



## Book reviews

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In return, as a service to readers, this review section of *Ibis* is organized and edited by Michael G. Wilson and Professor Ben Sheldon of the Edward Grey Institute, with the help of a panel of contributors. They are always grateful for offers of further assistance with reviewing, especially with foreign-language titles.

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**AVERY, M. *Fighting for Birds: 25 Years in Conservation*. xii + 324 pages. Exeter, UK: Pelagic Publishing, 2012. Paperback, £12.99, ISBN 978-1-907807-29-9. Website: <http://www.pelagicpublishing.com>.**

Mark Avery worked for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds for about 25 years, starting as a research scientist and leaving, in April 2011, as Director of Conservation. As such he was at the forefront of many of the major then-current conservation issues facing birds,

and indeed other wildlife, and was often called upon by the media, policy makers and many others for comments and to make decisions which affected conservationists generally and the RSPB in particular. Many of these decisions will continue to have effects for many years to come.

His views on some of the issues have been aired on his blog ([www.markavery.info/blog](http://www.markavery.info/blog)) since 2009, but only since he left the employment of the RSPB has he been able to be completely frank and not necessarily follow the RSPB line. *Fighting for Birds* follows on from this and sets out to clarify and summarize many of these major issues, to put forward Avery's own take on them,

discussed the problems of an emphasis on 'diversity' (when some species and systems are not naturally diverse), and noted the problems of defining the edges of habitats and ecosystems (a prerequisite for monitoring their numbers and loss).

The book centres on what is the 'utility' of biodiversity, and shows that this is very much a matter of the semantics of both 'utility' and 'biodiversity' – debates that could run for millennia after most of it has been lost. It covers old chestnuts such as 'what is life?', the origins of life, and the diversification of life, with some modern insights. It expands on the concept of living things increasing their own order and complexity through inevitably increasing universal disorder (entropy). The trendy concept of 'ecosystem services' gets some welcome critical comments, but the criticisms are not the strongest, and a focus on yields misses the argument that multiple 'services' need to be measured simultaneously before presuming a loss of species is irrelevant or tolerable.

Birds are mentioned only occasionally, but without an index it is not easy to find where – and you may not like what you find. The statement '... who blames the 17th century sailors for eating all the dodos?' is both factually wrong about the cause of extinction, and about whether anyone blames them for causing it: I for one do (as I believe did Darwin).

In summary, you can read this book for stimulation, but it will probably touch a few raw nerves.

#### Clive Hambler

KIRWAN, G.M. & GREEN, G. **Cotingas and Manakins. (Helm Identification Guides.)** 624 pages, 34 colour plates, numerous colour photographs and maps. London: Christopher Helm, 2011. Hardback, £60.00, ISBN 978-0-7136-6025-8. Website: <http://www.bloomsbury.com>.

The Cotingidae and Pipridae are New World suboscine birds known for their striking plumages and elaborate lekking displays. Kirwan and Green have compiled the most thorough compendium of information on these families published to date. This hefty tome features plates depicting multiple plumages of polymorphic species followed by species accounts with photographs and sections on taxonomy, identification, distribution, movements, habitat, measurements, geographical variation, voice, foraging, breeding, status. It expands upon treatments by the late D.W. Snow published in Volume 9 of the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo *et al.* 2004, pp. 32–108; 110–168) by providing more detailed species accounts, especially with regard to morphology and display.

The authors present 48 genera (130 species), including several genera now placed in other families (e.g.

*Sapayoa*, *Oxyrunchus*, *Calyptura*). This taxonomic scope is somewhat surprising until you consider that the book was 16 years in the making, and considerable reshuffling of higher-level classification has occurred during that period. Readers interested in historical and current taxonomy, nomenclature and systematics will find ample discussion of these topics in a stand-alone introductory section, as well as within species accounts. Consequently, by including all taxa 'traditionally' considered to be cotingas or manakins, the authors may aid the average reader's understanding of this complicated issue. Inclusion of a current phylogenetic hypothesis would have helped clarify relationships among the genera.

I am impressed by both the scope and the beauty of this book. Eustace Barnes's paintings are excellent, being true to the birds' coloration, proportions and postures, with many plates enhanced by background depictions of representative habitat. While the paintings don't 'leap off the page' for me, they are complemented by the photographs, which provide a sense of the birds' intangible 'gestalt'. These rich visual resources, along with descriptions of geographical and age-specific plumages, should ensure that Kirwan and Green will be invaluable as an identification reference.

How will the book be used? It is definitely *not* a field guide! Weighing in at over 1.6 kg, it is unlikely to be toted around South America on birding expeditions. However, most of the information is presented in such a way that keen birders and ecotourists will find the book accessible to them, especially with the aid of the Glossary. Yet many sections (e.g. Measurements) are clearly not directed at the birding audience. Field researchers are most likely to use these data, making it a valuable reference for biological stations and NGOs. A broader range of ornithologists will also find the book valuable in serving as a starting place for gaining natural history knowledge of species unfamiliar to them.

As a researcher with first-hand experience of some featured taxa, I was disappointed with the accuracy of the ecological information. I found many errors ranging from reversals of '<' and '>' or plant genera listed under the wrong families, to confusing or contradictory range information, misleading summaries of scientific results, and literature omissions. It is unreasonable to expect that the authors could reference every paper published on so many species and, although the stated aim was 'to summarize all of the available information on cotingas and manakins', the omissions therefore bother me less than the inaccuracies.

Descriptions of Three-wattled Bellbird *Procnias tricarunculatus* movements exemplify such inaccuracies. Powell and Bjork's 2004 radiotracking study (*Conserv. Biol.* 18: 500–509) provides the best data published on intra-tropical bird migration patterns. Kirwan and Green's summary fails to mention the four-stage annual migration

cycle covering 280 km and linking three countries. Instead, they confuse components of breeding range and movement from *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica* (Stiles & Skutch 1989), stating that following breeding, Bellbirds 'move upslope as high as 3000 m (e.g. on the Nicoya Peninsula)'. Bellbirds are recorded breeding on the Nicoya, but those peaks barely exceed 1000 m, and while Bellbirds sporadically reach 3000 m, the primary post-breeding movements documented by Powell and Bjork involve movements from Caribbean to Pacific montane forests of the same elevation. When considerable space is devoted to anecdote and speculation regarding other species' movements, one wonders why more care was not devoted to reporting the few robust movement data that are available. Given my encounter rate of errors in the summaries of literature I know well, I will be sure to double-check primary sources when researching topics less familiar to me.

Overall, I would recommend *Cotingas and Manakins* to keen amateurs and professionals with an interest in Neotropical birds. The authors are to be commended for tackling this ambitious project and producing such an attractive reference. I join Kirwan and Green in hoping their book will inspire others to fill the many gaps in our knowledge and galvanize efforts to protect the ever-shrinking habitats that cotingas, manakins and whole communities of Neotropical birds depend upon.

Alice Boyle

LATTA, S.C. & WALLACE, K.J. **Ruta Barrancolí: A Bird-Finding Guide to The Dominican Republic.** 241 pages, 33 maps, 8 checklists, many colour photographs, and plates of all 32 endemic species. Pittsburgh: National Aviary, 2012. Paperback, US\$29.95, ISBN: 978-0-615-62568-3. Website: <http://www.aviary.org>.

Bird finding guides are becoming very popular for those travelling the world and wanting to see the bird species for which a region or country is particularly noted. This little book does exactly that for the Dominican Republic, focusing on 44 birdwatching sites across five regional 'birding trails' within the country, with particular emphasis on seeing the 32 species endemic to the island. Steven Latta is Director of Conservation and Field Research at the National Aviary, and has already written a field guide to the birds of the Dominican Republic and Haiti (Latta *et al.* 2006; reviewed in *Ibis* 149: 640), whilst his co-author Kate Wallace has led many tours to the best birding sites on the island. Both are long-standing residents and know the country's birds as well as anybody.

The book starts with a map of the five regions: Santa Domingo, Enriquillo-Bahoruco-Jaragua Biosphere Reserve, Cordillera Central and the Cibao, The Southeast and Los Haitises, and Samana and the North Coast. There follows a section summarizing the island's biodiversity (more than

300 bird species recorded) and conservation (38 species are considered threatened or endangered with extinction, including 15 of the 32 endemics). The most critically endangered remain Ridgway's Hawk *Buteo ridgwayi*, now virtually restricted to the Los Haitises National Park, the Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata*, and the Bay-breasted Cuckoo *Coccyzus [Hyetornis] ruficularis*, whilst the White-necked Crow *Corvus leucognaphalus* and Golden Swallow *Tachycineta euchrysea* are also highly threatened. The geography and main habitats of the island are then described, followed by useful tips before you go: arrival and entry requirements, currency, language, car rentals, public transport, places to stay, climate, timing the trip, health and safety issues and things to bring. Related books, CDs and websites are mentioned, although no detailed bibliography is provided. There are basic tips for finding birds, along with birding ethics to ensure the welfare of the species and their environment. A checklist of endemic species and subspecies is followed by short accounts of the 32 endemics accompanied by colour plates of each. Two large tables indicate which species can be seen at each of the 44 sites, the first focusing on the endemics, and the second on all the species.

The main body of the book describes each of the recommended birding sites within the five regions, with useful sketch maps, birding times, trail difficulty, reserve hours and entrance fee details where applicable, followed by a site description, details of access, main birding areas and logistics. The site accounts are illustrated throughout by some excellent (although rather small) photographs showing the place and/or some of the representative species.

Steven Latta and Kate Wallace have done an excellent job in synthesizing all this information, helped by Emily Pierson, Dana Gardner's artwork, and Dax Marcel Román Espinal's photographs (along with other photographers). I cannot imagine any birdwatcher visiting the island without this book, which undoubtedly will enhance their visit.

Peter G.H. Evans

McLAREN, I. **All the Birds of Nova Scotia: Status and Critical Identification.** 247 pages, 124 colour photographs and some black-and-white figures. Kentville, Nova Scotia: Gaspereau Press, 2012. Hardback, CA\$47.95, ISBN 978-1-55447-116-4. Website: <http://www.gaspereau.com>.

Nova Scotia is home for me, but I have not visited the province in quite some time, and this book reminded me of some of the good reasons I should do so more often. Situated on the east coast of Canada, Nova Scotia is halfway between the North Pole and the equator and nearly completely surrounded by approximately 7500 km of coastline. The bulk of the land mass is