

## BOOK REVIEW

### BIRDS OF JAMAICA: A *Photographic Field Guide*

Audrey Downer & Robert Sutton. 1990. Photos by Yves-Jacques Rey-Millet. Cambridge Univ. Press, New York 10011. Hardback. 152 pp. \$29.95.

Jamaica is the third largest island in the Caribbean Sea (about 4000 square miles) located approximately 95 miles south of Cuba and 110 miles west of Haiti. Jamaica's topography and geology are diverse, producing a variety of habitats that attract a large number of birds. Forty-six species and subspecies of birds are endemic to Jamaica, that is found nowhere else in the world. With its tropical location, relative proximity, and English language, it is not surprising that it has become a popular attraction for both American and British tourists.

Since 1936 the definitive guide to the birds of Jamaica, and all of the other islands in the Caribbean, has been James Bond's *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*. Bond's *Guide* is still considered the authority on the region. However, if you are a birder and you are vacationing only on Jamaica, you may not be interested in (and may even be confused by) all those other birds that occur on all those other islands covered by Bond. This is the standard motivation for producing a local field guide. The membership of the local Gosse Bird Club had the required basic information and the recent volume of tourists with at least a passing interest in birds made the proposal economically feasible. The result is this little guide.

Be forewarned; if you want to be able to identify most of the birds that you encounter while vacationing in Jamaica, you will need more than just this guide. During the cold-weather months, when most people will find Jamaica maximally appealing, the island will also be occupied by a large (dwindling) number of avian tourists, over-wintering after a strenuous breeding season on the North American mainland. The authors of this guide assume that everyone knows how to identify these species so they are neither illustrated nor described. Many of these birds are wearing relatively drab, comparatively unfamiliar plumages (for example, the "confusing fall warblers"), meaning you may want to bring along your trusty North American guide if you want to identify these. In addition, there are several wide-spread Caribbean species found on Jamaica such as the West Indian Whistling Duck, Yellow-breasted Crake, Plain Pigeon, and Golden Swallow that are not illustrated in this guide nor are they even listed in any of the common North American guides. For these you still need to have a copy of Bond.

What this guide does provide are sixty-five excellent photographs of Jamaican birds and recommendations to about four dozen places where species of birds can be found. Normally I am not very enthusiastic about photographs in field guides, but these look like they will work reasonably well. The photos will probably not work reliably for differentiating many of the species of flycatchers, but then again, nothing is going to make identification of the species of *Elaenia* or *Myiarchus* easy.

The thirty dollar price of the book is expensive for what you get compared to a Peterson Guide or the National Geographic Guide, but if you can afford to spend time in Jamaica on vacation, you can probably afford the additional cash for this local bird guide.—H. T. Hendrickson.