

Field Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago

By Martyn Kenefick, Robin Restall, and Floyd Hayes. 2011. A & C Black Ltd., 50 Bedford Square London WC1B 3DP, UK. 288 pages. 40.00 USD. Paper.

For many years avid birders needed to take two books when visiting Trinidad and Tobago. *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago* by Richard ffrench is about the best written field guide and provides excellent information. However it is a little large for a pocket and has

few illustrations. You needed to take *A Guide to the Birds of Venezuela* [by R. Meyer de Schauensee and W. Phelps] to have good visual coverage.

In 2008 Kenefick et al. produced a compact guide that solved this problem. However they used plates

from *Birds of Northern South America: an identification guide* [by Robin Restall, Clemencia Rodner and Miguel Lentino, Christopher Helm, London & Yale University Press.] and these are poor for some species. Now the authors have released a second edition that contains many revised illustrations. This resolves most, but not all, of my issues with the illustrations.

The book starts with a brief description of the geography, habitats, and climate of the two islands. There are descriptions of the best places to find birds which are both accurate and realistic.

The book covers 470 species, both native and introduced. The text is brief but informative, with a useful section on similar species. The new plates are essential for the difficult species, like elanias and flycatchers. I would never have identified a Small-billed Elania without Kenefick's original book, and this revised edition is an improvement. Most remarkable is the five plates of New World warblers, that has the most detailed coverage of any guide. Most species have several plumages, ranging from the duller immature to the brightest male. For example, there are six plumages of Chestnut-sided Warbler shown. In all 20 of the two dozen species I see each year are illustrated, making this book useful in Canada as well as Trinidad.

The taxonomy is up-to-date. The Blue-crowned Motmot is now the Trinidad Motmot [*Momotus bahamensis*], but I wonder why it isn't the Tobago or, at least, the Trinibago Motmot. This year I saw 0.5 motmots per day in Trinidad, while I hit four or more per day on Tobago. Likewise Cayenne Tern is split from

Sandwich. Moorhen carries the new [old?] name – Common Gallinule.

Some of the illustrations I did not like have been retained. There are birds that look more like museum specimens, than birds in the field. This is not critical for a distinctive species like Crested Caracara, with its odd, gangly pose. However I had great difficulty identifying an immature Ornate Hawk Eagle from this plate. *Birds of Venezuela* shows more clearly the wing and body shape and the description backs this up. I later checked these characteristics against photos on the internet. There are no range maps.

These criticisms notwithstanding this is now the essential guide to these exotic islands. For the best part it is accurate, easy to use and portable. The text while short is useful. The text in french is more extensive [and therefore worth having as a reference]. It is interesting to note that Kenefick does not include Groove-billed Ani [which does not occur in Trinidad] while french does. However french says the lone record is "certainly a mistake for [Smooth-billed Ani]." Why then do I see this species recorded by many visitors on their trip list. Clearly they need Kenefick et al's book.

Note the publisher has changed from Yale University Press to Christopher Helm of London, the natural history arm of A & C Black Ltd, I am not sure how this will affect the North American distribution. If you are going to T&T this well done book is a must have guide; wherever you need to go to buy it.

ROY JOHN

2193 Emard Crescent, Ottawa, Ontario K1J 6K5