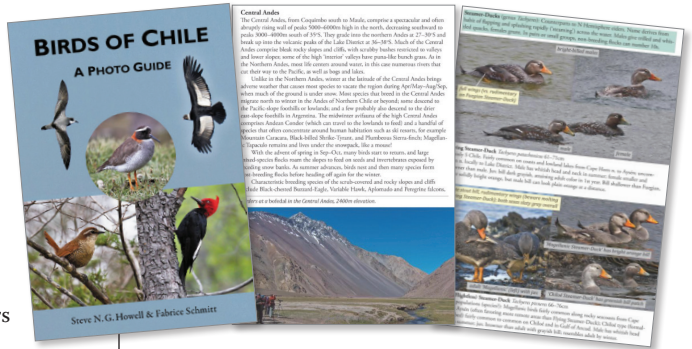
This book immediately differs from the other two by illustrating birds through photographs rather than artwork. The authors suggest that their guide is simply 'another steppingstone [sic]' on the journey of understanding Chile's birds, and that it 'builds on the work of many others'. The latter claim may be true, but the first statement is overly modest. This is an outstanding field guide.

Species are arranged in 'field-friendly groupings' rather than seeking to keep up with the 'seemingly ever-changing landscape of higher-level taxonomy'. It is heartening to see proposals made by Howell *et al.* (2012) in this magazine being adopted in print.

The book squeezes a vast amount into its jacket-pocket size. Typically two species feature on each page, each illustrated by three or four images covering different poses and plumages. Images bleed to the page edge; no space is wasted. Many photographs (e.g. for seabirds, raptors and hirundines) are integrated into the design, creating a pleasing, plate-like effect against a plain background of sea or sky. Others are constrained in somewhat ugly rectangles.

The authors state that 'most' of the 1,300 images are theirs. The quality is good, if not likely to win awards. There are neat touches, such as tail-feather detail of Chilean Woodstar *Eulidia yarrellii*. There are images of 'birds in habitat', where the subject is smaller in the frame and sometimes imperfectly lit. This is brave – but inspired. It gives a real insight into how you see the birds in the field. For me, it's the stand-out characteristic of the book – and the one that sets it apart from the burgeoning morass of photographic guides.

Images fill roughly three-quarters of each page, which leaves little room for text. The authors have



turned such a constraint into a virtue, penning six pithy lines that focus on vocalisations, confusion species, distribution, status and behaviour. (There is no feather-by-feather description here; this guide complements books with traditional artwork, rather than replaces it.) Key identification features are more succinct still, 'starring' in small boxes superimposed on dead space in photographs. These include fascinating little nuggets: I have seen many White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihii*, but never noticed that males have longer legs than females.

The authors believe that 'taxonomic studies in South America lag well behind the curve of actual species diversity'. Accordingly, and as trailed in Jeffers & Schmitt (2016), the book contains some bold taxonomic changes. The authors openly admit to tending 'in a liberal (=realistic) direction when recognising species'. Thus Chilean Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis* is split from Cayenne *V. cayennensis*, Austral Turkey Vulture *Cathartes jota* from two(!) other turkey vultures and so on. The authors slightly hedge their bets on complex cases such as Band-winged Nightjar *Caprimulgus longirostris* and Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail *Leptasthenura aegithaloides*, which the authors suggest may comprise three and four species-level taxa, respectively. Nevertheless, the boldness is welcome – and increases the attractiveness of an already-brilliant country yet further.

As with any book, I have the odd grumble or niggle. Even with space at a premium, scientific names would have been useful in the introduction. So too species distribution maps – perhaps in discrete section to avoid overcrowding the plates. But these are minor points that in no way distract from an excellent, exciting and invigorating addition to the library on Chile's avifauna.

James Lowen

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Jaramillo, A., Burke, P. & Beadle, D. (2003) *Birds of Chile*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jeffers, R. & Schmitt, F. (2016) Red-hot Chile: a NBC fundraiser on the trail of the country's speciality birds. *Neotrop. Birding* 21: 12–21.

Birds of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao: a site and field guide by Jeffrey V. Wells & Allison Childs Wells; illustrated by Robert Dean. 2017. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 474pp, 59 colour plates. Softback. ISBN 978-1-501701078. £31.99/c.\$41/c.€36.

For many years, birders visiting the beautiful Leeward Islands of the Dutch Caribbean – Aruba, Bonaire & Curaçao, collectively and affectionately known as the 'ABC islands' – had little choice when it came to field guides. We had *Birds of the Netherlands Antilles*, first published in 1955 with the second edition in 1983 (Voous 1983). In 1993, this was complemented by a small photo guide intended for the local market, *Nos paranan* ('Our birds'; de Boer 1993). But mainly we made do with guides whose reach covered adjacent areas as northern South America or the Caribbean overall.

In tandem with the growing interest in birds and bird conservation in the islands, itself accompanied by burgeoning ecotourism, the field-guide vacuum has been filling up rapidly over the last few years. First up, in 2012 the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance produced a series of bird-identification cards for ecotourists and locals alike, repurposing images provided by publishers Helm and Lynx Edicions. The same year saw publication of the first 'serious' field guide to these islands in decades (de Boer *et al.* 2012). *Birds of Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire* packs a lot into its highly portable 176 pages: 1,000 illustrations (covering various plumages) and succinct accounts to aid identification of 286 species. It also throws in a short section on special birding sites alongside the usual geographical overview of the region covered. It is a smashing little field guide.

This is the context in which *Birds of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao* by Jeff and Allison Wells was published five years later. The book's subtitle differentiates it explicitly from de Boer *et al.* (2012):

this guide is as much about *place* as it is a tool for bird identification. A great benefit of Wells and Wells is its coverage of where to go birding: each island gets its own chapter, while each site is treated to a description of its habitat, a summary of what birds can be found there when and a short but very helpful paragraph on access. This approach contributes much to the book's value.

In terms of a field guide, Wells and Wells contains more information (and so it should, given that it weighs 0.8kg!) yet provides fewer illustrations. A full paragraph (rather than the usual word or two, e.g. 'rare visitor') is allocated to status in each species account, summarising historical and recent records alike. Whilst this provides evidence of Jeff Wells's pedigree as an ornithologist, I personally feel that it is not clear what value this adds to a *field* guide. Given the still limited and incomplete knowledge on the distribution of birds in the Dutch Caribbean, I feel that the additional benefit of (re)publishing these data does not justify the extra page count

(and weight...). For birders interested in the best-available information on records of birds on the three islands, checklists are available (e.g. Prins *et al.* 2009) as well as, of course, eBird.

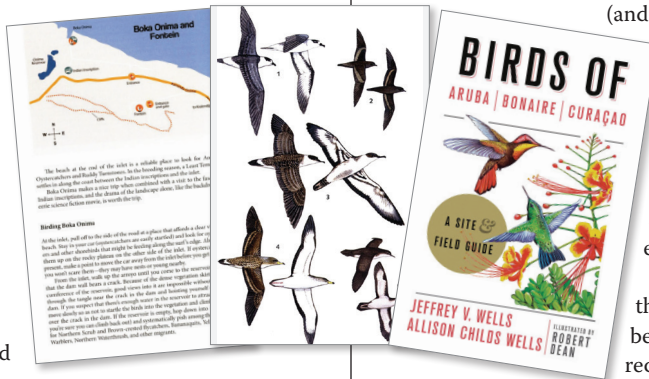
Birdwatching on the 'ABC islands' has become much easier in recent years, thanks to the publication of both

Wells and Wells (2017) and de Boer *et al.* (2012). The former is a great guide, particularly because of its site-based information. I can recommend it for planning visits or keeping in your hotel during a trip. That said, its weight and relatively low number of bird illustrations make it less comfortable and practical as a guide for use in the field. Accordingly, when actually out and about, optics around neck, I prefer to take with me de Boer *et al.*

Bert Denneman

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Les oiseaux de Guyane by Tanguy Deville. 2018. Mèze: Biotope Éditions. 324pp. Numerous colour photographs. Hardback. ISBN 978-2-366622041. €46/c.£41/c.\$52.



Ever fancied birding French Guiana – perhaps inspired by the late Alex Renaudier's article in an early *Neotropical Birding* (5: 39–47) – but not yet made it? This new coffee-table book by celebrated bird photographer Tanguy Deville makes a decent substitute... although

it may end up encouraging you to book a flight to one of South America's least-visited countries. Deville's photographic work is well known to *Neotropical Birding* readers (e.g. Deville *et al.* 2010, Deville & Ingels 2016), and some images published in this sumptuous book will ring bells with the magazine's readers. The visuals offered here are varied – from birds in their environmental context to luxuriant close-ups – and of very high quality. Indeed, it is the former – a silhouetted Swallow-tailed Kite *Elanoides forficatus* soaring high above the rainforest, a Pompadour Cotinga *Xipholena punicea* in a gap between the canopy leaves – that sneakily steal the show. For those who read French, the imagery is complemented with both detailed essays covering themes as diverse as ecology, behaviour and evolution, and a suite of extracts from Deville's notebook-cum-diary. In sum this is a rich book and a veritable treat for the eyes. Most enjoyable.

James Lowen

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Birds of Central America: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama by Andrew C. Vallely & Dale Dyer, 2018. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 584pp, 260 colour plates, 1,261 maps. Softback. ISBN 978-0-691-13802-2. £40/\$49.50/c.€45.

Until recently, field guides for Central America were getting rather long in the tooth, although such masterworks as Howell & Webb (1995), Stiles & Skutch (1989), and Ridgely & Gwynne (1989) never become obsolete. The situation was remedied by the first field guides to Belize (Jones 2003) and Honduras

(Gallardo 2014), followed by pocket guides to Costa Rica (Garrigues & Dean 2007), Panama (Angehr & Dean 2010) and Nicaragua (Chavarría-Durieux *et al.* 2018; see review, page 88) published by Zona Tropical/Comstock Publishing Associates (latterly imprints of Cornell University Press), and by the Peterson guide to Northern Central America (Fagan & Komar 2016). The present volume, as the first field guide to the entire Central American avifauna, fills the gaps left by El Salvador and Guatemala and brings the identification literature for the remaining countries up to date.

A decade in production, the book covers the 1,261 bird species that had been documented in the political region of Central America as of August 2017, an avifauna comparable in size with that of a typical South American country – quite a daunting undertaking. Each of the 1,194 bird species of what the authors define as the 'core avifauna' is accorded a main species account, while a further 67 'marginal, dubious and hypothetical species' are relegated to an annotated appendix.

The region is delimited politically rather than biogeographically, so Vitelline Warbler *Setophaga vitellina*, a West Indian species found only on the Swan Islands and (extraliminally) on the Cayman Islands, is included. Taxonomy and order broadly follow American Ornithological Society (AOS). There are some logical departures, such as treating Audubon's *Setophaga auduboni* and Goldman's Warblers *S. goldmani* as separate from Yellow-rumped Warbler *S. coronata*, or recognising Azuero Parakeet *Pyrrhura eisenmanni* as distinct from South American Painted Parakeet *P. picta*.

The main accounts comprise carefully distilled, concise identification texts and good-sized distribution maps (29 x 36 mm) on the left, with plates on facing spreads. Layout is intuitive, facilitating cross-referencing to the facing page. For species that exhibit geographic variation northern/western subspecies appear on the left-hand side of the plate and eastern/southern subspecies on the right. Plates are the most realistic of any guide to this region, accurately capturing the jizz and plumage of all groups. Birds are usually shown in profile to facilitate comparison, but the illustrations have a pleasing three-dimensional quality and the plates themselves are works of art. The antbirds and furnariids are spectacular. The figures are large and fill each plate, leaving minimal blank plate.

Critical groups such as shorebirds, tyrant flycatchers and warblers are very nicely illustrated, the latter with both breeding and non-breeding plumages. There should be no need to carry an additional guide to the birds of North America. It is no surprise to learn that both artist and author spent a great deal of

time in museum collections, especially the American Museum of Natural History, checking and comparing specimens. The depth of their research is apparent in the quality of the entire book. It may take a while for the eye to adapt to the lack of colour saturation of the plates, particularly for some groups like vireos and thrushes. However, I find the artwork very pleasing.

In the introduction, the authors set out their reasons for not labelling figures with subspecies names; having examined the full range of geographic variation they felt that a more general description of geographic variation was more appropriate. Given the diligence with which the authors examined museum specimens, I would have liked to have seen scientific names of subspecies specified, which I think would have added clarity to accounts of, for example, Willet *Tringa semipalmata*, Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*, Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Dusky-capped Flycatcher *Myiarchus tuberculifer* and Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*.

Text focuses squarely on the task of identification. In the interest of brevity, it omits information on aspects of life history except where they aid identification. An introductory line on regional and global status precedes the main identification text, which is followed by a short section covering geographic variation where appropriate. Notes on habits indicate habitat preference, the favoured habitat stratum (canopy vs understorey, etc.), and distinctive features of behaviour. The final section describes vocalisations. The compilation of accurate distribution maps across seven nations must have consumed an inordinate amount of time. I could find no obvious oversights, although unfortunately Turquoise-browed *Eumomota superciliosa* and Blue-throated Motmot *Aspatria gularis* maps have been transposed during layout. The authors have wisely treated records on popular online platforms with caution, which will ensure that the distributional data provides a solid baseline for future work.

Compressing practical information on the identification of 1,200 species into one volume

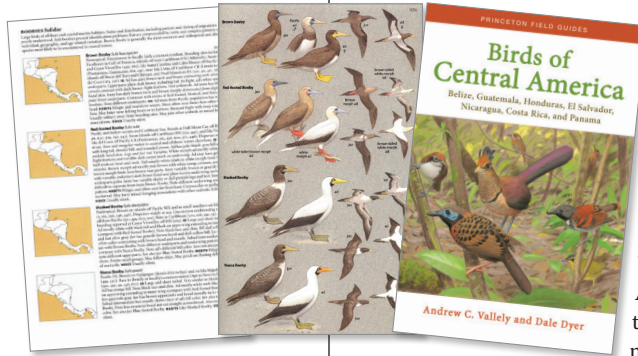
demands a good-sized book. This one is about the size of old guides such as Stiles & Skutch or Ridgely & Gwynne, and weighs 1.3 kg. Yes, for those who want to carry a pocket guide, it is bulky, and also heavy. And it is likely that many visitors will be inclined to pass it over in favour of a lighter guide. In my opinion that would be a mistake. I much prefer to carry a dependable, authoritative reference and will gladly have this in a backpack in preference to a smaller guide. At the very least, for those who will not be

taking it in the field, it should be an essential reference for consultation back at camp or at the hotel.

So, an excellent addition to the literature on the birds of Central America with strong text and plates. This new guide becomes the benchmark for the

region and acts as a worthy geographical complement to Howell & Webb (1995), with a slight geographic overlap. The authors deserve the highest praise for a magnificent achievement.

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