

Book Review: *A Birder's Guide to the Bahamas (Including Turks and Caicos)*

Anthony W. White. 1998. American Birding Association. Paper, wire-O binding. \$26.95.

Probably the first question to come to mind is why review a book on Bahamian avifauna in a journal about Carolina birds. There are a number of reasons this book is pertinent to the avifauna of the two Carolinas. First, a large percentage of our tropical pelagic seabird fauna is composed of species nesting in the Bahama archipelago. Secondly, nearly all our transient species are shared.

Thirdly, and most importantly, a great number of southeastern migrant birds winter in the Bahamas. Approximately 85% of the total 305 species which comprise the avifauna of the Bahamas is shared with the Carolinas. This shared fauna exceeds 260 species, and a great many of these species are birds which breed in the Carolinas and winter in the Bahamas in considerable numbers. Between 5.6 and 9.7 million North American migrants, many of these from the southeastern United States, winter in the pine forest of the Bahamas (Baham J. Sci 3:8-15). And, on San Salvador, for example, North American migrants make up 30 - 38% of the winter faunal assemblage. (J. Field Orn. 69:402 - 414.) A number of common woodland breeding species are also shared (Red-tailed Hawks, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and Pine Warblers to name a few). In reality the region extending from the Carolinas southward through Georgia, Florida, the Bahamas, and the pine forest of eastern Cuba is a zoogeographic continuum, and for birds the fact that this region is interrupted by state lines and brief stretches of open water is irrelevant.

White's book is arranged as a bird finding guide. It is set up so that visitors going to any particular island will know where to go and what species they are likely to encounter. Obviously, local endemics and hard-to-find species get much of the attention, but readers also get a good review of each major island and specific plant communities. Because of the fragmented nature of the Bahamas archipelago and the remoteness of some island groups, the book is also a good reference for just the logistics of physically getting about the islands.

From an ornithological perspective, White's book is an important contribution. There have been few books on the birds of the Bahamas, and previous ones all suffered from the earlier authors' lack of familiarity with most of the island groups. It is clear that White has personally visited most of the

islands and has first-hand experience with their faunas. The book also covers the Turk and Caicos Islands, islands which zoogeographically are part of the Bahamas, but politically are a different country. The total number of named islands, rocks and cays exceeds 1,000. Over a third of the 305 species of birds recorded from the 700 mile long archipelago breed there. White records four endemic species and thirty-four endemic subspecies. Additionally, a number of North American species reach their southern limits of breeding distributions, and many Greater Antillean birds reach their northern limits on islands barely 50 miles from the coast of the southeastern United States.

The book is comprised of an introductory chapter, 13 island guide chapters, an annotated list of specialities, a photo section of Bahamian birds (with many excellent photographs by Bruce Hallett), a chapter on other observable wildlife, a checklist of birds of the archipelago, and a good bibliography.

One can get a good idea of the type of information White provides in an article he prepared for *Birding* entitled, "Birding Southern Abaco" (*Birding* 30 (3):196 - 207). In fact, if you are going to the Bahamas to see birds and only plan to go once, Abaco is my personal favorite. But even if you never plan to visit the Bahamas, from a Carolina perspective this book is worth having to get a feel for what the catbirds and kingfishers we see in the Carolinas do for the other seven months of their lives.

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