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A Birder's West Indies by Roland H. Wauer

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A Birder's West Indies.—Roland H. Wauer. 1996. University of Texas Press, Austin. 256 pages. \$40.00, ISBN 0-292-79098-8, hardcover. \$19.95, ISBN 0-292-79101-1, paperback.—This book consists mainly of 18 essays, one for each of 18 West Indian islands or island-groups from Cuba to Grenada. Each essay is a chatty, species-rich narration of the author's visit(s), widely embellished with conservation and natural history facts, opinions, and hyperbole. Because each chapter is largely independent of the others, much repetition exists, especially in discussion of natural history and other topics common to several islands. The level of useful detail varies considerably between island accounts. Eyepopping statements include dubious sightings such as Golden Swallows at Hardwar Gap in Jamaica (p. 26), east of the species' recently known range there (in fact, no confirmed reports exist from Jamaica since several years before the author claimed to have seen it); misstatements such as Manx Shearwaters known to breed at St. Martin (p. 128); and sensationalisms such as the possibility that small finches might have been transported by windstorms from Africa to Martinique (p. 176). Referring to Semper's Warbler as "[St. Lucia's] best-kept secret" (p. 183) may mislead the audience over the status of this species, for which no confirmed reports exist since 1934.

In addition to the 18 essays, an introduction contains some advice on when and how to visit the region, but at a rather superficial level. The introduction fails to explain how the author chose the area he calls "West Indies", which excludes the Bahama Islands as well as several western Caribbean islands, all considered by James Bond and most other recent ornithologists to comprise the West Indian biogeographic region. The introduction contains a table of 161 West Indian endemic birds showing status, as defined by the author, ("single island endemic", "two-three island endemic", "widespread West Indian endemic") for 15 islands or island groups in his region. Several species are incorrectly coded in the table such as Villedine Warbler, not confined to the Cayman Islands; Olive-capped Warbler, also found in the Bahamas; or Stripe-headed Tanager, not confined to the West Indies. The table also fails to recognize the taxonomic changes recently embraced by the A.O.U. (Auk 112: 819-830, 1995), such as splitting the Greater Antillean Pewee into three species. Ornithological work-in-progress suggests that changes like these will accelerate for the West Indian avifauna, so a table at the (current) subspecific level would have helped this book avoid rapid obsolescence.

The essays together are preceded by 18 appealing color photographs, one for each island treated as a chapter, mainly of local scenery. A foreword by Bradford Northrup and an afterward by Paul Butler bring a strong conservation message to the book as a whole. All-in-all *A Birder's West Indies* is attractive and lightly informative, but it lacks desirable comprehensiveness and authority. It may appeal to ecotourists and to basic-level birders, and it should raise consciousness for those who wish to gain a "feel" for the region. Ornithologists should be cautious in citing this book, however, and serious birders who want dependable facts and details to plan a trip to the region probably should not rely solely on it.—**P. William Smith**, P.O. Box 901341, Homestead, Florida 33090.