
January 2002

Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba by Orlando H. Garrido and Arturo Kirkconnell

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Recommended Citation

Smith, P. William (2002) "Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba by Orlando H. Garrido and Arturo Kirkconnell," *Florida Field Naturalist*: Vol. 30 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/ffn/vol30/iss1/2>

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REVIEW

Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba.—Orlando H. Garrido and Arturo Kirkconnell. 2000. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York. 251 pages. \$59.95 cloth. ISBN 0-8014-3718-0, \$29.95 paper. ISBN 0-8014-8631-9.—This much-anticipated book, written by Cuba's two leading field ornithologists, was motivated in part by that nation's long period of informational isolation. Its primary focus is to encourage the Cuban people, as well as visitors to their island, to know, enjoy, and conserve Cuba's diverse and often unique avifauna. Unbound by geopolitics, North American migrants regularly visit Cuba and some Cuban endemics occasionally venture across the Florida Straits from Cuba. Florida's ornithologists and birders largely have been able only to dream of learning more about those species in their native range. Now those dreamers may at least become voyeurs.

In format, *Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba* reminds me most of mid-twentieth-century eastern North American field guides by authors such as Roger Tory Peterson and Richard H. Pough. It covers all 362 species of birds reported in Cuba through early 1999, no matter how rare or uncertain, and illustrates nearly all of them. The 51 plates by Román N. Compañy, with opposite naming pages, are grouped together separately from the text. Species accounts average about half a page in length. Each account provides a description, a discussion of similar species, the species' range both in Cuba and worldwide, its Cuban status in terms of season and abundance, its habitat, voice, food preferences, and the plate number upon which it is illustrated. For the 142 native breeding species, a Cuban range map and a summary of nesting details also are provided. A succinct but informative introduction gives much helpful information about Cuba and its environment, including maps showing its vegetative zones and its major political and topographic features. The little-known theory of an early-Miocene "Gaarlandia," which is offered to explain some of Cuba's geological and zoological history, is particularly stimulating.

The book's text reflects a virtuoso performance by its two deeply knowledgeable authors. I can hardly find more than minor quibbles with it, and most of those involve identification matters pertaining to North American species that are rare in Cuba. I particularly applaud the authors' willingness to follow AOU taxonomy (as of 1998), sometimes ignoring their own published opinions. They wisely treat uncertain data conservatively, such as much of the published information concerning the rare and endemic Zapata Rail, especially its breeding biology. Information concerning Cuba's two rarest endemic subspecies, races of the Hook-billed Kite and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, also is presented with suitable caution. The illustrations generally are to a high standard, although some may be considered more art-like than ideal for field identification. Cuba's native birds in general seem portrayed the best.

My only significant frustrations with this book are the absence of a gazetteer, rendering it difficult to understand local distributions, and the design of the naming page facing each plate. Plate numbers are inconspicuously concealed against the book's spine on the bottom of each facing page, and no reference to the corresponding text page is provided where each species is outlined and named. This concept may be acceptable for a book intended for browsing but seems inappropriate for a field guide, where users frequently want to move back-and-forth quickly between illustrations and the corresponding text. Most field users probably will prefer to annotate each plate's facing page, writing the plate number in the upper left corner and adding the page number of the text beside each species outline.

Active Florida birders and ornithologists interested in the West Indian avifauna should not hesitate to obtain this book. Although it does not completely replace other West Indian guides, it provides important information, often not available elsewhere,

about the Cuban range, status, and habits of all endemic West Indian species found in Cuba. It covers all but one West Indian endemic (Bahama Woodstar) that definitely has occurred in Florida. In many cases this book's text and illustrations are superior to other sources. This book also is essential for libraries supporting Cuban studies or Caribbean regional biology. Cuban expatriates may even want a copy simply for its plates, to evoke fond memories of their homeland.

We should all thank Cornell University Press for bringing this important work to reality given its somewhat limited market at present. A Spanish-language edition planned in the near future not only should promote sales, but it also should help the book directly achieve its goal of serving the Cuban people. Now we should pray for the ability to advance legally from voyeurs to visitors. When the "Gulf Stream Curtain" finally does fall, everyone interested in Cuba's birds should grab this book and hop the first available ship or flight. Cuba's glorious remaining wild areas with their special birdlife may not survive America's pent-up development juggernaut for long.—**P. William Smith**, P.O. Box 1992, Ocean Shores, Washington 98569.