

## **Birds of Aruba, Curacao and Bonaire**

By Bart de Boer, Eric Newton and Robin Restall. 2012. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey, 08540-5237 USA. 192 pages. 27.95 USD. Paper.

Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao [known as the ABC islands] are the three western-most islands of the Lesser Antilles or Leeward Antilles and lie just north of Venezuela. They are 800 km west of Trinidad and Tobago. They are outside the coverage of *A Guide to Birds of the West Indies*, by H. Raffaele, J. Wiley, O. Garrido, A. Keith and J. Raffaele. The bird list has a Caribbean flavour and has a South American influence the islands share with Trinidad and Tobago [see a *Field Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago* (or T&T), by Martyn Kenefick, Robin Restall, and Floyd Hayes].

As soon as I got this book I looked up Little Egret. Last year I saw a distant bird I thought was this species on Aruba. The distance and heat haze made it difficult to be certain of the identification. The authors say there are only two records, but it “may be overlooked due to

its similarity” with other egrets. So maybe I did see a good record!

The artist is Robin Restall and he took a lot of the illustrations from his other books – *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago* and *Birds of Northern South America*. Restall’s art is a bit stiff for my taste. I much prefer the quality of *Birds of the West Indies*. However, they are more-than-adequate for identification in the field. Only the three *elaenias* might cause you trouble. Restall has included the detailed pages of *Wood Warblers* from T&T.

The status given for seabirds is sometimes rather vague. For example, the Red-billed Tropicbird has only nine records, but the local fishermen have their own name for this species, suggesting they see it often. I had no trouble seeing several pelagic species on the

ocean between Curacao and Bonaire, including two Red-billed Tropicbirds. I suspect the local birders have not tried many pelagic trips and this would be a real opportunity for exciting discoveries.

This book has two principal virtues. First it is very compact and light so it will easily fit in a pocket. There are no range maps as they are not necessary and this saves much space. Second, the authors give the status of each species. It is remarkable how different the ABC's are from T&T. I photographed a Reddish Egret in T&T last year – the second record in 15 years. These egrets are regular visitors and breed on Bonaire. Last spring I had no trouble finding Troupials on Aruba and

Curacao, yet there are no records for T&T. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is a rare visitor to the ABCs – its only woodpecker – and is unknown in T&T [which has six resident species].

If you are planning a visit to the ABCs then this is a valuable purchase. It is a good field tool and the status and distribution information will be extremely useful. Not only will you be able to resolve identification issues, but I suspect that you will be made aware of the significance of any of your sightings.

ROY JOHN

2193 Emard Crescent, Ottawa, Ontario K1J 6K5 Canada