

the three accipiters have each one holding its tail in a different way, and this makes it hard to see the differences which are so useful in field identification. There are also some outright mistakes. Ones that I caught tended to be mislabeled photographs: in the eastern volume, the first winter Iceland Gull is actually a second-year bird, the first summer Common Tern is mislabeled as an adult summer (although the same photo is correctly labelled in the western volume), and an immature Yellow-billed Cuckoo is mislabeled as an adult. The range maps are good, but also not

without fault, for example, the Ontario range of Gray Partridge is incorrect.

With the proliferation of options, choosing a good field guide is increasingly a question of personal preference. Most of my casual birder friends prefer photographic guides; most keen birders seem to prefer traditional guides with paintings. I would recommend this book for novice birders and for those wanting to supplement a more traditional guide.

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A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Jamaica

By Ann Hayes-Sutton, Audrey Downer, and Robert Sutton. 2009. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540-5237 USA. 304 pages, 29.95 USD Paper.

In 1990, Sutton and Downer produced a well-received, handy little photographic guide to the birds of Jamaica. Almost 20 years later, a more comprehensive guide, copiously populated with stunning photographs taken by Yves-Jacques Rey-Millet, makes for a fitting replacement and a fitting tribute to Robert Sutton and Audrey Downer, both of whom sadly passed away before the book was published.

The book follows a well-trodden path, with an introductory section providing a biogeography of the island and observations on the composition and origins of the avifauna and on migration, including austral and altitudinal migrants. There are notes on conservation and threats, a history of ornithology on the island, and a section on birding in Jamaica, including short site notes. This is followed by the obligatory “how to use this guide” section, and there are end pieces, including a section hopefully entitled “probably” extinct species, as well as an annotated list of vagrants and charts highlighting endemic species and subspecies.

As is the norm, the bulk of the book consists of species accounts. Each account includes the often colourful local names and a short taxonomy of the species, followed by a detailed description and discussion of similar species, voice, and, for the visiting birder, an all-important section on habitat and behaviour—usually the keys to finding birds. Each species account is accompanied by a colourful, easy-to-read range map. The most attractive aspect of the book is the photographs. The number of photographs of each species varies, with residents being awarded more extensive coverage, up to four photographs, compared to migrants, which generally have one or two only. For the resident species, all the most likely plumages to be

encountered are illustrated. This bias makes sense, as most users of this book will concentrate on the charismatic local resident species, which include 30 endemics, as the other species are well covered in any standard North American guide. The quality of the photographs is generally excellent; the plates of Jamaican Tody alone are an incentive to start planning your next trip. And then there is the photo of an adult Northern Potoo with a downy white nestling: “When alarmed the chick gradually melds into the parent’s feathers, until totally concealed.” Now that would be something to witness. Of particular interest to North American birders is a good photograph of the enigmatic Bicknell’s Thrush, a hard-to-see northern breeder which winters in Jamaica.

The editing and quality control are excellent. The only slip-up I found was an end piece photograph of a White-chinned Thrush unhelpfully labelled only as “adult”, with the reader left to guess what species was involved, a problem easily solved by flipping through the species accounts. A minor quibble: there is a lack of in-flight shots of gulls, shorebirds, and ducks, and this reduces the ability of the book to meet its stated objective to be an all-in-one field guide.

This handy little volume is the only guide you need in order to identify all of the resident birds of Jamaica, along with most migrants you are likely to see. It is also an excellent photographic complement to any of the standard Caribbean regional field guides. The photographs alone make this a handsome addition to any birder’s library. I would highly recommend it to anyone with an interest in Caribbean birds and birding.

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