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## Book Review

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**RICHARD FFRENCH.** *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago.* Macmillan Caribbean, London and Basingstoke, 1986, 87 pp. £ 3.75.

Page proofs for this issue of *Living World* had already been corrected when I received a copy of this book for review. Rather than wait another 18 months or more I decided to stall the publication process for a few days so that a review could be included in this issue.

The book is one of a series of Macmillan books of similar format on aspects of Caribbean natural history. It deals with 83 species, "mostly the more common ones", of the 400 recorded in our islands and so does not pretend to be complete; the same author has already given us a complete treatment. This book is aimed more at the "non-specialist reader" rather than the advanced ornithologist and is a very attractive and welcome addition to the literature on our natural history.

There is first of all an introduction that deals with general topics such as geography and ecology, the habits of birds, the description of birds, how to study birds and where to go to see them. There is much useful information here both for the beginner and the more experienced ornithologist. The author stresses the importance of using clues from habits and habitat preference to assist in the identification of the more difficult species that cannot be easily identified from a colour photograph. For a glimpse at the problems of identification turn to the pictures of the 3 sandpipers and the one plover to see how similar different species may appear in the field and these are only four of the nine plovers and 24 sandpipers that occur in Trinidad.

The 83 chosen species are described under seven headings: Gardens and parks; Open country and scrubland; Cultivated land with large trees; The forest; Swamps, marshes and reservoirs; The coast; The air. There is a colour photograph of each species, a short description, and information about its song, food, nesting and general behaviour. The question of what to include and what

to exclude must have posed a problem. I must confess to some surprise at the inclusion of the Saffron Finch, a bird I have never seen, and the exclusion of the House Wren and the Turkey Vulture but a choice had to be made and the author made his choice, perhaps at least in part, on the availability of photographs.

The photographs are mostly good, sometimes very good, but a few do not do full justice to the bird and one or two, notably those of the Grey-breasted Martin and the swift, are almost useless for the purpose of identifying the bird. The author must have known this but decided (rightly, I think) not to hold back publication until better ones were available.

All the information given about the birds I know well conforms with my knowledge of them except in one instance. About the Rufous-browed peppershrike the author says "Each bird has its own tune which it hardly alters". This is what the situation appears to be but the reality, revealed only to some-one who actually lives where the bird is common, is much more fascinating. Each bird has a repertory of over forty tunes and within a district each bird apparently has the same repertory. Why a peppershrike should need such a large collection of tunes while other birds need only two or three is a topic crying out for investigation.

At this stage in the development of our country when environmental abuses increase daily and there is an ever greater need for good conservation practices it is important that as many people as possible be made aware of this.

This book should help to stimulate that love and concern for living things from which the awareness must spring. From this standpoint it does not matter much that a couple of photographs are not as good as the rest. It is much better to get the book published for the good it will do and I hope it will be a huge success.

*Victor C. Quesnel*