

BOOK REVIEWS

WILDLIFE OF THE CARIBBEAN – Herbert A Raffaele and James W Wiley. Published in soft covers by Princeton University Press [press.princeton.edu] at US\$19.95 / £12.96; Kindle edition \$15.46 / £10.44. 304 250mm x 210mm pages, with colour illustrations throughout. ISBN 978-0-691-15382-7

If you are heading to the Caribbean this is a must to have aboard – it is the first comprehensive, illustrated guide to the natural world of the Caribbean islands. With 600 exquisite colour images, it is an ideal field guide which will spark the imaginations of everyone on board. The text covers 451 species both terrestrial and marine, selected on the basis of those most likely to be seen. Each has at least one image associated with it. The geographic coverage includes the Bahamas, Greater Antilles, Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands and Lesser Antilles. Trinidad and Tobago and the ABC islands (Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire) are not covered.

Wildlife of the Caribbean begins by exploring the issues in general, including biogeography, climate, lost faunas, habitats, the influence of hurricanes, folklore and environmental threats and conservation. It then moves on to terrestrial life including plants, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates in colour coded sections. This takes up 228 of the 304 pages so forms the majority of the text. Marine life is not given short shrift, however. Marine mammals, reptiles and fish are covered in sufficient detail to assist in identification and learning. Fish are separated by where they are likely to be seen – reefs and sand/grass flats or open water game fish. Marine plants and invertebrates follow, before closing on sea shells or molluscs.

Each species is introduced with a set of key features intended to assist in identification in the field, while the language is plain English and suitable for all audiences. What I really liked is that one guide covers all the wildlife most likely to be seen rather than just one type, so you need carry only one book. It is available in print and Kindle, but the comments on Amazon about the Kindle edition suggest that it may be more difficult to use in the field than the print edition. I did not review the Kindle version.

Herbert A Raffaele worked for more than four decades directing wildlife conservation for the Puerto Rico Department of Natural Resources, and served as chief of Latin American and Caribbean programmes for the US Fish and Wildlife Service. James W Wiley has conducted ornithological research throughout the Caribbean since 1972. Raffaele and Wiley previously collaborated on *Birds of the West Indies*, also published by Princeton Press. What they have produced is invaluable for the Caribbean cruiser. I wish we had had access to it when we sailed there – perhaps we'll just have to go back.

DOB

GORDON BENNETT and the First Yacht Race Across the Atlantic – Sam Jefferson. Published in hard covers by Adlard Coles Nautical [www.adlardcoles.com] at £16. 99. 282 230mm x 140mm pages with eight pages of colour photos. ISBN 978-1-4729-1673-0

History is about the doings of interesting people. Gordon Bennett was so extraordinary there is an expletive, used in moments of massive frustration, which is nothing more than his name. He raced across the Atlantic in what today we would call a large, heavy, comfortable fully-equipped schooner soon after the end of the American Civil War.

This book, written in what can be called 'the modern manner', is aimed at a wide audience, so there is little technology and not much about the three yachts competing. There is not a vast amount about the race, but then getting data would be hard for the most enthusiastic researcher.

And the author of this book certainly has dived into lots of archives. The paucity of technology is in part because Bennett led such an extraordinary if unedifying life that the author has not had much space to cover those aspects of the transatlantic race which would especially fascinate OCC members.

As a glimpse of New York life in the late 19th century this book is packed with delicious detail. Wealthy people had coachmen to take them to yet another evening of heavy drinking ... and take the half comatose semi-corpses home afterwards. Maybe we should revert to this method of avoiding drink driving charges. The wild crowd and the anti-hero of this book did not lack toughness or determination, as the race started in a freezing December. What the crews did not have, and needed, were safety harnesses. The loss of life was horrific.

IN