



BOOK REVIEW

Reptiles and Amphibians of the Dutch Windward Islands

The Reptiles and Amphibians of the Dutch Caribbean: Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten. 2nd ed., revised and expanded. Nature Guide Series No. 004. 2015. Robert Powell, Robert W. Henderson, and John S. Parmerlee, Jr. Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance, Kralendijk, Bonaire. 343 pp. Softcover — ISBN 978-99904-1-842-2. Available at the offices of the conservation organizations on Saba (Saba Conservation Foundation), St. Eustatius (St. Eustatius National Parks), and St. Maarten (Nature Foundation St. Maarten) or a copy can be ordered from the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (info@dcnanature.org).

The Caribbean contains many islands and island groups, each of which tends to have its own unique species. Even though most islands are relatively small and hold only a few species, together they represent a global biodiversity hotspot. Totals of over 400 endemic species of reptiles and over 150 endemic amphibians, and high levels of land conversion place the Caribbean close to the top of both diversity and risk for both groups. The region is also popular with holidaymakers. Although many are interested only in taking advantage of the warm weather, beautiful beaches, great diving, and wonderful local cuisine, drinks, and cultures, others want to expand their biological horizons. The relatively small number of Caribbean island groups with good field guides for herps and other groups is therefore somewhat surprising.

The Dutch Caribbean includes two main groups. In the south, the ABCs — Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao — are close to South America. The herpetofauna, covered in van Buurt's (2005) field guide, reflects that location. Mid-way up the chain of the Lesser Antilles, the three islands covered in the current contribution — Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten, which is partly governed by France — share very few species with the ABCs. Nor is the casual tourist likely to visit both groups on a single trip. Powell, Henderson, and Parmerlee's *The Reptiles and Amphibians of the Dutch Caribbean* serves those interested in the herpetofauna of Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten. A few of the species may be included in a regional guide (Malhotra and Thorpe 1999) or one that is taxon-specific (e.g., Haselhaus and Schmidt 1995), but updated information on most is not available elsewhere. Exceptions are taxa such as sea turtles that receive

SABA, ST. EUSTATIUS,
AND ST. MAARTEN
DUTCH CARIBBEAN



lots of attention on a regular basis, and for which this book focuses on location-specific information. The authors are all highly experienced herpetologists. Powell and Henderson have published hundreds of peer-reviewed papers, many of them collaboratively, and have jointly authored or edited a number of books about Caribbean herpetology. Parmerlee has extensively collaborated with the two, including the first edition of this book. In addition, Mark Yokoyama, author of *The Incomplete Guide to the Wildlife of Saint Martin* and credited only in the acknowledgements, contributed many photographs and pertinent observations. We cannot imagine a better team for this project.

The book is divided into three sections: (1) a geological and geographic survey of the islands, (2) a brief history of their people and conservation efforts, and (3) comprehensive descriptions of all species known to occur on the islands. The first two sections do a fine job of providing the reader with relevant, contextual information, but the third section, which spans about 200 pages, is the one that honeymooners and herpetologists alike will likely find most useful. Aware of their diverse audience, the authors maintain their prose at an accessible level. Jargon is scarce and the style allows the book to be used as either a comprehensive introduction for novices or a non-technical reference for professional herpetologists.

Each species account lists the animal's common English and/or local names (if any — often none exist) and its scientific name, followed by paragraph-long sections on description, distribution and origin, habitat, food, predators, reproduction, behavior, conservation status and threats, and additional commentary. Despite the wide diversity of information, the authors do not overly sacrifice conciseness for comprehensiveness. Certain accounts have been expanded in the second edition to include information on the intersection of a species with its home island's culture or history. For instance, the text on Green Sea Turtles now reveals that “turtle meat and soup was offered in some restaurants on St. Maarten as late as the 1990s” (p. 253). Several pages are devoted to each species, with those of particular interest, such as Green and Lesser Antillean Iguanas, receiving additional attention. High-resolution photographs of good quality and detail appear on nearly every page, many of them updated from the previous edition. Perhaps the best organizational improvement is in the clearly demarcated sections, each separated by a two-page

color photo spread, which begin on new pages rather than directly following previous sections. Additionally tabs, color-coded by taxon and visible on the outward facing edges of the book, make this edition easy to search. Non-native species get their own section, regardless of taxonomy. Appendices list the taxonomic authorities and provide a glossary and an index.

This second edition boasts several advantages over its decade-old predecessor (Powell et al. 2005), although the two are organized in much the same way. Thankfully, the laminated and nearly impossible-to-flip-through pages of the first edition have been replaced by book-weight gloss paper — a big improvement. The small-format second edition is perfect for carrying in a backpack or even a large pocket, but the font is on the small side. All in all, this edition is even more accessible than the first while remaining highly useful. Unfortunately, the book is not currently available in the U.S., so obtaining a copy might not be easy.

Literature Cited

- Haselhaus, R. and M. Schmidt. 1995. *Caribbean Anoles*. T.F.H., Neptune City, New Jersey.
- Malhotra, A. and R.S. Thorpe. 1999. *Reptiles & Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean*. Macmillan Education, London.
- Powell, R., R.W. Henderson, and J.S. Parmerlee, Jr. 2005. *The Reptiles and Amphibians of the Dutch Caribbean: Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten*. St. Eustatius National Parks Foundation, St. Eustatius.
- van Buurt, G. 2005. *Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire*. Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt, Germany.

Maggie Zebracka and Gad Perry
Department of Natural Resource Management
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, Texas 79409