

Reviews of the CD “Bird Song of Trinidad and Tobago” and DVD “Wild T&T”

- a. The CD set is priced at TT\$300.00 and is available at the Asa Wright Nature Centre, Trinidad and at both Cuffie River Nature Resort and The Adventure Farm in Tobago.
- b. The DVD is available from “RIK Books” and “Just CD’s” chain of stores and priced at \$250 + VAT. VHS versions are available via Caribbean Discovery Tours via
Email: caribdis@wow.net or Tel. 620-1989.

Bird Song of Trinidad and Tobago The terms “birding” and “bird-watching” embrace a wide spectrum of interests and intensities. These hobbies are aided by an ever growing library of support material, suitable for all levels of ability and now include DVD, Video and CD ROM.

“Bird Song of Trinidad and Tobago - an aid to identification” is a 3 CD set recording, the work of John Hammick and Richard French, assisted by Dave Ramlal. Accompanying is an index booklet naming each track and allowing cross reference to the picture and written account in Richard French’s 2nd edition of his “Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago”.

Birding is often about what initially you hear, rather than see. There follows a filter process which basically asks two questions of the noise heard; (a) is it a bird (rather than insect, mammal or amphibian)? If the answer is “yes” (b) then what species is it? Here these CD’s become invaluable. Whilst not a visual aid that can be easily used in the field, I know of more than one birder who use their vehicle CD systems on the drive out to and back from birding locations.

To a general audience, the selection is extremely comprehensive covering 179 species, including representatives from every bird family occurring in our twin islands. These CD’s put to rest the misconception that an individual species only makes “one kind of noise”. Individual recordings are generous in the coverage not only of familiar vocalizations, but also include a variety of sub-song and contact calls. Obviously selection of species is a very personal thing. As an ardent seeker of secretive and elusive birds, I would have welcomed inclusion of more of our resident crakes and rails – birds we frequently hear and rarely see. Again personally, I find the vocalizations of “pigeons and doves” frustratingly similar. Gray-fronted and White-tipped Doves are admirably handled, if only the rarer Ruddy and Lined Quail-doves had been included!

On a more technical note, the absence of introductory titles or numbering to announce individual tracks on the CD’s themselves is irritating and could easily have been incorporated.

Nevertheless, these criticisms are minor and should not in any way detract from what is a major work of excellent

quality. Whilst it may have a rather limited audience, I can thoroughly recommend it as an essential reference for any resident or visiting birder to Trinidad and Tobago.

Wild T&T Departing from the exclusivity of birds, “Wild T&T” is a 45 minute long film produced by Pearl & Dean (Caribbean) Ltd. in association with Caribbean Discovery Tours; available on both VHS and DVD. Whether your interest is in birds or butterflies, spiders or snakes, frogs or lizards, mammals or fish, plants or trees, there is plenty here for everyone. The highest compliment I can pay to the photography is to call it “BBC quality”. The narration is both informative and pleasing to the ear, without detracting our attention from what is being filmed.

Personal favourites are many, especially the sequences of the Wolf Spider devouring a frog twice its size; the dance of the Blue - backed Manakins; the troop of Red Howler monkeys stretching and yawning in the hot afternoon sun and the Silky Anteater actually dropping off to sleep. However, without doubt the social interaction of the White - fronted Capuchin monkey family takes pride of place for me.

The advantage of a DVD version is its flexibility. In addition to the film, there are options available for a captioned rolling slide show featuring every species depicted; copy of the script; a useful bibliography and a series of location maps. My only minor criticism is restricted to the captioning. The trogon depicted is a female Violaceous, not White-tailed Trogon and there are several spelling and punctuation mistakes.

Not only do I wholeheartedly recommend this film to everyone with an interest in the animal and plant life of our islands, I urge all parents and school teachers alike to show this to the children; the generation who can truly help to save what otherwise is in danger of being lost forever.

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