
As with many field guides, the genesis of this book is firmly rooted in the two authors having a great passion and curious interest in the only mammal that has mastered the art of flight. Whether it be for conservation or education, this love of bats shines through from the entertaining writing style about their biology to the detailed descriptions and beautiful paintings of the species found on the twin islands of Trinidad and Tobago.

What distinguishes this publication from others in the genre are Geoffrey Gomes and Fiona Reid’s ability to break out of the formulaic field guide mold by balancing typical species accounts with an equally engaging presentation of the ecology of bats and their significance to people. Another nice aspect is the frequent reference to local examples that give the book a truly Trinidadian and Tobagonian flavor. Where else would we learn about the tradition of ‘Authentic Bats’ and ‘Fancy Bats’ in mas bands during Carnival?

A big inspiration to the authors comes from the founder of Bat Conservation International, Dr. Merlin Tuttle, who not only has written the Forward to the book but also generously provided stunning photographs, especially of bats in flight. In fact, there are many talented photographers and artists who have contributed to make this a great visual publication. Not the least of which are the exquisitely executed renderings of bats in the species accounts by Fiona. She has mastered a unique style that combines life-like poses while highlighting key identification features.

The book begins with an introduction to the presentation format and a good overview of the geography of the islands and their diverse habitats. The main text is divided into three parts beginning with a very thorough coverage of the natural history of bats. This section takes a holistic ecosystem approach to cover topics ranging from echolocation to roosting in a refreshing non-textbook way. They do one of the better jobs of articulating the importance of bats to the environment and dispelling age-old misunderstandings such as the false hysteria of vampires by early taxonomists trying to get a grasp of this unknown plethora of biodiversity being discovered in the New World tropics.

In the second part, I was impressed by the wealth of information on the relationships between bats and humans that is both broad in scope, covering topics such as folklore and rabies, while staying almost exclusively focused on examples from the islands. This is one of the benefits of having Gomes, a local Trini, as the first author. Especially interesting to me was a subsection on amazingly recognizable bat effigies portrayed in Pre-Columbian ceramic pottery of the Salodoid Amerindians living in Trinidad from about 500 BCE.

The last part of the book comprises the accounts of 68 species of bats currently known from Trinidad and Tobago, which represents about 70% of the mammalian diversity on the islands. Each species has a life-sized color illustration of the bat done by the second author. A feature not regularly seen in other field guides is a detailed subsection devoted exclusively to echolocation calls specific to that species. This is one of the fastest growing areas of bat research that may eventually start a niche market that enables ecotourists to eavesdrop on these mysterious nocturnal flyers with bat detectors, which are becoming more readily available and cheaper in price.

The book is attractively packaged into almost 300 pages of a handy tablet-sized format that is self-published through Trinibats, a bat conservation organization in Trinidad that the first author co-founded in 2011, and will be sold in the U.S.A. by Speleobooks. As the first monograph on the bats of Trinidad and Tobago (Goodwin and Greenhall, 1961) spurred a wave of interest in researchers from throughout the world, the current contribution over half a century later will open up this fascinating world to the amateur naturalist while still being a useful reference to professional biologists. It sets a new standard for not only field guides but bat books in general.

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LITERATURE CITED


Almost 50 years ago, Funaioli and Lanza (1968) published a short (4 pages) paper on some bats (5) from Somalia. Since then, their expertise on bats has been growing forever. The current collaboration — together with Marco Ricucci — resulted in an impressive 566 pages volume, covering 46 species occurring in Somalia and an additional 33 occurring in neighbouring areas. Besides the species profiles, separate chapters are dedicated to the genera, families, and the (sub)order(s). Each of these chapters contain sections on synonyms, common English and Italian names (most of the latter being introduced here), the