

BOOK REVIEWS

A Birder's Guide to Trinidad and Tobago.

William L. Murphy.

Peregrine Enterprises Inc., Maryland. 1986. 124 pp. US \$12.95.

As birdwatching has developed in many western countries during the last 20 years into a major leisure-time activity, people have not been slow to exploit the commercial opportunities that have arisen from this. Trinidad and Tobago offer probably one of the most desirable locations in the world for tourist birdwatchers, with more than 400 recorded species within a relatively small area, in an accessible situation well provided with modern amenities. So it is not surprising that a "birder's" guide to our islands has now appeared, catering principally to foreign visitors.

William Murphy's booklet effectively covers what is needed in such a publication. In a lengthy introduction he gives a brief account of the islands' geography and climate, he advises visitors in detail on what to bring with them, when to visit, how to travel, and deals with such matters as immigration control, customs and bird-tours. He discusses where birdwatchers should stay, giving (I thought) decidedly unbalanced accounts of three locations in Trinidad and five in Tobago and also explains the important matter of internal transportation and the availability of good driver/guides.

In the main portion of the guide Murphy advises on the best places to find birds, suggesting thirteen locations in Trinidad and four in Tobago, gives useful map-diagrams for several of these and illustrates many with black and white photographs, some of them rather inadequate. In this section his selection was clearly guided by his experience as a bird-tour leader for an American agency. The locations described are mostly those which the tour groups visit, based at their hotels in Port of Spain, St. Augustine and Arima valley within Trinidad, or at either end of Tobago. Thus little space is given to more remote parts of the islands, and none at all (apart from Little Tobago) to offshore islands. But the main locations are generally well described.

In a less successful section the author briefly notes the status and habitats of 156 "more unusual species... frequently missed by visitors", lists accidental species and local hunting laws, and gives a complete checklist for the islands. He also gives bar-graphs showing seasonal distribution and abundance of selected species. As I don't have space here for a comprehensive critique, I can only say that it is a mistake to include what purports to be scientific information in a travel guide, unless it is based on published and verifiable sources. As it is, much of this section could mislead the serious ornithologist and is not of much use to the more casual birdwatcher.

Two articles are included by other authors, a bibliography of recent references to local birds, by Roger Clapp (which even includes chatty articles in "Trinidad Naturalist" - then why not articles from "Trinidad Guardian?") and, a bit inconsequentially, a snorkeler's guide to Arnos Vale by Tom and Katharine Almy.

Among a small crop of typographical and other errors are the mention of the *Strong-billed Woodcreeper* (twice), the placing of Matura forest in *southeast* Trinidad, and the occurrence of *Hooded*, instead of *Prothonotary*, Warbler in Tobago. Moreover, in a book like this it is inevitable that certain statements will be obsolete before they are printed (as Bacon and I found out in "Nature Trails"!.) Thus I doubt whether many birders can now go very far along the Old Castara Road in Tobago. I also find it a pity that the author hasn't found space for a mention of the Trinidad & Tobago Field Naturalists' Club and its activities, which might well interest visiting birdwatchers.

All in all, this is a useful enough book, giving some valuable information for a visiting birdwatcher who is not a member of a tour group. But those in tour groups hardly need this book, nor can I see much value in it for local resident birdwatchers, except perhaps for complete novices who have seldom set foot outside Port of Spain all their lives!

Richard ffrench

Butterflies and other Insects of the Eastern Caribbean.

P.D. Stiling

Macmillan Caribbean, 1986.

The author seems to have been torn between writing a general introduction to entomology and a guide to butterflies. The section on butterflies (occupying 28 out of 85 pages) is the more successful part. The general entomology text is patchy in style and content and contains some dubious or inaccurate statements.

The photographs with which the book is profusely illustrated are amateurish, and are mostly of insects that are obviously dead.

The captions are inconsistent, varying from Latin binomials to basic English (eg. "Killer bee"), and do not always fit the picture printed (eg. a mole-cricket labelled "cricket"; a picture of a wasp "and nest" when the wasp is posed on a flower).

The printing and reproduction are excellent. It is a pity that the contents are not of an equivalent standard.

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