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Books

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A year's ringing at Phakalane Sewage Lagoons in south east Botswana. S. J. Tyler and L. Tyler. 1997. *Safring News* 26:81-82. Room 106, DAHP, Private Bag 0032, Gaborone, Botswana (Highlights of netting efforts included the capture of the first Basra Reed Warbler for Botswana and the capture of 53 European Reed Warblers, formerly regarded as a rare Palearctic migrant to southern Africa.) MKM

Note: Special thanks to Al and Jude Grass for the gift of *Bird Watcher's Digest* 23(6) abstracted in this issue, a gift that helped start my recovery from a recent coma.

MKM = Martin K. McNicholl



Books

FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF CUBA.

By Orlando H. Garrido and Arturo Kirkconnell. 2000. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. xvi + 253 pp. Paper \$29.95 U.S.; cloth \$59.95 U.S.

What do Zapata Rail, Bee Hummingbird, Gundlach's Hawk, Giant Kingbird, Fernandina's Flicker, and Blue-headed Quail-Dove mean to you? We suspect that to many of us they are unfamiliar, even though they are found on an island complex less than 145 km. (90 miles) from Florida. These birds and Cuba's 15 other endemic species are a small portion of the 354 species recorded in the country, the main island of which is one of the four major West Indies islands. The size of the avifauna is impressive for an area slightly smaller than the state of Pennsylvania.

Many species of the Cuban avifauna have North American origins; fewer apparently originated in Central America and northern South America. The latter presumably reached Cuba when it was part of a peninsula which extended from the northwest of South America to the Greater Antilles millions of years ago. More recently, rising sea levels submerged much of this peninsula, isolating the islands of Cuba, Jamaica, Hispanola, and Puerto Rico, and allowing the evolution of endemic species on each island.

Cuba's fossil record provides a fascinating insight into past avifaunas on the island. For instance, in the absence of large carnivorous mammals, that ecological niche was filled by large raptors, including owls, which may have survived until the arrival of the first humans, perhaps only 7,000-8,000 years ago.

One of the appeals of perusing an island bird book is the opportunity to compare the island's avifauna with those of larger nearby landmasses. For example, Cuba's two crows are West Indian endemics, and its only grackle is the Greater Antillean. Nearby Florida shores, only 145 km distant, host American and Fish crows and Boat tailed Grackles. Of Cuba's four breeding warbler species, only the Yellow Warbler is shared with North America, and two of the others are Cuban endemics. Cuba has three breeding blackbird species, two endemic and one shared with Hispanola, but no North American species. Cuba's only breeding oriole is the Black-cowled, not reported from the United States. Other species, such as Masked Duck, are common in Cuba, but just casual in Florida.

Unfortunately, some of Cuba's endemic and rare species face an uncertain future. A few Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, once shared with the southeastern United States, where it is now apparently extinct, may survive in the mountains. Zapata Rail and Zapata Wren have extremely limited ranges in freshwater marshes in the vicinity of Santo Thomas and are considered endangered.

This new guide illustrates all but five of the species recorded in Cuba on 51 color plates. The images are large and clear, but appear lifeless and are sometimes superimposed rather awkwardly on a swatch of background vegetation, as in the case of Zapata Rail on plate 14. While the text is cross-referenced to the plates, the plates are unfortunately not cross-referenced to the text. The plates are uncluttered by any identifying names or other marks; instead these appear on a subdued monochrome facsimile of the plate on the facing

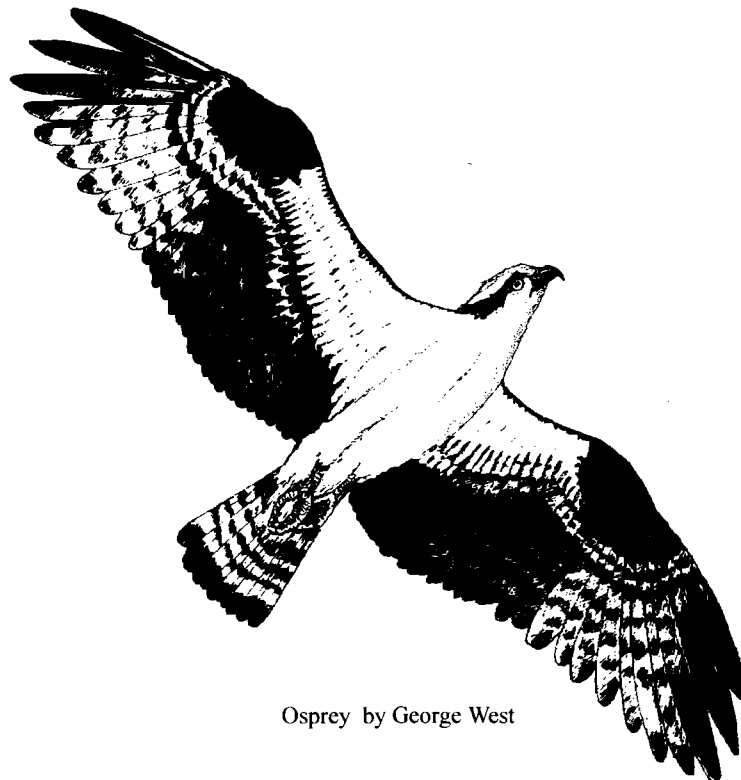
page. It is an interesting idea, but may not appeal to everyone. The plate number is placed on the monochrome page in the lower right corner close to the binding, where it is not easy to see. Images on a given plate are not always drawn to the same scale. Images of Ospreys on the plate are identified by subspecies names, while the text identifies visually distinct races by migratory status, not by name. The text description of the adult and juvenile Cuban Gnatcatcher and the plate appear to contradict each other. Tighter editing might have alleviated some of these problems.

The text of the guide follows the taxonomy and order of the 1998 edition of **The A.O.U. check-list of North American birds**. Species accounts include English, Spanish, and scientific names, plumage descriptions, similar species, range, status, nesting characteristics, voice, and food, as well as a large map of distribution in Cuba. Appendices include a list of endemic species and their distribution and a bibliography. The introduction includes information on climate, geological history of the island, origins of the avifauna, conservation (including a list of threatened species), birdwatching in Cuba, and directions for using the guide. The type is large and easy to read.

Some Canadians and a few U.S. scientists have banded in Cuba in recent years; but due to the complexities of international politics, Cuba and its interesting avifauna are inaccessible by U.S. law to most United States citizens. This guide will be of most interest to Canadians, armchair travellers, biogeographers and the U.S. citizens who expect to outlive Fidel Castro.

For those whose interests include other islands in the West Indies as well, another choice is **A guide to the birds of the West Indies** by H. Raffaele, J. Wiley, O. Garrido, A. Keith and J. Raffaele (1998. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ). This guide covers the Greater and Lesser Antilles, Bahamas, Cayman and Virgin islands, San Andres, and Providencia, omitting only Trinidad, Tobago, and islands closer to the continental coasts. This volume covers 564 species, including more than 150 West Indian endemics. Either guide provides a view of the avifauna of a nearby area and an excursion into island biogeography.

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Osprey by George West