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A Guide to the Birds of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands

Florida Field Naturalist

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as if the birds were cut out and reassembled on poster board. Most of the other large gulls seem to have this problem as well. Several plates just look washed out, including the grackles and cowbirds, yellow orioles, and cross-bills. The towhees look very grainy and a little anemic, while the goldfinch yellows are day-glow bright while other colors are faded. It is unfortunate that my tea-stained, mildewed first edition contains brighter, more lifelike plates than the revised edition. Poor-quality printing also reduced the utility of the pipit tail line drawings. They are virtually indistinguishable from one another. While it is doubtful that the lower quality printing has created identification problems, it is unfortunate that Singer's high quality work has been sacrificed for an inexpensive cover price. I would have gladly paid an extra dollar or two for art reproductions equivalent to the NG guide.

One last contention with the Golden Guide is Robbins' insistence on including sonograms for many species. A compelling argument is given on the utility and value of 2-dimensional representations of bird song. But imagine trying to enjoy your favorite Beethoven or Blues Brothers tune by reading the score. It's just not the same as a recording or live performance. I doubt many music lovers would buy a recording based on a paper image, as I doubt many birders have found sonograms useful in the field.

Finally, which one should you buy? Despite all my criticisms, I like them both. In neither guide were anatomical and printing errors great enough to seriously affect accurate field identification. However, a good deal of variation in quality of plates is inherent to both guides. NG's variation is due to the large number of artists used while Robbins' variability is apparently the result of budget printing. The Golden Guide will remain my back-pocket guide, but I'll also find ways of taking the larger guide along; even if it stays on my car's front seat, or I start carrying a small backpack. I often find myself picking up the NG guide simply to enjoy the illustrations and their inherent variety. I'm not compelled to do this with the Robbins guide, although the revised edition should remain the standard field companion for all birders. But get the National Geographic guide, too. Its beautiful, spacious plates will provide enjoyable book watching while being a most practical field reference for bird watching.—David S. Maehr, Florida Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission, Wildlife Research Laboratory, 4005 South Main Street, Gainesville, Florida 32601.

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A guide to the birds of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.—Herbert A. Raffaele. 1983. Fondo Educativo Interamericano, San Juan. 256 pp., 24 color plates, 17 black and white plates, 9 maps. \$13.95 paperback.—This well-written book is the first comprehensive guide to the 273 species of birds known from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands (British and United States). Winter visitors, 47% of the avifauna, are described and illustrated making a second volume for identification of North American migrants unnecessary. I particularly appreciate inclusion of the legion of introduced species (the author lists 32 species breeding in the area and 18 as yet not established), which eliminates the need for guides to the birds of Africa, Australia, South America, and Asia.

Aside from being a fine field guide to the area's birds, the book includes summaries of the biogeography of the region, ecology of avian populations, and a discussion of the problems of conservation in the West Indies, including the causes of extinctions and endangerment, fossil birds (updated with unpublished data by Storrs Olson), pressures facing local avian populations, and an excellent section on conservation measures proposed by the author. Finally, Raffaele has provided visitors to the islands with a most useful section entitled "Places to Bird" that will help make a short stay more productive. This section describes four sites in Puerto Rico and three in the Virgin Islands (two contributed by local birders Jim Riddle and Robert Norton).

However, Raffaele's major contributions are his presentation of a wealth of heretofore unpublished information on the natural history of the region's birds and in his updating (through July 1981) of the avian records for the region; a considerable task considering the much dispersed literature and unpublished records Raffaele has collected. In addition, the author has presented his own considerable list of new records. Dr. Raffaele is eminently well qualified for this task. He has visited the island many times since his first trip in 1963 and resided in Puerto Rico for 6½ years while he worked as a wildlife biologist for the Commonwealth Department of Natural Resources. More recently he completed his Ph.D. research in Puerto Rico.

All species are illustrated, and the illustrations are very well done, particularly those by Cindy House, who visited the islands to observe the birds before completing her illustrations. Full-page color plates are presented for four of the 14 endemic species. All other endemics (except the PR whip-poor-will [=Puerto Rican Nightjar]) are illustrated among the remaining 20 color plates. Seventeen black and white plates are used to illustrate species for which color is not critical in identification. The plates use the (Roger Tory) Peterson System of pointers to direct the reader to key characters of identification. Although the plates are well presented, it would have been useful if they were cross-referenced to the species accounts in the text and if Spanish common names were given. Nine maps illustrate the region and specific birding localities.

Raffaele has selected or coined common Spanish names to eliminate some of the local misnomers and to standardize local names with those used internationally. A Spanish version is planned for 1984.

Unfortunately the publisher did not commit as much effort in the production of this book as did the author. The pages of my copy began falling out after only a few openings.—James W. Wiley, Apto. 21, Palmer, Puerto Rico 00721.