

Preface

The concept for this book evolved from several years of seeing visitors, local birders, and even naturalist guides venturing into the field with just the illustrated plates removed from the center of *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica* by F. Gary Stiles and Alexander F. Skutch (Cornell University Press, 1989). Although understandable from the perspective of minimizing gear weight, this practice always seemed a pity, as it meant leaving behind the entire text of that wonderful guide. Since it was clear that people were primarily interested in making correct species identifications while in the field, we set out to provide an alternative for that specific purpose.

In 2007, we published the first edition of this book with the objective of pairing quality illustrations with concise species accounts to facilitate identification in the field. In order to limit the size and weight of the book we sacrificed material that, while interesting, was not directly pertinent to field identification. Our recommendation was—and still is—that serious birders obtain a copy of the Stiles and Skutch volume for more in-depth information on topics such as habits, nesting, voice, and full range.

The response from reviewers and users of the first edition has been overwhelmingly positive. Nonetheless, we felt we could provide a more complete resource by incorporating additional species and making improvements to the text, illustrations, and range maps.

In this second edition, we describe all 903 species definitely known from Costa Rica as of October 2013. Thirty of these are new species that have been added to Costa Rica's country list since the publication of the first edition; for the first time we also include pelagic birds and species regular to Cocos Island. Fifty-six of the species covered are placed in a Rarities section (p. 372), which includes species recorded less than three times, species that have not been reported in more than twenty years, and the more uncommon pelagics.

Artist Robert Dean has supplied over 360 new illustrations for this edition. These fall into three categories: those that replace (and improve upon) illustrations from the first edition, those that supplement the primary illustrations with in-flight views and additional plumages, and those that cover the sixty-four species illustrated for the first time in this edition. The latter group includes the thirty new additions to the country list as well as pelagic species, Cocos Island species, and all rarities recorded from the Costa Rican

mainland. We have also taken great care to further enhance the print quality of the illustrations in order to ensure the highest degree of accuracy and fidelity to the original artwork.

In response to numerous requests, the range maps are now color-coded to reflect migratory status. The maps have been updated and also now indicate vagrant records. Similarly, the species accounts have been adjusted to reflect new information about species' ranges and patterns of occurrence within the country.

One of the most debated changes for the second edition had to do with taxonomy and order of species. To be in accordance with eBird—a powerful and important online data-collection tool—we chose to follow the nomenclature and systematics of the eBird/Clements Checklist of Birds of the World: Version 6.8, which, among other changes, eliminates the *Incertae sedis* status for several genera and moves a number of former finches and seed-eaters into the tanager family. A country checklist that matches this current taxonomic order is included as an appendix (p. 383).

However, at the family level, we have made various deviations from the list order in an effort to assist less-experienced birders. Inspired by an article in the November 2009 issue of *Birding* by Steve N. G. Howell et al. on the issue of taxonomy versus utility in field guides—and further motivated by the recent taxonomic repositioning of falcons after woodpeckers—we have incorporated a sequence that places families of somewhat similar birds next to each other. This means, for example, that swallows and swifts appear consecutively because, despite not being at all closely related, they are similar enough in size and behavior that it is advantageous to have them close together in the guide for easy comparison. Following the same reasoning, we chose to keep falcons next to hawks and eagles.

The order of families in roughly the first third of the book is as follows: game birds, swimming birds, aerial pelagic and coastal species, wading birds and shorebirds, diurnal birds of prey, nocturnal birds, aerial insectivores, and hummingbirds. From there, the families follow more closely the order prescribed by the eBird/Clements list. Along with what we believe is a more user-friendly organizational scheme, we also provide an alphabetical Quick-Find Index of groups on the inside back cover of the book so that users can find the birds they're looking for as quickly as possible.

This is a book by birders for birders, and we sincerely hope that these changes will further enhance your enjoyment and appreciation of Costa Rica's varied and fascinating avifauna.