

Neotropical Birding

THE BIRDING MAGAZINE OF THE NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB



Number 22 • Spring 2018



The Neotropical Bird Club aims to:

- foster an interest in the birds of the Neotropics amongst birdwatchers throughout the world
- increase awareness of the importance of support for conservation in the region
- mobilise the increasing number of enthusiastic birdwatchers active in the region to contribute to the conservation of Neotropical birds
- provide a forum for the publication of articles and notes about Neotropical birds, their identification and conservation and thus enhance information exchange in this subject area
- channel efforts towards priority species and sites, drawing attention to conservation needs
- publicise the activities of local groups and individuals, and improve liaison and collaboration between these same people and other birdwatchers

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Neotropical Birding

THE BIRDING MAGAZINE OF THE NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB

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Neotropical Bird Club

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BIRDING MAGAZINE OF THE NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB • NUMBER 22 • SPRING 2018

EDITORIAL

- 2** Welcome to *Neotropical Birding* 22
JAMES LOWEN

FEATURE

- 3** When losing feels like winning: impressions of the inaugural Costa Rica Bird Challenge
SAM WOODS

FEATURE

- 15** Ecuador 'big day': a new world record
DUŠAN BRINKHUIZEN, TUOMAS SEIMOLA, RUDY GELIS,
MITCH LYSINGER AND GEORGE PAUL

SPLITS LUMPS AND SHUFFLES

- 30** Splits, lumps and shuffles
THOMAS S. SCHULENBERG

BIRDING SITES

- 47** Robinson Crusoe Island (and coming back!)
FABRICE SCHMITT

BIRDING AT THE CUTTING EDGE

- 54** A vagrant from the Old World: a mysterious gull in Trinidad
NIGEL LALLSINGH

CONSERVATION AWARDS

- 59** NBC Conservation Awards
CHRISTOPHER SHARPE AND ROB CLAY

REVIEWS

- 65** The new Neotropical companion
JAMES LOWEN
- 65** Raptors of Mexico and Central America
JOSEPH TAYLOR
- 67** Birds new to science
JAMES LOWEN
- 68** Aves de Chile, sus islas oceánicas y Península Antártica
MARK PEARMAN
- 70** Wildlife of Ecuador
JAMES LOWEN
- 71** Quatro estações
GUY KIRWAN
- 72** The birds of the Falkland Islands: an annotated checklist
JAMES LOWEN

PHOTOSPOT

- 74** Mountain Avocetbill in Ecuador
NIELS POUL DREYER AND NIELS KRABBE

CLUB NOTICEBOARD

- 76** Club Noticeboard
CHRIS BALCHIN

FRONT COVER

Male Juan Fernández Firecrown *Sephanoides fernandensis*, Robinson Crusoe Island, Juan Fernández, Chile, November 2016 (Fabrice Schmitt/WINGS).

Welcome to *Neotropical Birding* 22!

This first issue of 2018 marks two major developments for the Neotropical Bird Club. First, *Neotropical Birding* is now published in full colour. This improvement should help us celebrate Neotropical birds and birding even more enthusiastically and excitingly.

Second, both Neotropical Bird Club publications (*Neotropical Birding* magazine and its sister journal *Cotinga*) are now available in digital form. Club Members now have the option to receive publications either in printed form, in digital form via the internet or—for a small supplement—in both ways.

This change was prompted by our concern that postal services can be unreliable in several countries, meaning that publications sometimes fail to reach members. The digital option should resolve this problem. Members choosing the digital option will also see a small reduction in subscription rates (as the Club will be saving postage costs), offering a digital option has also enabled us to change the reduced rate offered to Neotropical Nationals. This will now become even cheaper, but will only include access to NBC publications in digital form. (Members in the Neotropical region wishing to receive printed publications now pay full world price.)



Female Juan Fernández Firecrown *Sephanoides fernandensis*, Robinson Crusoe Island, Juan Fernández, Chile, November 2016 (Fabrice Schmitt/WINGS).

The new subscription rates are summarised on the inside front cover. Please spread the word about our new digital publication option to your friends and colleagues. The stronger the Club's membership, the better our position to deliver on our charitable objectives (to remind yourself of these, take a look at the inside front cover).

But what about *Neotropical Birding* 22 itself? In this issue, we start with the exhilaration of not one but two 'bird races'. Two issues ago (*Neotropical Birding* 20: 3–8), Ian Davies inspired us with his look forward to the 2017 'Global Big Day', observing that participants 'walked the thin line between madness and brilliance'. In the current magazine, we ramp things up with direct experiences from birders racing against the clock.

Sam Woods (page 3) explains why defeat in the inaugural, week-long Costa Rica Bird Challenge actually felt like victory. Then Dušan Brinkhuizen and friends (page 16) demonstrate what it takes—planning, execution, energy and supreme field skills d—to become world-beaters. On 8 October 2015, Dušan and team recorded an almost unimaginable 431 bird species, smashing the record set in Peru in 2014.

Next up, Tom Schulenberg (page 30) once again brilliantly discusses the latest changes and controversies in the world of avian taxonomy through his regular column, treating us to an intriguing bag of splits, lumps and shuffles. Fabrice Schmitt (page 47) treats us to a tour of Chile's Robinson Crusoe Island, home to spectacular seabirds and endemics of the Juan Fernández archipelago including Juan Fernández Firecrown *Sephanoides fernandensis*, which graces the magazine's front cover.

As part of our occasional series on pioneering birding, Trinidad-based birder Nigel Lallsingh (page 54) explains the excitement (and bewilderment) of discovering a species never previously recorded in the New World, namely Audouin's Gull *Ichthyaetus audouinii*. Chris Sharpe and Rob Clay (page 59) compile reports from projects funded by Neotropical Bird Club Conservation Awards, a programme that goes from strength to strength. We have a bumper set of reviews (page 65), the books involved covering species new to science, raptors and several of the region's countries. Finally, a Photospot features the fabulous Mountain Avocetbill *Opisthoprora euryptera* (page 74). Have a great 2018!

James Lowen, Senior Editor

When losing feels like winning: impressions of the inaugural Costa Rica Bird Challenge

Sam Woods

The first-ever Costa Rica Bird Challenge was held on 11–20 October 2017. A bird-tour leader based in Ecuador offers his personal reflections on an intense eight-day race.

San José, Costa Rica, on the evening of 11 October 2017. Thirteen participants from all over the world (Ecuador, South Africa, USA, UK, Sweden, Spain, Serbia and Israel) waited with bated breath for Serge Arias to launch the Costa Rica Bird Challenge. We were a motley crew, with professions ranging from bird-tour leaders to conservationists and journalists. Yet it seemed

entirely apt that an eight-day-long bird race set in such a biodiverse country had attracted a similarly diverse set of birders.

All photos were taken in Costa Rica. Additionally, unless otherwise indicated, all photos were taken (a) by Sam Woods/Tropical Birding and (b) on the Costa Rica Bird Race in October 2017.

1 Team Tucán Tico at Parque Nacional Volcán Irazú, shortly after seeing the quetzal on page 10. Left to right: German Rojas Arrieta, Saúl Ruiz Fernández (Costa Rica Tourist Board, not a team member), Niklas Aronsson, Sam Woods, Tim Appleton and Beltrán Ceballos Vazquez.



As the brains behind this brand-new event, funded by Futuropa and the Costa Rica Tourist Board, Arias confirmed the itinerary for the eight-day event and set out a loose set of rules and regulations. ('Loose' is the operative word here, as flexing seemed to be an integral part of the event!) Arias also explained the objectives of 'the Challenge': to demonstrate that it was possible to have successful birding trips to Costa Rica outside the traditional high season of January to March, and to showcase some of the best birding hotspots.

Teaming up

On that first night, teams were assembled. Many participants already knew one other and quickly coalesced into natural partnerships. As for me... I was reminded of some dark school days when I was the last player picked for the football team! Soon a ragtag bunch (no disrespect intended) of four remained without a team: Tim Appleton (known to many for being the organiser of the British Birdwatching Fair), Niklas Aronsson (a writer covering the event for the magazine of Sveriges Ornitologiska Förening/BirdLife Sweden), Beltrán Ceballos Vazquez (environmental consultant and conservationist associated with Spain's legendary Coto Doñana) and me. We joined forces, giving ourselves the team name 'Tucán Tico'. Each group was bolstered by a Costa Rican bird guide, in our case German Rojas Arrieta, who soon became the spine of the Tucán Tico. The other two teams – our rivals, lest you forget – went by the names of Redstart Wranglers and Tico Tickers.

As a full-time bird-tour leader for Tropical Birding, and now living in the Neotropics, an irrepressible competitive spirit forms the core of my entire being. Accordingly, I wanted to *win* the inaugural Costa Rica Bird Challenge. Putting out feelers to see what experience of Costa Rica we had amongst our team, I became a little unnerved. Tim admitted having not seriously birded in Costa Rica for nearly twenty years. But at least he had visited; Niklas and Beltrán had not. Although I had led tours in Costa Rica for the last six years, I was

While no guidelines were given regarding playback at the outset of the Race, teams operated in accordance with general best practice. That is to say playback was used, but kept to a minimum, and mostly deployed in response to hearing a bird vocalise. Among the Tucán Ticos, at least, bouts of playback were kept short to minimise any stress caused to birds.

nevertheless a newcomer to this classic birding country relative to many other tour leaders.

Privately, I wondered whether I would be the only *competitor* in our group. How wrong I was. The team gelled instantly, proved to be an excellent group of bird *finders*, and fought together, hammer and tong, all the way. It was a seriously enjoyable group to be part of, and I feel I made friends for life...

Day one

Teams assembled pre-dawn in San José, nibbled a cookie and downed a cup of tea (no coffee for this traditional Englishman), then rushed out the door, heading for our first stop in the mountains in **Parque Nacional Volcán Poás**. My only previous experience of a true bird race came as a teenager in the UK, when I spent 24 hours racing around the small, landlocked county of Surrey; hardly a decent training ground for over a week in one of the world's diversity hotspots! The competitiveness between the teams was evident when every single participant scrambled to join the first available coach! Battle lines were drawn, and the scene was set for one of the most intense birding weeks of my life.

Out in the field, we quickly notched up Purple-throated Mountaingem *Lampornis calolaemus* and Volcano Hummingbird *Selasphorus flammula* at a local set of hummingbird feeders, while a Flame-colored Tanager *Piranga bidentata* regarded us with apparent bemusement. At a nearby waterfall – a tourist attraction, not that we were interested – we homed in on regional endemics such as Sooty-faced Finch *Arremon crassirostris* and Golden-bellied Flycatcher *Myiodynastes hemichrysus* in the adjacent forest. An early headliner was an Ornate Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus ornatus* (Near Threatened) that drifted over the mountains, under clear blue skies.

The crisp, clean mountain air was refreshing, but we had no time for contemplation as we headed for a traditional Costa Rican breakfast of *gallo pinto* (rice and beans with lashings of *Salsa Lizano*, the well-known local condiment) at the Galería de Colibríes (hummingbird gallery, also known as Mirador la Cascada Cinchona) at **Cinchona**. The meal was inevitably interrupted for hummingbirds, notably Violet Sabrewing *Campylopterus hemileucurus* and Coppery-headed Emerald *Elvira cupreiceps* (Fig. 6).

The morning was scant hours old when we visited our third site of the day, **Virgen del Socorro**. Here we birded a valley from a dirt road,



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We salivated over a fine variety of hummingbirds throughout the Bird Race. Species recorded included: **2** Fiery-throated Hummingbird *Panterpe insignis* (Paraíso Quetzal, August 2015); **3** Scintillant Hummingbird *Selasphorus scintilla* (male, Bosque de Paz, August 2015); **4** Volcano Hummingbird *S. flammula* (male, Savegre Lodge, August 2015); **5** Magnificent (Talamanca) Hummingbird *Eugenes (fulgens) spectabilis* (male, Paraíso Quetzal, August 2015) and **6** the endemic Coppery-headed Emerald *Elvira cupreiceps* (Mirador la Cascada, Cinchona). Frustratingly, we saw **7** this male Mangrove Hummingbird *Amazilia boucardi* near Estero Mata de Limon, Puntarenas, just after the Bird Race had ended – so it didn't count!



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8 This marvellous Lineated Woodpecker *Dryocopus lineatus* showed superbly at Virgen del Socorro.

netting White Hawk *Pseudastur albicollis*, Bay-headed Tanager *Tangara gyrola*, Crimson-collared Tanager *Ramphocelus sanguinolentus*, Scale-crested Pygmy Tyrant *Lophotriccus pileatus*, and a marvellous, close-range Lineated Woodpecker *Dryocopus lineatus* (Fig. 8).

At lunchtime, we pulled into **Selva Verde Lodge**, where we spent the afternoon birding Caribbean lowland forest. Colourful tropical species featured prominently; one fruiting tree hosted three species of toucan, two dacnis and two honeycreepers. Migrating raptors streamed overhead: mainly Broad-winged Hawks *Buteo platypterus* dominating, with a few Mississippi Kites *Ictinia mississippiensis*. Our stint at Selva Verde produced stunning non-avian wildlife too. Mantled Howlers *Alouatta pileata* dangled from *Cecropia* trees (Fig. 10), Strawberry Poison-dart Frog *Oophaga pumilio* (Fig. 9) and Green-and-black Poison-dart Frog *Dendrobates auratus* hopped amongst the damp leaf litter, and the iconic Red-eyed Tree-frog *Agalychnis callidryas* was found during a fruitless search for owls. As for birds, we ended the opening day proudly, with 150+ species, but were then shattered to learn that the Tico Tickers were already leading the field by more than 20 birds! Would we ever chase down their lead?



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Although our focus was on birds, we enjoyed other fauna too! **9** Green-and-black Poison Dart Frog *Dendrobates auratus*, Selva Verde Lodge. **10** Mantled Howler *Alouatta palliata*, female with infant, near Selva Verde Lodge.

Day two

It was time to mix it up, visiting both Caribbean lowlands (at nearby **La Selva Biological Station**) and foothills (with a visit to the aerial tram in **Parque Nacional Braulio Carrillo**). **La Selva** was amazing, a full-scale onslaught of new birds rarely granting us a spare moment to gather our thoughts. This place is rightly revered; you never hear people say that La Selva 'was a bit slow'. Despite just two hours on site, we racked

11

11 Parque Nacional Braulio Carrillo, as viewed from the aerial tram.

up 90 species thanks to Joel, one of the station's excellent local guides. A mouth-watering roll-call included the Endangered Great Green Macaw *Ara ambiguus*, an immaculate 'Persil-white' Snowy Cotinga *Carpodectes nitidus* from the restaurant, a party of Pied Puffbird *Notharchus tectus*, Rufous-tailed Jacamar *Galbula ruficauda*, Rufous-winged Woodpecker *Piculus simplex*, Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker *Celeus castaneus*, White-collared Manakin *Manacus candei*, an atypically easy Royal Flycatcher *Onychorhynchus coronatus*, and a perched Semiplumbeous Hawk *Leucopternis semiplumbeus* whistling at us.

Before the morning was out, we were literally in the canopy of foothill forest canopy. **Braulio Carrillo's** aerial tram brought us an entirely new dimension to our rainforest experience (Fig. 11), but sadly precious few birds during a hot late-morning ride, aside from a circling King Vulture *Sarcorampus papa* seen by all teams. Back on the ground, we squeezed in a brief pre-lunch walk that threatened to be equally ineffective until we hit a flock, enabling us to ogle both Black-and-yellow Tanager *Chrysothlypis chrysomelas* and Speckled Tanager *Tangara guttata* among a flurry of birds foraging above us.

The afternoon was largely spent travelling, but we added a few shorebirds before reaching our next accommodation, **Selva Bananito Ecolodge**. Oddly, as we bumped our way along the final stretch of road to the lodge after nightfall, we scored an American Pygmy Kingfisher *Chloroceryle aenea* in the car headlights. Following dinner, we added a Great Potoo *Nyctibius grandis* to the Challenge list.

Day three

An early morning walk at **Selva Bananito** produced two rare Costa Rican birds: the recently split Central American Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium griseiceps* (heard only) and the Vulnerable Red-fronted Parrotlet *Touit costaricensis* (for two of the

three teams, ours being the exception). Dipping the parrotlet, despite visiting an often-frequented feeding tree, was a personal blow as I am still seeking that species despite eight trips to Costa Rica. A third sought-after species, Great Jacamar *Jacamerops aureus*, sadly demanded too long a walk for the time we had available.

By mid-morning, we had reached a brilliant site – a specially built tower in indigenous **Kekoldi territory** near Puerto Viejo. Rightly, this claims to bear witness to some of the highest concentrations of migrating raptors in the Americas. We stood in the treetops while a steady flow of Broad-winged Hawks and Swainson's Hawks *Buteo swainsoni*, Swallow-tailed Kites *Elanoides forficatus*, Mississippi Kites, Merlins *Falco columbarius* and Peregrines *Falco peregrinus* passed overhead. Access to the tower traversed forest and plantations that held decent birds of their own. A tame Double-toothed Kite *Harpagus bidentatus* (Fig. 12) was every bit as good as anything in the air that day, a White-whiskered Puffbird *Malacoptila panamensis* perched quietly in the understorey, and an excitable male Purple-throated Fruitcrow *Querula purpurata* revealed its deep crimson ruff to spectacular effect.

After a lunch accompanied by an excellent calypso band, we moved west and south towards one of the world's greatest birding lodges: **Rancho**

Despite the overhead passage of birds of prey, raptor of the day at Kekoldi Indigenous Reserve was **12** this Double-toothed Kite *Harpagus bidentatus*.

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Cracking nightbirds included: **13** this Mottled Owl *Ciccaba virgata*, which showed in front of the lodge at Rancho Naturalista, within minutes of arrival; **14** this Crested Owl *Lophostrix cristata*, which Diego Quesada and team kindly showed us at Casa Turire; and **15** this Bare-shanked Screech Owl *Megascops clarkii* at Hotel El Establo, Monteverde, which demanded cross-team collaboration before deigning to reveal itself.

Naturalista. En route, our afternoon highlight was to photograph an ostensibly out-of-range Grey-lined Hawk *Buteo nitidus*, although this species does seem to be spreading of late. Arriving after dark at the Rancho, there was little time for exploration, but we still managed to watch a Mottled Owl *Ciccaba virgata* perched in front of the property (Fig. 13), and to hear the distant, mournful whistles of a Common Potoo *Nyctibius griseus*. Good omens for the following dawn, perhaps?

Day four

Harry Barnard, one of **Rancho Naturalista's** exceptional local guides, did us proud. Despite only staying until mid-morning, we observed more than 120 species! Among these were some stylish birds, notably the bird with which the lodge has become synonymous: Snowcap *Microchera albocoronata*. We also recorded the local, globally Vulnerable



16

16 The ears and eyes of the operation: Harry Barnard (from Rancho Naturalista, left) and sharp-eyed team member Niklas Aronsson (Beltrán de Ceballos Vazquez).

Tawny-chested Flycatcher *Aphanotriccus capitalis*, a barrel-chested Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser *Sclerurus mexicanus* and the ever-popular Black-crested Coquette *Lophornis helenae*.

The birding was so good that we stayed after the other teams had departed – until paranoia started to sink in. What might they be seeing – and where? Nevertheless, we didn't move far – birding the nearby, attractive **Valle de Tuis**, near Turrialba. This produced quality over quantity, with Sunbittern *Eurypyga helias* and Lanceolated Monklet *Micromonacha lanceolata*. The team that missed both choice species was rather sore...

From Tuis, we traveled to another excellent reserve in the foothills, **Reserva Biológica El Copal**. Further Snowcaps greeted our lunchtime arrival. Following the meal, Harry continued to aid our 'list-loading' through several rapid hours birding the trails... We largely focused on feeding flocks, as these could throw us many a new species. Early afternoon is normally 'downtime' for Neotropical birds, but the avian throngs came so fast and furious that even the glorious Emerald Tanager *Tangara florida* was being shamefully ignored by late afternoon. The canopy parties held some real avian treats, including Rufous-browed Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes superciliaris*, Red-headed Barbet *Eubocco bourcierii*, White-winged Tanager *Piranga leucoptera* and Ashy-throated Chlorospingus *Chlorospingus canigularis*. The understory contingent also oozed quality, their number including Spotted Antbird *Hylophylax naevioides*.

There are times when bird races stand in complete contrast to 'normal' birding. As late afternoon approached, we needed to make a tough choice between quality and quantity. Should we

make a dash for **Laguna Angostura**, which would likely be loaded with waterbirds that would swell our list? Or should we stick with a phalanx of army ants, hoping for potential quality such as Ocellated Antbird *Phaenostictus mcleannani*?

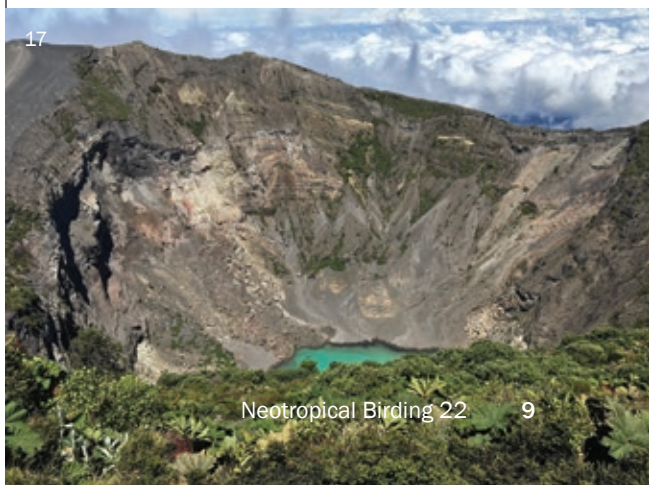
Normal birders would clearly opt for the latter... but this was a bird race so we behaved like 'trash birders' and chased the numbers. In a jet-set late-afternoon burst at **Casa Turire**, we rapidly extended our list with species such as Russet-naped Wood Rail *Aramides albiventris*, Limpkin *Aramus guarauna*, Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis*, Prothonotary Warbler *Protonotaria citrea* and Grey-crowned Yellowthroat *Geothlypis poliocephala*. Following dinner and an intake of alcohol, we went in search of nightbirds on the grounds, quickly 'locking in' a calling Tropical Screech Owl *Megascops choliba*, but then rather fortuitously bumping into Diego Quesada and his Tico Ticklers, who selflessly shared with us an incredible Crested Owl *Lophotrix cristata* (Fig. 14).

Day five

A day that opened in the Caribbean lowlands, moved into the highlands of **Parque Nacional Volcán Irazú** (Fig. 17) by mid-morning, and still managed to end near the Pacific coast. This exemplified one of the great joys of birding Costa Rica: the country's small size and decent transport links makes it possible to bird three major biogeographical realms in a single day.

As expected, the **Talamanca highlands** stole the day's headlines. Upon arrival, a male Scintillant Hummingbird *Selasphorus scintilla* was waiting for us – and promised a good morning. The 'hummer' proved no false prophet. The morning continued with Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher *Ptiliogonys caudatus* and Flame-throated Warbler *Oreothlypis*

17 At Parque Nacional Volcán Irazú, we recorded Resplendent Quetzal *Pharomachrus mocinno* and Costa Rican Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium costaricanum* on the Bird Race.



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In the Talamanca highlands, we encountered stunning birds such as **18** Flame-throated Warbler *Oreothlypis gutturalis* and **19** Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher *Ptiliogonys caudatus* (both photos taken at Savegre Lodge in February 2013), then struck gold (well, garnet and emerald) with **20** this sumptuous male Resplendent Quetzal *Pharomachrus mocinno*, which caused a minor traffic jam as teams converged on Parque Nacional Volcán Irazú.



20

gutturalis (both every bit as good as they sound), but reached fever pitch with a roadside crush. All three teams reacted simultaneously when one of the drivers gestured towards a Resplendent Quetzal *Pharomachrus mocinno* (Near Threatened; Fig 20), its glimmering green feathers waving gently in the breeze.

At the 'zenith' of the volcano, we went straight after some exciting denizens of Costa Rica's highest elevations. A Volcano Junco *Junco vulcani* flaunted shamelessly right around the car park. Timberline Wren *Thryorchilus browni* required a little more digging to find among the stunted vegetation that cloaked the edges of the impressive crater. Here we benefitted from a stroke of fortune. A Costa Rican birder casually showed us a stunning photo of a Costa Rican Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium costaricanum* that he had taken just down the road. We swiftly retraced our steps, located the bridge indicated by the birder... but couldn't find the rusty owl whose images we had admired. By chance – and entirely unaware of the owl's presence – the Redstart Wranglers were also on site. Charitably, we passed on the news and joined forces. Soon after, to our collective surprise, this often – difficult owl reacted to our overtures. Result!

After lunch in the cloudforest, we grudgingly boarded our bus, left the lovely landscapes of Irazú behind, and headed south to **Macaw Lodge**. This is close to **Parque Nacional Carara** in the steamy lowlands of the Pacific side of the mountain ranges that form the spine of Costa Rica.

Day six

Day five had been excellent and unforgettable, but late on the following morning the next day it had become a distant memory as we immersed ourselves in one of Costa Rica's most productive regions, the Central Pacific. Here, two great bioregions meet, creating a font of diversity remarkable even for this wildlife-rich country. Costa Rica's North Pacific region is dominated by tropical dry forest, but the South Pacific comprises humid forest. **Carara**, located at the convergence of these two great zones, holds elements of each. This small area thus potentially offered us a very varied bird list in a manageably small area.

A walk among the grounds of **Macaw Lodge** was, predictably, too brief to do it justice. Nevertheless, it demonstrated its quality by producing Baird's Trogon *Trogon bairdii* (Near Threatened), the poorly named Charming Hummingbird *Amazilia decora* (in reality, rather dull for a Costa Rican hummingbird!) and Fiery-billed Aracari *Pteroglossus frantzii*. The latter,

plucking pendulous fruits from a ripe *Cecropia*, was too gorgeous for us not to indulge in some (list-restricting) photography. The two other teams headed straight into Carara, but we opted to view the **Río Tarcoles** and search the surrounding mangroves. This brought us Mangrove Vireo *Vireo pallens* and Panama Flycatcher *Myiarchus panamensis*, plus a slew of shorebirds.

Moving onto **Orotina**, we hoped to claw back Spectacled Owl *Pulsatrix perspicillata*, which our rivals had encountered earlier on the trip. Although we had heard that the owl had been conspicuously present the previous afternoon, our quarry was now conspicuous in its absence. However, our time here was far from wasted as we got a roosting Barn Owl *Tyto alba* (we were the only team to get this species), a band of Double-striped Thick-knee *Burhinus bistriatus*, a daytime Pacific Screech Owl *Megascops cooperi*, a male Long-tailed Manakin *Chiroxiphia linearis*, and a frankly ridiculous Lesser Ground Cuckoo *Morococcyx erythropygus* that stood statuesque on a branch (Fig. 21)!

We arrived slightly late for lunch and were faced with tales from the other teams of productive mornings in Carara. We were instantly itching to get there. Bolting down our food, we headed for the nearest trail. We were nervous. Would our gamble of avoiding the other groups at Carara in the morning backfire? Afternoons, after all, can be notoriously slow in tropical forests.

Fortunately, our fears were quickly alleviated when we not only heard, but saw (and saw *well*) a Streak-chested Antpitta *Hylopezus perspicillatus* near the trailhead. A male Spot-crowned Euphonia *Euphonia imitans* in the same area was a nice find at the northern extremity of its range. The handsome Barred Antshrike *Thamnophilus doliatus* and boisterous Rufous Piha *Lipaugus unirufus* were added further along the trail, although the afternoon will undoubtedly best be remembered for the sizable Fer-de-lance *Bothrops asper* (the notorious pit-viper) that crossed just ahead of us. As the day dissipated, we watched the massive frames of Scarlet Macaws *Ara macao* labour their way through the air to go to roost in the mangroves. It was time for us to roost as well. We needed to garner our energy ahead of the battle for second place with the Redstart Wranglers (the Tico Tickers remained well in front following their storming first day).

Day seven

The penultimate day started near Carara. Here we picked up a handful of Black-headed Trogon *Trogon melanocephalus*, White-lored Gnatcatcher



21

We gambled on a side trip to Orotina and were rewarded with several new birds including **21** this Lesser Ground Cuckoo *Morococcyx erythropygus*.

Poliophtila albiloris, Streak-backed Oriole *Icterus pustulatus*, Turquoise-browed Motmot *Eumomota superciliosa* and a striking White-throated Magpie-Jay *Calocitta formosa*. All are species that betray the site's proximity to the dry North Pacific, which is where we headed next.

Rolling into the car park at **La Ensenada**, we only needed to look up to see another Pacific Screech Owl in broad daylight. With a few minutes to spare before our boat trip into the mangroves, we darted onto a trail leading through scrub and patchy tropical dry forest. Here we found the hoped-for Banded Wren *Thryophilus pleurostictus*, Spot-breasted Oriole *Icterus pectoralis* and nabbed a bonus Great Black Hawk *Buteogallus urubitinga*.

The boat trip disappointed, with Mangrove Hummingbird *Amazilia boucardi* (an Endangered Costa Rica endemic) thwarting all teams' hopes by refusing to appear. After lunch, each team went its separate way, mainly in search of waterbirds to pad our respective lists. Knowing that **La Ensenada** has an impressive set of saltpans, surrounded by dense mangroves, we targeted that area. However, despite scouring through thousands of waders beneath the searing tropical sun, we added only one shorebird to our list, a solitary Red Knot *Calidris canutus* (Near Threatened). Some compensation was provided by a low-flying Hook-billed Kite *Chondrohierax uncinatus*, but the sweltering mangroves were equivalent to an avian graveyard.

We felt relatively flat following this spell. Our chances of securing second place were slipping from our grasp. The competitor in me was frustrated. After another drive, we swapped the hot, dry forest of the lowlands for the cool, damp cloudforests of the highlands, close to **Monteverde**. The day ended well – even if it did nothing to

differentiate the teams – as we all shared a Bare-shanked Screech Owl *Megascops clarkii* (Fig. 15) in the grounds at **El Establo Mountain Hotel**. At the nightly log, it was confirmed that we remained firmly in third place; the other teams had racked up a dizzy array of waterbirds (many new) at a different set of saltpans. For us, that night's dinner was a sobering event. Nevertheless, we retained hope for the final day. After all, German had a plan to put us back in contention...

Day eight

The final day of the Costa Rica Bird Challenge could not have been more different from its predecessor. We had exchanged the oppressive heat of the Pacific for snug hats in the chilly sylvan uplands of **Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve** and neighbouring **Reserva Curi-Cancha**. Birdwise, however, things started warmly, because the new elevation came with many new species.

Our only cloudforest birding so far had been a brief trip to Irazú, which lies at considerably higher altitude than Monteverde. This meant that birds encountered this final morning, such as Red-faced Spinetail *Cranioleuca erythropis*, Spotted Barbtail *Premnoplex brunnescens*, Ruddy Pigeon *Patagioenas subvinacea*, Rufous-browed Peppershrike *Cyclarhis gujanensis*, a mumbling Orange-bellied Trogon *Trogon aurantiiventris* and the recently split Northern Emerald Toucanet *Aulacorhynchus prasinus* (see *Neotropical Birding* 20: 25–28 for details) were all new for our Challenge list.

The clock was ticking; the finishing line was set for noon at a roadside restaurant overlooking the Pacific Ocean. A visit to Monteverde's **hummingbird gallery-cum-café** was critical, as

it added the agile Magenta-throated Woodstar *Calliphlox bryantae* amongst familiar figures from earlier in the race such as Purple-throated Mountaingem, Violet Sabrewing and Green-crowned Brilliant *Heliodoxa jacula*. Thrushes brought us hope, with six of the species encountered being new: Black-faced Solitaire *Myadestes melanops*, White-throated Thrush *Turdus assimilis*, Mountain Thrush *T. plebejus*, Wood Thrush *Hylocichla mustelina* (Near Threatened), Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush *Catharus fuscater* and Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush *C. aurantirostris*.

Last-minute scrambling had enabled us to weave **Curi-Cancha** into the itinerary. This paid off, once the rotund form of a Grey-throated Leaf-tosser *Sclerurus albigularis* (Near Threatened) scraped into view. Prong-billed Barbet *Semnornis frantzii* – one of just two members of the exclusively Neotropical family, Semnornithidae – made its sole appearance here. While the other teams scoured the cloudforest for final scraps, German had one final card up his sleeve. We zoomed off to some coastal pans and pools. We hoped that these might provide a final bounty of waterbirds that might just push us over the line to reach a more respectable *second* place. Our collective inner competitor wasn't beaten quite yet.

Arriving at **Punta Morales**, there was good news and bad. There were indeed plentiful waterbirds present, but we would need to work hard to locate those that we needed. This culminated in the ridiculous spectacle of Niklas and myself knee-deep in mud as we stumbled towards a distant group of terns in the hope of finding something special, but instead added nothing more than one of Costa Rica's most abundant coastal birds, Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*. Worse, we got cut off by the tide and so had to wade our way back. No prizes for guessing whose face the laugh was on...

I can say, without a single shred of doubt, that I have never worked so hard to see this species. Such is the folly of a bird race, where every bird is equal, each counting one on the list. With noon fast approaching, we only had time to slam-dunk a couple of flycatchers before very reluctantly boarding the bus, and heading for the restaurant-cum-finishing-line.

The Costa Rica Bird Challenge – our 192 hours of bird-racing – thus came to an abrupt end. Having handed in our final species lists, we relaxed over lunch. But not for long, for the Challenge had one final twist in its tale. As we feasted, it came to light that a rival team had found a much-wanted Costa Rican endemic. With the race safely

SITES VISITED

This box summarises websites and/or GPS coordinates for lodges/sites visited.

Parque Nacional Volcán Poás tinyurl.com/volcan-poas; 10.196426, -84.232144; closed at time of writing due to volcanic activity

Cinchona 10.22171, -84.16696

Virgen del Socorro tinyurl.com/virgin-el-socorro; 10.25537, -84.17019

Selva Verde Lodge selvaverde.com; 10.4502, -84.0677

La Selva Biological Station ots.ac.cr/laselva; 10.4288, -84.0128

Kekoldí indigenous reserve 9.6469963, -82.7393675

Parque Nacional Braulio Carrillo tinyurl.com/braulio-c; 10.155366, -83.973990

Selva Bananito Ecological selvabananito.com; 9.8237567, -83.0627239

Rancho Naturalista ranchonaturalista.net; 9.83193, -83.5638

Valle de Tuis 9.8769754, -83.6442757

Reserva Biológica El Copal elcopal.org; 9.78404, -83.75147

Casa Turire & Laguna Angostura hotelcasaturire.com; 9.8515798, -83.6465549

Parque Nacional Volcán Irazú tinyurl.com/irazu-volcan; 9.9788256, -83.8454247

Macaw Lodge macawlodge.com; 9.7283846, -84.5186135

Parque Nacional Carara tinyurl.com/pn-carara; 9.7844453, -84.5664024

Río Tarcoles 9.7645509, -84.6272564

Ceiba, Orotina 9.9214559, -84.5788865

Guacimo road, near Carara 9.867198, -84.6480337

Hacienda La Ensenada laensenada.net; 10.1413403, -85.0427628

Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve reservamonteverde.com; 10.3038148, -84.7956777

El Establo Mountain Hotel elestablo.com; 10.3130879, -84.8158586

Reserva Curi-Cancha reservacuricancha.com; 10.3078434, -84.8051376

Punta Morales 10.0594508, -84.9422979

over, they deigned to tell us. Shortly after the noon, we successfully 'twitched' a male Mangrove Hummingbird (Fig. 7). No matter how much pleading was done, however, we were not permitted to add the species to our team list total. Where were those flexible rules when we needed them?

The scores are in...

So, I guess you would like to know the final totals? Tucán Tico, our team, managed to get into a medal position with an admirable 476 species. We were narrowly beaten into silver spot by the Redstart Wranglers, with just two more species. But we were all trounced by the outstanding Tico Tickers, who ended with an unbeatable 488 species.

The verdict

Let there be no doubt. The Costa Rica Bird Challenge was an excellent event that fully met its objectives. Those participants with no prior experience of Costa Rica were left in no doubt as to the avian riches of this extraordinary Central American country. We were unanimous that there was no need to shoehorn birding trips solely into the traditional high season; the remarkable totals above are testament to that. We were here during

what is formally the wet season for the Pacific slope – yet barely saw a drop of rain throughout the eight days. Finally, *everybody* – no matter how well they knew Costa Rica – got to visit new places, many of which have left an indelible mark on our respective birding lives. Rumours are rife that Costa Rica might hold another Bird Challenge. If so, I will be among the first to sign up.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

On the final night, participants met with many of the people who made the Costa Rica Bird Challenge happen. We are all eternally grateful to Futuropa (an organisation dedicated to promoting tourism to Costa Rica in Europe), the Costa Rica Tourist Board, and, of course, the voracious Serge Arias, without whom this would never have come to pass. I sincerely thank you all. Finally, I want to thank my team mates: German for his willingness to give it absolutely all, Beltrán for his wonderful humour throughout, Nicklas for his eagle eyes that put this bird guide to shame on many an occasion, and Tim for being great company with a fine set of eyes like all in this extremely enjoyable ragtag group!

SAM WOODS

Tropical Birding Tours, Quito, Ecuador
Email: sam@tropicalbirding.org
Website: <http://samwoodsbirding.blogspot.co.uk>

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Ecuador 'big day': a new world record

Dušan Brinkhuizen, Tuomas Seimola, Rudy Gelis, Mitch Lysinger and George Paul

In Neotropical Birding 16 we published an account of the world-record-breaking 'big day' in Peru in 2014. Here we celebrate an even more amazing achievement – another new world record, set by 'Team Ecuador'.

In birding terms, a 'big day' is a team effort to observe as many bird species as possible in a single calendar day. Here we present a detailed account of a record-breaking big day that surpassed the magical 400 species threshold for

the first time in ornithological history. Within the 24 hours of 8 October 2015, the first four authors identified a remarkable 431 bird species. Given our careful preparation, we thought we would have a reasonable chance of breaking the world record, set in Peru the previous year, but none of us expected that we smash it by 77 species!

All photographs were taken in Ecuador. All images of the team were taken on the 'big day' or 'pre-big day'.

1 Pied Water Tyrant *Fluvicola pica*, Baeza, Napo, September 2015: the long-staying vagrant (Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com).



Previous world records

Perhaps the world's first truly massive big-day record was set by the late Ted Parker and Scott Robinson on 30 September 1982. They recorded 331 species in Amazonian lowland forest at Cocha Cashu Biological Station, Madre de Dios, southeast Peru. Their effort has remained legendary because it was achieved at a single site and without motorised transport. On 30 November 1986, Terry Stevenson and John Fanshawe raised the bar to 342 species. Their Kenyan big day involved using two aeroplanes and nine land-based vehicles.

The Kenya record stood for 28 years until beaten by a Louisiana State University (LSU) team in Peru (Seeholzer *et al.* 2015). Dan Lane, Mike Harvey, Glen Seeholzer and Fernando Angulo Pralongo birded northern Peru, from the east slope of the Andes into the lowlands, identifying 354 species. Their success sparked several birders in Ecuador who had long been keen on a big day. The LSU team's route suggested the potential of an itinerary along the Equator through Ecuador's vast eastern side.

The team, route and preparations

Peru, Colombia and Brazil may boast a larger avifauna than Ecuador's 1,700 species, but the latter country is smaller, condensing very varied ecosystems into a more manageable area for a big day. Factor in decent infrastructure (particularly the trans-Andean highway), a carefully designed route making the most of the altitude gradient and conveniently located birding reserves and a well-considered timetable, and we reckoned the LSU total was within our grasp.

2 George Paul had the hardest task – listening to us talking and recording most of it! (Tuomas Seimola).

2

Designing the perfect big-day route was not easy. For a few years we thought it optimal to combine both east and west. However, with only 12 hours daylight on the Equator, we realised that this would be over-ambitious. Simply driving from the Amazon basin to the western lowlands would take at least eight hours. An overnight drive would enable both areas to be birded in 24 hours – but not in a single calendar day.

So we thought again. Annual Christmas Bird Counts had indicated the great potential of Ecuador's eastern slope along an axis connecting Cosanga and Narupa. We also knew the area well, having been birding (and, in the case of both Rudy and Mitch, living) for years in the eastern foothills and subtropics. The construction of the paved highway from Quito to Tena played both ways: while it reduced the quality of roadside birding, it would almost halve driving times (from eight to under five hours).

The first attempt by part of the eventual team came in March 2015. Tuomas (recently arrived from Finland) joined Dušan and Rudy to scout for a couple of days before starting listing at midnight on 8 March. We were joined by Peter Joost, who helped us with catering and other logistics but (in adherence to the American Birding Association's big-day rules: <http://listing.aba.org/big-day-count-rules>) would not point out birds to us. Nocturnal birding went very well but constant rain wiped out the dawn chorus and, with it, our chances of a world record. We abandoned the venture.

Our experience prompted a new term and new tactic: the 'pre-big day'. As we were all free the following day, we simply postponed our race day to 9 March! After several hours sleep, our internal clocks were adjusted fully when the alarm sounded at 23h45. We were off (again)! The weather was much better on 9 March. Despite light rain from 11h00, we mustered 335 species by the time we called it quits at 19h00. At the time, this first effort placed us in the bronze medal position: the third-highest big-day total ever. More significantly, we knew that better preparation would improve our chances.

Over the next few months, we developed the idea of a record-breaking big day. Rudy led the way in raising funds. Tuomas – an amazingly keen and loyal friend – was happy to fly in from Finland again. We completed the team by recruiting 'magic' Mitch, and securing George's services as non-participating companion and official witness. George flew in from Arizona (US) to document the entire endeavour with high-tech recording and video equipment (Fig. 2). His contribution ensured that our big day would be fully documented and



therefore auditable, thereby setting a new standard for future world-record attempts.

Our further preparations included redesigning and optimising the route. Compared to our March day, we needed a much tighter schedule. On a big day, time management is one of the greatest challenges. To devise the perfect timetable we did many reces along our route. We scouted for active nests, roosts and fruiting trees and searched for backup territories for as many species as possible (including nightbirds, which meant very few hours of sleep). We tried to get a better idea of the daily patterns and whereabouts of mixed-species feeding flocks. Another key factor was finding the perfect place for our dawn chorus. Especially during the immediate run-up to the count, we birded almost as intensely as we would do on the big day itself. In itself, this 'training' honed our spotting and communication skills, and bonded the team. It was an exhausting but amazingly rewarding week of non-stop birding and planning in the company of outstanding fellow birders and dear friends.

Even though our Amazonian and trans-Andean route seemed very solid, we needed an extra strategy that would significantly increase our chances for the world title. We had been toying for some time with taking a commercial flight. The basic problem with doing so is the critical birding time that you lose during check-in and while in the air. Therefore, a flight during the least productive time of the day would be the best scenario: in our case, this was after dusk.

But where in Ecuador would we maximise new species in the second session of night birding? Ben Haase, Ecuador's seabird and shorebird expert, confirmed that nocturnal birding in the salt pans of Santa Elena province could be rewarding. A quick check online revealed that the single monthly flight from Quito to Salinas (Santa Elena) departed 80 minutes after sunset on 8 October: the perfect timing for our big day. With only six seats left decisions had to be made immediately, and, after a few more phone calls, the flights were booked! Our big day was scheduled for 8 October!

Dušan and his wife Lorena scouted Salinas three weeks prior to the big day. A nocturnal trip with Ben into Ecuasal salt pans was a huge success, with more than 30 species identified by moonlight! Over a couple of nights, Dušan, Lorena and Ben carefully designed a 'power route' lasting 3 hours. The omens were good. Not only were many shorebirds foraging at night but the majority also seemed to be site-faithful.

Dušan and Lorena also sensitively searched gardens and bushes in town by night. Despite

finding it far easier to waken guard dogs and alarm the police than find sleeping birds, they eventually located roosting sites of Long-tailed Mockingbird *Mimus longicaudatus* and Red-masked Parakeet *Psittacara erythrogenys* (Near Threatened). Our coastal extension was certainly an ace up our sleeve but nevertheless the big day remained a big gamble: the date was set and we had only that single opportunity to do it. Ecuador's weather is highly unpredictable: heavy rain and strong wind would scupper even the best-laid plans.

On 7 October we applied our tactic of a pre-big day. Our route from San Isidro to the Amazonian lowlands and back up to the subtropics of Cosanga was a great success. So much so that we even discussed continuing the count that day before electing to stick with the plan (and its scheduled flight!). We stopped the pre-big day at Cabañas San Isidro at 14h00 with more than 300 species in the bag. After a delicious lunch there we 'hit the sack,' with alarms set for 23h40.

8 October 2015; the big day itself

It was a special feeling when the alarm sounded. Immediately, we looked outside: no rain and a promising sky! Ten minutes ahead of schedule, awake and dressed, we met on the balcony of the lounge at Cabañas San Isidro. Our crazy, exciting adventure was about to start! As midnight approached, George was conducting final tests on his microphone set-up and Mitch and Tuomas were scanning with spotlights in the hope of detecting perched birds.

"OK guys, it is **00h:00** on 8 October 2015. Our big day has officially started." Everything was dead silent until **00h01** when a Rufous-banded Owl *Ciccaba albitarsus* called beautifully in front of us, getting the list going. A minute later, the Black-banded ('San Isidro') Owl *Ciccaba* sp. called behind us: check!

To the vehicle, with Rudy driving. The 20 minutes scheduled for Andean Potoo *Nyctibius maculosus* were unsuccessful; the same was true of Swallow-tailed Nightjar *Uropsalis segmentata* at Guacamayos pass, but White-throated Screech Owl *Megascops albogularis* was a great consolation. Lower down the slope we got two further screech owls: Rufescent *M. ingens* and Vermiculated (Foothill) *M. guatemalae napensis*. Our next stop was a Band-bellied Owl *Pulsatrix melanota* territory. The previous night we had watched a beautiful pair at a streetlight but, unfortunately, this time there was a perched 'San Isidro' Owl instead! Backup sites further along



3



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The first few hours of the 'big day' were about nightbirds. **3** Vermiculated (Foothill) Screech Owl *Megascops guatemalae napensis*, WildSumaco Lodge, Napo, Aug 2013 (Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com). **4** Rufescent Screech Owl *Megascops ingens*, WildSumaco Lodge, Napo, February 2014 (Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com).

Loreto road were blank. A roadside nest of Blue-fronted Lancebill *Doryfera johannae* was a great find during scouting. A quick check with the spotlight confirmed the presence of an incubating adult. A cliffside Lyre-tailed Nightjar *Uropsalis lyra* was our next successful stop before heading to the lowlands.

Our owling session in *terra firme* forest around Jatun Sacha's private reserve near Tena airport was a huge success. At a single spot, we bagged three owls and Common Potoo *Nyctibius griseus*! The Nocturnal Curassow *Nothocrax urumutum* was singing much closer to the road than the previous night, and listening to its booming call was magical. White-throated Tinamou *Tinamus guttatus* and Crested Owl *Lophotrix cristata* were heard nicely but it took a backup site to produce Great Potoo *Nyctibius grandis*, which flew overhead in the spotlights. Another other-worldly moment!

Species count at 04h49: 16.

The pre-dawn

Continuing towards the Río Napo, a short stop at Tena airport got us a huge bonus species: a Barn Owl *Tyto alba* perched atop a fencepost! A couple of minutes before reaching our dawn-chorus locality, we picked up Hoatzin *Opisthocomus hoazin* at a small swamp.

The avian concert of the coming half-hour was crucial for the count. Although we knew what species to expect, scouting had taught us that dawn-song activity of individuals varied by the day. For example, today Rusty-fronted Tody-Flycatcher *Poecilotriccus latirostris* started calling earlier than expected, Fuscous Flycatcher *Cnemotriccus fuscatus* started relatively late and Stripe-chested Antwren *Myrmotherula longicauda* didn't sing at all.

Soon many more species started singing. It became a challenge to discern new species from the beautiful yet busy Amazonian soundscape. Targets ranging from Black-banded Crake *Anurolimnas fasciatus* to Riparian Antbird *Cercomacroides fuscicauda* and Dusky-cheeked Foliage-gleaner *Anabazenops dorsalis* were picked up according to plan. The resident White-lored Antpitta *Hylopezus fulviventris* tested our nerves but eventually started calling nicely. The superb loud call of a Buckley's Forest Falcon *Micrastur buckleyi* was a nice surprise.

First light

It became light quickly and we started to pick up species visually – starting with various waterbirds. A Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea* atop a bush was our first 'dirty bird' – one not seen or heard



5

5 Scarlet-crowned Barbet *Capito aurovirens*, Napo, August 2015 (Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com). This species (#40 on our big day list) participated in the dawn chorus, starting to sing at 05h40. **6** Black-banded Crake *Anurolimnas fasciatus*, Tena, Napo, December 2015 (Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com).

by all team members. Although American Bird Association rules allowed ‘dirty birds’ to comprise up to 5% of the total, we worked very hard to get everyone on every bird.

Species count at 06h22: 92.

As expected, a short stop at Tena airport at **06h30** produced various hirundines and a few other species. A huge surprise here was a singing Willow Flycatcher *Empidonax traillii*, smartly detected by Mitch’s fine-tuned ears. Not an everyday Ecuadorian sighting, for sure! Calling in at the ‘bat bridge’ (we created names for different road stops) got us the expected Yellow-margined Flycatcher *Tolmomyias assimilis*, Yellow-browed Tody-Flycatcher *Todirostrum chrysocrotaphum* and Spot-winged Antbird *Myrmelastes leucostigma*.

After successful birding in open country and secondary habitats with species such as Lettered Aracari *Pteroglossus inscriptus* and Rufous-sided Crake *Laterallus melanophaius*, we continued onto what we called ‘Rudy’s road’. Scouting had



6

suggested promise along this paved road, which traversed a nice stretch of mature lowland *terra firme* forest. We endured a slow start, craving a substantial mixed-species canopy flock rather than the scattered birds we were encountering.



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At 07h24, however, we got lucky, with a remarkable set of rare birds in little time. As we clambered out of the vehicle, a Hairy-crested Antbird *Rhegmatorhina melanosticta* was calling. A minute later a splendid Red-necked Woodpecker *Campephilus rubricollis* flew by, quickly followed by a Casqued Cacique *cacius oseryi*! Calls of both White-plumed Antbird *Pithys albifrons* and

7 Scanning the canopy of lowland terra firme forest along 'Rudy's road' near Tena airport (Tuomas Seimola). 8 Black Antbird *Cercomacra serva*, Archidona, Napo, January 2010 (Tuomas Seimola). This common inhabitant of second growth and forest edges in the lowlands is easily heard but can be difficult to see. It was species #157 at 07h26. 9 Dušan admiring an Opal-rumped Tanager *Tangara velia* along 'Rudy's road' (Tuomas Seimola). Species #166. 10 We found always carrying one scope to be a good tactic (Tuomas Seimola).

White-cheeked Antbird *Gymnopithys leucaspis* strongly suggested the presence of army ants inside the forest. What a pity we didn't have the time to check for ground cuckoos!

Although we never hit the hoped-for massive flock, we did pick up a good number of species. Highlights varied from Spix's Guan *Penelope jacquacu* to Rusty-belted Tapaculo *Liosceles thoracicus*, and Purple-throated Fruitcrow *Querula purpurata* to Spangled Cotinga *Cotinga cayana*. Chestnut-headed Crake *Anurolimnas castaneiceps* and White-eyed Tody-Tyrant *Hemitriccus zosterops* were being naughty and, for the first time, in four days of scouting, they remained silent. Difficult as it was to leave the species-rich terra firme behind, our schedule insisted that we move on.

Species count at 08h45: 195.



11 Blackish Nightjar *Caprimulgus nigrescens*, Loreto Road, Napo, August 2013 (Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com).

12 Olive-chested Flycatcher *Myiophobus cryptoxanthus*, Rio Bombuscaro, Zamora-Chinchipec, December 2009 (Tuomas Seimola). A common resident of open areas in the foothills, this was species #245 at 11h15. **13** We were starting to get desperate in a sunny, silent road cutting along the Loreto Road (Tuomas Seimola).

11
12
13



Bits and pieces in the lowlands

En route towards the foothills, Grey-breasted Crake *Laterallus exilis* was 'at home' in a swamp near Misahuallí and a bonus Little Cuckoo *Coccyua minuta* popped up, but we missed Point-tailed Palmcreeper *Berlepschia rikeri*. Consolation for dipping two woodcreepers at a stake-out came in the form of nearby Lemon-throated Barbet *Eubucco richardsoni* and Turquoise Tanager *Tangara mexicana* in a fruiting tree. Returning to Tena we made several 'emergency' road stops, including for Blue-winged Parrotlet *Forpus xanthopterygius* on wires outside Misahuallí and then a splendid White-browed Purpletuft *Iodopleura isabellae*. As the sun warmed the air, we made a tactical stop for sky-scanning, picking up some soaring raptors and a large mixed flock of swifts that contained Spot-fronted *Cypseloides*

cherriei and White-chested *C. lemosi*. We departed the lowlands at 10h00, on schedule so far!

Species count at 10h00: 215.

The foothills

We only had an hour to bird the foothills of the Loreto Road but did well despite intense sun that depressed bird activity. A Blackish Nightjar *Nyctipolus nigrescens* was seen at roost. Nearby flocks yielded several new species including Ecuadorian Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes gualaquizae* (Near Threatened). A section of steep, rocky cuts through the road was productive with Cliff Flycatcher *Hirundinea ferruginea*, Olivaceous Siskin *Spinus olivaceus* and a bonus Rufous-tailed Tyrant *Knipolegus poecilurus*. Rudy demonstrated his amazing ability to hear distant sounds when he exclaimed that "the puffbird you just whistled in is calling back!" Tuning in, we all managed to hear a very distant Western Striolated Puffbird *Nystalus obamai*: persistence paid off!



14



15

16



14 Cliff Flycatcher *Hirundinea ferruginea*, Zamora, Zamora-Chinchipe, August 2011 (Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com). **15** Rufous-tailed Tyrant *Knipolegus poecilurus* (Baeza, Napo, November 2011; Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com) was an unexpected bonus bird. **16** One of our big misses was Golden-eared Tanager *Tangara chrysotis* (Copalinga, Zamora-Chinchipe, August 2011; Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com).

Another loose flock lower down produced goodies such as Yellow-breasted Antwren *Herpsilochmus axillaris*, Lafresnaye's Piculet *Picumnus lafresnayi* and Orange-eared Tanager *Chlorochrysa calliparaea*. Inevitably, plenty of birds got away: Golden-eared Tanager *Tangara*

chrysotis was our biggest miss here, especially because we probably had a pair fly overhead. Nevertheless, by the halfway point in our big day, we were broadly happy with our score. Broadly...

Species count at 12h00: 260.

The subtropical zone – make or break

It was time to move up into the subtropical zone. At 12h33, along the highway near Cocodrillos (1,800 m altitude), we chanced upon a ‘monster’ flock, one of those dream mixed-species flocks matching quantity with quality. This added an amazing 24 species to our list, including eye-level views of classy birds including various tanagers, Rufous-rumped Antwren *Euchrepomis callinota*, Ashy-headed Tyrannulet *Phyllomyias cinereiceps*, Black-billed Peppershrike *Cyclarhis nigrirostris* and even a splendid Chestnut-bellied Thrush *Turdus fulviventris*. What a feast!

Up at Guacamayos pass (2,200 m) we added further novelties including Lacrimose Mountain Tanager *Anisognathus lacrymosus*, Chestnut-crowned Antpitta *Grallaria ruficapilla* and Green-and-black Fruiteater *Pipreola riefferii*.

Our hour at Cabañas San Isidro was mixed: some gloomy moments due to unusually slow bird activity but 32 new species included some goodies as well as common subtropical flock species. Feeders and flowers in the garden attracted several hummingbirds, and extensive bamboo provided targets such as Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher *Poecilatriccus ruficeps*, Blackish Tapaculo *Scytalopus latrans*, Ash-coloured Tapaculo *Myornis senilis* and Black-eared Hemispingus *Hemispingus melanotis*. Tough species recorded at the start of Macucoloma trail comprised Barred Antthrush *Chamaeza mollissima*, White-bellied Antpitta *Grallaria hypoleuca* and Black-chested Fruiteater *Pipreola lubomirskii*. We left San Isidro at 14h00 sharp, with 329 species in the bag. Right now, it was smooth sailing!

Species count at 14h00: 329.

A twitch!

At Baeza hospital we successfully twitched the long-staying Pied Water Tyrant *Fluvicola pica* (Ecuador’s second documented record), and a brief pause by the police checkpoint got us Torrent Tyrannulet *Serpophaga cinerea* and a fantastic pair



17 18

Antpittas are an integral part of birding in Ecuador – and our big day. **17** White-bellied Antpitta *Grallaria hypoleuca*, Cabañas San Isidro, Cosanga, November 2013 (Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com). **18** Chestnut-crowned Antpitta *Grallaria ruficapilla*, Guango Lodge, Napo, August 2009 (Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com).

of Torrent Duck *Merganetta armata*. The officials appeared bemused by our celebration dance, but despite whatever suspicions they harboured, they fortunately let us pass without problem.

At a petrol (gas) station a literally eagle-eyed Tuomas picked up an adult Black-and-chestnut Eagle *Spizaetus isidori* (Near Threatened). Another memorable encounter was a Slaty-backed Chat-Tyrant *Ochthoeca cinnamomeiventris* heard through the open car window. In chorus we called “chat-tyrant!”, which prompted a good giggle but, with consensus on the identification, no need to turn back.

At Guango Lodge, bird activity was surprisingly slow and thus we added few new flocking species. Better were the hummingbird feeders, where we efficiently added to our list species including Sword-billed Hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera*, Tyrian Metaltail *Metallura tyrianthina* and Tourmaline Sunangel *Heliangelus exortis*. The world record was within sniffing distance, but only Dušan (responsible for keeping track of species recorded) was aware... and he kept quiet!

Species count at 15h45: 348.



19



20



21

19 Sword-billed Hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera*, Yanacocha, Pichincha, July 2014 (Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com). We added this species at Guango Lodge. **20** Agile Tit-Tyrant *Uromyias agilis*, Papallacta, Napo, March 2015 (Tuomas Seimola). Species #367 at 16h39. A bird fairly readily seen in temperate forest around Papallacta. **21** Male Rainbow-bearded Thornbill *Chalcostigma herrani*, Cerro Mongus, Carchi, January 2013 (Tuomas Seimola). A welcome surprise, this was species #363 at 16h25.

Up high

Ascending to Papallacta, bird activity improved. We quickly picked up a few common high-altitude species, including Red-crested Cotinga *Ampelion*

rubrocristatus, plus a staked-out Paramo Tapaculo *Scytalopus opacus*, but we failed to locate any mixed flocks. Oddly, we couldn't find Shining Sunbeam *Aglaeactis cupripennis* at the expected flowers but did add Viridian Metaltail *Metallura*

22 Red-crested Cotinga *Ampelion rubrocristatus*, Yanacocha, Pichincha, July 2014 (Dušan Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com). We encountered this smart bird at Papallacta. Seeing it meant we broke the world record.

williami and the rare Rainbow-bearded Thornbill *Chalcostigma herrani*.

A short 'flock stop' along the highway added species including Agile Tit-Tyrant *Uromyias agilis*, Grey-browed Brushfinch *Arremon assimilis* plus a bonus Purple-backed Thornbill *Ramphomicron microrhynchum*. To our surprise, several carloads of people parked next to us, wondering what we were ogling – and were then bemused as we rushed back into the car, leaving them standing. Laguna Papallacta efficiently produced four new waterbirds within two minutes. At Papallacta pass (4,000 m altitude) we did well with Blue-mantled Thornbill *Chalcostigma stanleyi*, Stout-billed Cinclodes *Cinclodes excelsior* and other high-altitude specialities – but the Plumbeous Sierra Finch *Phrygilus unicolor* that seems ever-present at the shrine chose today of all days to be hiding! With less than an hour's daylight remaining, we had to shift to get to Quito airport, so an adult Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle *Geranoaetus melanoleucus* on our way down was a great addition.

Species count at 17h27 (not that everyone realised it at the time...): 384.

Airport birding – and a world record realised

We reached Quito's airport pond five minutes behind schedule at **18h05**. At our final daylight

stop, we added seven new species, including three shorebirds and a Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* memorably hunting above the pond at dusk.

As we headed to the airport terminal for our flight to Salinas, Dušan, who had (quietly!) been keeping track of species recorded with a digital recorder, informed other team members that we had broken the world record two hours previously – and that our current total stood at 392 species! "Seriously guys, I'm not joking."

A split-second of disbelief was followed by loud cheering. Tuomas replied: "I knew it, you *****! You kept it secret so we would keep on birding!" Those few minutes of noisy jubilation were incredible, and focused our attention on the next milestone: 400 species here we come! Full of ecstasy and adrenaline, we checked in – and had the funniest airport experience of our collective lives. Tuomas's tripod and scope were causing a little trouble, but when we explained that, as 'Team Ecuador', we were currently breaking a birding world record, resistance softened and we were allowed to take the equipment as hand luggage. Within minutes, we were sitting in the plane, enjoying some much-needed 'time out'. Rudy was particularly relieved at not having to drive anymore!

Species count at 18h09: 392.

Salinas: the end game

At **20h40** we arrived at Salinas airport, meeting Ben Haase and driver Luis. George sat inside while the rest of us leaped into the back of the

THE NUMBERS GAME

Our big day followed American Birding Association rules (<http://listing.aba.org/big-day-count-rules/>). This includes the stipulation that at least 95% of species must be seen or heard by all team members. All four of our team members recorded 415 species (96.3%), with only 16 'dirty birds' missed by one or more member (3.7%). We saw 305 species (70.8%) and heard (only) a further 126 (29.2%). Our total included 12 owls, nine swifts, 27 hummingbirds, eight parrots, nine woodpeckers, 24 ovenbirds, 19 antbirds, 54 tyrant flycatchers, nine swallows, 11 wrens, 52 tanagers and 10 New World warblers. We broke the world record with Red-crested Cotinga (species #355). As far as we know this has been the first big day to be fully documented with audio equipment. The total distance covered by ground vehicles was c.385 km. Our full 'big day' data report can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/big-day-data>

open pickup. Within minutes we screeched to a halt for a Burrowing Owl *Athene cunicularia*. Our next stop was the Long-tailed Mockingbird tree in town. “That’s not a mockingbird: it’s a West-Peruvian Dove [*Zenaida meloda*]! Wait, the mockingbird is sleeping right above it!” Three minutes later we stopped at the Red-masked Parakeet roost – another bird ticked without needing to get out of the pickup.

At **21h00** we drove to Santa Rosa harbour, our only shot at Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*. “There’s one, sleeping on top of that lamppost!” Scanning the harbour produced Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* and Yellow-crowned Night Heron *Nyctanassa violacea*. Cruising slowly along Mar Bravo beach, we located Willet *Tringa semipalmata*, Sanderling *Calidris alba* and Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*. All went to plan at Punta Carnero mangroves and mudflats, where a Wilson’s Plover *Charadrius wilsonia* flew in after playback, and Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja* and Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* foraged in a ditch.

At **22h00**, the salt pans beckoned. Ben had secured permission for us to enter at this unusual hour. In a tree swamped with Snowy Egrets *Egretta thula*, we carefully picked out the yellow bill of a Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, a common but hitherto elusive species, plus a nice Tricoloured Heron *Egretta tricolor*. Continuing along the narrow embankment of the pond network, we added a host of new gulls, shorebirds and other waterbirds. A dense party of Grey Gull *Leucophaeus modestus* was memorable for their beautiful vocalisations. A large flock of terns roosting on a mudflat added four species, notably Elegant *Thalasseus elegans* (Near Threatened). Tuomas scoped the

23 An exhausted but exhilarated team at the end of our big day, in front of a saltpan at Ecuasal, Salinas (Tuomas Seimola). From left: Rudy, Mitch, Tuomas and Dusan. We had 431 reasons to smile!

SOME SITES VISITED

Here are the GPS co-ordinates and (where relevant) websites for some of the key locations visited during our ‘big day’.

‘Rudy’s road’ -1.084278, -77.651500

Dawn chorus area -1.035306, -77.583556

Loreto Road, cutting through road -0.708167, -77.739583

Cabañas San Isidro cabanasanisidro.com; -0.589750, -77.881556

Guango Lodge area guangelodge.com; -0.377778, -78.075694

Papallacta lakeside forest -0.379056, -78.153333

Jatun Sacha jatunsacha.org

Papallacta pass -0.332306, -78.197750

Quito airport pond -0.110083, -78.364722

Ecuasal, Salinas -2.251583, -80.936972

hordes of waders on the mudflats and, amazingly, located the long-staying vagrant Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*!

The final countdown

Within only half-an-hour of the day remaining, we went to search for Chilean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus chilensis* (Near Threatened). Although normally a fairly easy task at Ecuasal the impact of El Niño meant that only a single individual was left. Luckily, we knew in which exact pond to look for it! Our final species of the day came at **23h50**, when a lone fast-running shorebird proved to be a smart Snowy Plover *Charadrius nivosus* (Near Threatened).

23



BIG-DAY ETHICS

The ethics of birding is always a hot topic. While scouting, we learned that frequent playback would actually depress our day score as it was time-consuming and made it difficult to hear other vocalising species. Therefore, we mainly used playback during the night. By day, we played only short bouts of a handful of target species, seeking to minimise disturbance. We appreciate concerns that our use of motorised transport meant that our endeavour was not the most eco-friendly. But our aims were to honour and publicise Ecuador's megadiversity and its natural habitats, flora and fauna.

At midnight, we took some team pictures in front of a mound of salt to celebrate our achievement of passing 400 species in a single day! In Salinas, a friend provided cold beers and a delicious seafood dinner. But our incredible result exacted a toll in terms of fatigue: none of us had the energy for a second beer. What an incredible 'big day'!

Final species total: 431.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We want to thank all the people and fellow birders that have been part of conservation work and promoting

birding in Ecuador: your contribution has protected vast areas and safe-havens for the birds of this magnificent country. We also want to thank everyone who funded and made this 'insane' project possible. Ben Haase and Luis provided crucial help out on the coast – thanks guys. We also want to thank Cabañas San Isidro and Guango Lodge for helping us greatly in our effort. Last but not least, we want to thank our partners for their love and infinite patience in putting up with us crazy birders.

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DUŠAN BRINKHUIZEN

E-mail: d.m.brinkhuizen@gmail.com

Website: www.rockjumperbirding.com & sapayoa.com

TUOMAS SEIMOLA

Käpyläntie 1 J 156, 00610 Helsinki, Finland

E-mail: tseimola@gmail.com

RUDY GELIS

E-mail: rudygelis@yahoo.com

MITCH LYSINGER

E-mail: mitch@cabanasanisidro.com

Website: www.cabanasanisidro.com

GEORGE PAUL

E-mail: george@georgepaulaw.com



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Rufous-crested Coquette by Rob Williams



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Splits, lumps and shuffles

Thomas S. Schulenberg



Based on features including boot colour and tail shape, Booted Racket-tail *Ocreatus underwoodii* may be as many as four species. **1** 'Anna's Racket-tail' *O. (u.) annae*, male, Cock-of-the-rock Lodge, Cuzco, Peru, August 2017 (Bradley Hacker).

This series focuses on recent taxonomic proposals – descriptions of new taxa, splits, lumps or reorganisations – that are likely to be of greatest interest to birders. This latest instalment includes: new species of sabrewing, parrot (maybe), tapaculo, and yellow finch (perhaps); proposed splits in Booted Racket-tail, Russet Antshrike, White-backed Fire-eye (split city!), Collared Crescentchest, Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner, Musician Wren, Spotted Nightingale-Thrush, Yellowish and Short-billed Pipits, Black-and-rufous Warbling Finch, Pectoral and Saffron-billed Sparrows, and Unicolored Blackbird; a reassessment of an earlier proposed split in Black-billed Thrush; the (gasp!) possibility of the lump of South Georgia Pipit; and re-evaluations of two birds each known only from a single specimen.

Racking up the racket-tails

Booted Racket-tail *Ocreatus underwoodii* is one of the most widespread, and one of the fanciest, hummingbirds of the Andes. It occurs from

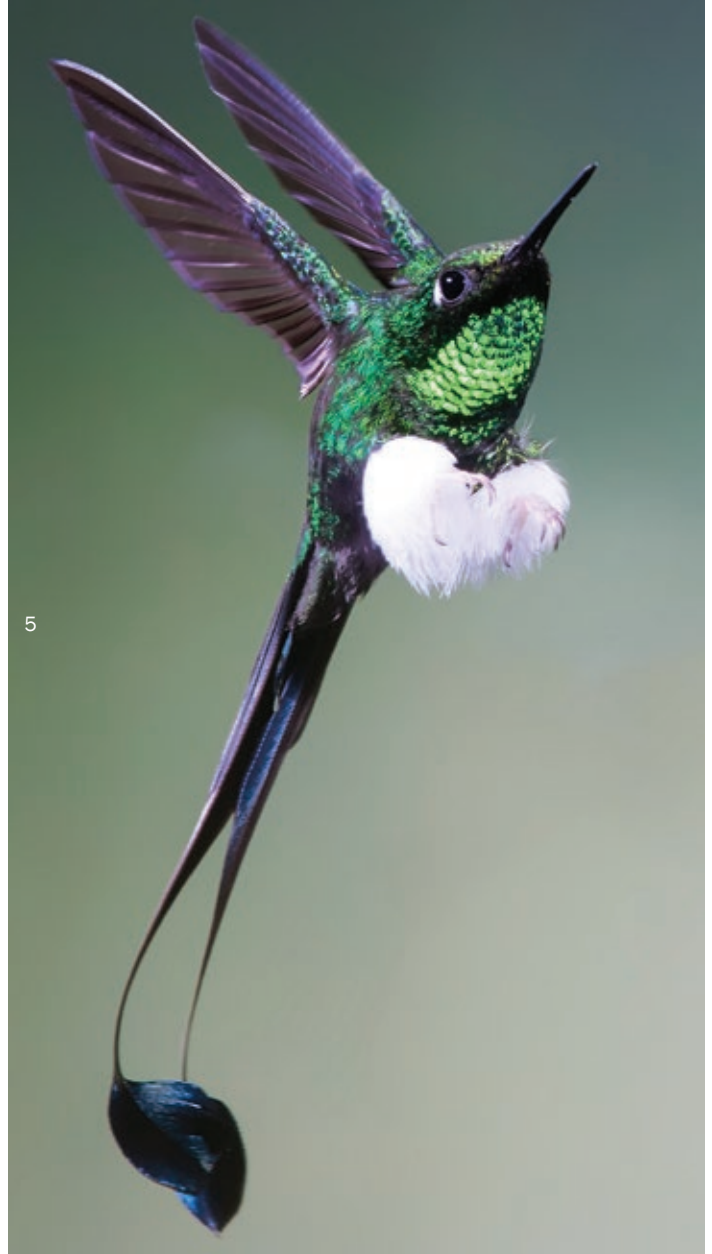
Venezuela to Bolivia; across its range, the puffy 'boots' (leg feathering) may be white or buffy, and the racket-tipped outer tail feathers may be straight, or so curved that the outermost rectrices cross over one another.



2 'Peruvian' Racket-tail *O. (u.) peruanus*, female, Abra Patricia, San Martín, Peru, October 2011 (Nick Athanas/antpitta.com).
3 'Peruvian Racket-tail' *O. (u.) peruanus*, male, Wild Sumaco, Napo, Ecuador, June 2012 (Nick Athanas/antpitta.com).



>> SPLITS, LUMPS AND SHUFFLES



4 'White-booted Racket-tail' *O. (u.) melanantherus*, female, Tandayapa Bird Lodge, Pichincha, Ecuador, February 2013, (Nick Athanas/antpitta.com). **5** 'White-booted Racket-tail' *O. (u.) melanantherus*, male, Tandayapa Bird Lodge, Pichincha, Ecuador, December 2015 (Thomas Lebeau: flickr.com/thomaslebeau). **6** 'Adda's Racket-tail' *O. (u.) addae*, male, Apa Apa, La Paz, Bolivia, September 2015 (Rich Hoyer/birdernaturalist.blogspot.com).

Some authors have proposed recognising two species of racket-tail, based on boot color (e.g. Ridgely & Greenfield 2001), but Schuchmann and colleagues (2016) propose to recognise no fewer than *four* species: the white-booted northern and western subspecies (Venezuela, Colombia and western Ecuador) as White-booted Racket-tail *O. underwoodii*; the rufous-booted, straight-tailed birds of eastern Ecuador and northern Peru as Peruvian Racket-tail *O. peruanus*; and the rufous-booted, curve-tailed birds as two species, Anna's

Racket-tail *O. annae* of central and southern Peru, and Adda's Racket-tail *O. addae* of Bolivia.

These splits are justified in part on the basis of the parapatric (abutting) ranges of White-booted and Peruvian Racket-tails in eastern Ecuador, as documented by a few older specimens, although the absence of recent records of contact between the white- and buffy-booted racket-tails calls this distributional pattern into question (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). On the other hand, Schuchmann *et al.* also report differences in the courtship

displays of White-booted, Peruvian, and Anna's/ Adda's racket-tails; otherwise, Anna's and Adda's are very similar to one another, distinguishable only by subtle differences in plumage and measurements.

One species? Two? Three, or four? Best to twitch 'em all, and let the experts sort it out.

Hiding in plain sight: a new sabrewing

Grey-breasted Sabrewing *Campylopterus largipennis* is a large but drab hummingbird that is widespread across Amazonia. The sexes are similar, apart from the greatly stiffened and curved outer primaries of the male (the wing 'sabres'), being green above and grey below, with white tips to the outer tail feathers.

Standing out from the crowd is a highly disjunct subspecies, *diamantinensis*, which occupies *campos rupestres* (brushy savannas) in the Serra Espinhaço in Minas Gerais, eastern Brazil – far removed, in other words, from Amazonia, both in distance and in habitat. Potentially confounding this pattern, however, have been a few reports from dry forests in intervening areas in central Brazil; some of these were identified as *diamantinensis*, others as one of the Amazonian populations, but most were not classified to subspecies at all.

Lopes *et al.* (2017) critically examined specimens from across that vast range of Grey-breasted Sabrewing, with a particular focus on those from central and eastern Brazil. They discovered that there is a previously unrecognised population of sabrewings that occupies deciduous dry forests in east-central Brazil, geographically separated from Amazonia but with a distribution that is parapatric to the range of *diamantinensis*. This population is more similar to *diamantinensis* than it is to Amazonian populations, but is smaller, and has slightly more extensive white tips to the tail. In view of the difference in habitat preferences between *diamantinensis* and the dry forest population, and the lack of evidence of hybridisation between them, Lopes and colleagues describe the dry-forest population as a new species, Dry-forest Sabrewing *C. calcirupicola*.



Recent research suggests that Grey-breasted Sabrewing *Campylopterus largipennis* may comprise four separate species, including two taxa endemic to Brazil, one of which constitutes a previously unrecognised population. The latter is **7** 'Dry Forest Sabrewing' *C. (l.) calcirupicola*, Fazenda Corredor, Bocaiúva, Minas Gerais, Brazil, July 2006 (Leonardo Esteves Lopes). The other Brazilian endemic has no proposed English name, although 'Cibo Sabrewing' is a possibility: **8** *C. (l.) diamantinensis*, Caraça, Minas Gerais, Brazil, October 2007 (Nick Athanas/antpitta.com). Both taxa are distinct from **9** Grey-breasted Sabrewing *C. largipennis*, Manaus, Amazonas, Brazil, March 2014 (Anselmo d'Afonseca).

Not surprisingly, they also elevate *diamantinensis* to species rank; they don't suggest an English name, but 'Cipo Sabrewing' is one possibility.

Not content with stopping there, Lopes *et al.* further suggest that the Amazonian populations also be split into two species, a more widespread *C. obscurus* (western and southern Amazonia), and *C. largipennis* of northeastern South America (north of the Amazon, east of the Rio Negro). Time will tell on that score. In the meantime, the interior of eastern Brazil seems poised to gain two new endemic species!

A split in Russet Antshrike, yes, but where?

Russet Antshrike *Thamnistes anabatinus* occurs in the midstorey and lower canopy of humid montane forests from southern Mexico south to Bolivia; both sexes are tawny brown, and are superficially similar to some foliage-gleaners *Philydor*. Zimmer & Isler (2003) suggested that there might be two species of Russet Antshrike, one on either side of the Andes, and this split was implemented by del Hoyo & Collar (2016).

Isler & Whitney (2017) take a closer look at vocalisations across the range of Russet Antshrike, however, and reach a slightly different conclusion. The most distinctive population, vocally, is subspecies *rufescens* of Peru and Bolivia, and Isler & Whitney would split this population, without hesitation, as a separate species, Rufescent Antshrike *T. rufescens*. This leaves Russet Antshrike as a species that includes both the populations west of the Andes, and some, but not all, of the populations on the east side of the Andes. There may be another shoe to drop,

10 Russet Antshrike *Thamnistes anabatinus aequatorialis*, Wildsumaco lodge, Napo, Ecuador, July 2016 (Roger Ahlman; pbase.com/ahlman). Unlike the confidently split 'Rufescent Antshrike' *Thamnistes (anabatinus) rufescens*, vocal differences between *aequatorialis* and other populations of *T. anabatinus* are not quite enough to justify proposing a split.

however, as Isler & Whitney acknowledge some vocal differences between subspecies *aequatorialis* (eastern Andes from Colombia to northernmost Peru) and other populations. For now, they are reluctant to recommend splitting *aequatorialis*, but... watch this space: if we wait long enough a final split may yet fall into place!

Calling out the fire-eyes

Fire-eyes are large antbirds that take their name from their bright red irides, a feature shared by both sexes. Fire-eyes occur from the Pacific coast of Ecuador and northernmost Peru east to southeast Brazil, but the distribution is patchy. Males are almost entirely black, but all have some white in the plumage (although this may take the form of a concealed interscapular patch). Females on the other hand are much more variable in appearance. Typically three species of fire-eye are recognised, although two of them (White-shouldered *P. leucoptera* and White-fringed *P. atra*) have a narrow zone of hybridisation in eastern Brazil.

Maldonado-Coelho (2010) conducted a genetic analysis of all *Pyriglena*. One result of this survey was to identify four separate genetic lineages (clades) within the most widespread species, White-backed Fire-eye *P. leuconota*. Furthermore, White-shouldered and White-fringed Fire-eyes were placed, genetically, inside of White-backed; the implication of this is that there could be either one species in the genus, or up to five or six.

Isler & Maldonado-Coelho (2017) extend this analysis, and use vocalisations as an additional data set with which to sort out the fire-eyes. Songs show some variation in pace between different populations, but otherwise one fire-eye song sounds much like any other: variation in songs alone does not seem sufficient to define species. On the other hand, calls turn out to be rather variable across the fire-eyes.

The upshot is that Isler & Maldonado-Coelho not only recommend retaining White-shouldered and White-fringed Fire-eyes as species, but also would partition White-backed into three species: their analysis maps closely onto the genetic clades, but lumps two genetic lineages into a single group defined by calls. The splits in White-backed Fire-eye recommended by Isler & Maldonado-Coelho break down as: Western Fire-eye *P. maura* (western Ecuador, east slope of the Andes from Colombia to Bolivia, and southwestern Brazil); Tapajos Fire-eye *P. similis* (eastern Amazonia, between the Tapajos and Xingu rivers); and East Amazonian Fire-eye *P. leuconota* (eastern





12

If adopted, splits in White-backed Fire-eye *Pyriglena leuconota* would make **11** 'Tapajos Fire-eye' *P. (l.) similis* (Altamira, Pará, Brazil, May 2013; Victor Castro) a different species from **12** 'East Amazonian Fire-eye' *P. (l.) leuconota* (Caxias, Maranhão, Brazil, June 2012; João Quental: [flickr.com/jquental](https://www.flickr.com/photos/jquental/)).



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Amazonia, and northeastern Brazil). As so often is the case, however, Isler & Maldonado-Coelho end by pointing to vocal and plumage differences between subspecies that may lead to yet further splits.

A fifth species of crescentchest?

Crescentchests *Melanopareia* are peculiar terrestrial suboscines of semi-arid habitats of South America. Traditionally four species are recognised, but this may change, following a review by Lopes & Gonzaga (2016) of the three subspecies of Collared Crescentchest *M. torquata* of central South America. Variation within

13 is 'Double-collared Crescentchest' *Melanopareia (torquata) bitorquata* (Vila Bela da Santíssima Trindade, Mato Grosso, Brazil, January 2014; Márcio Repenning) a fifth species of crescentchest, distinct from **14** Collared Crescentchest *M. torquata* (Altiplano Leste, Distrito Federal, Brazil, February 2017; Cristofer Martins: [flickr.com/147473680@N03](https://www.flickr.com/photos/147473680@N03/))?

the two subspecies of Brazil and Paraguay is clinal, and perhaps these subspecies should be merged. Subspecies *bitorquata* of eastern Bolivia,

however, is markedly different. Both *torquata* and *bitorquata* have a rufous nuchal collar, but in *bitorquata* this is bordered by a narrow black collar, streaked with white, and *bitorquata* generally has darker, richer tones to the plumage, especially on the underparts.

Although Lopes & Gonzaga do not make this point, arguably *bitorquata* and *torquata* are at least as different as are two other taxa recognised as species, Elegant *M. elegans* and Marañon *M. maranonica* crescentchests. And although most range maps show the distribution of Collared Crescentchest as continuous from Bolivia into Brazil, Lopes & Gonzaga find no evidence for hybridisation between *bitorquata* and other populations (nor, however, can they document sympatry between them either). Lopes & Gonzaga conclude that *bitorquata* be split, as Double-collared Crescentchest.

A halt to the name ‘Alto Pisones Tapaculo’

In 1992 the noted ornithologist Gary Stiles encountered a tapaculo *Scytalopus* with a distinctive churring vocalisation, which at first he mistook for a frog; this discovery was at a site known as Alto de Pisones, in the highly diverse

15 Gary Stiles and his ‘charge’, Tatamá Tapaculo *Scytalopus alvarezlopezi*, Cerro Montezuma, Risaralda, Colombia, April 2015 (Julian Heavyside). The species was finally described 25 years after its discovery.

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Western Andes of Colombia. Since that time, legions of birders have visited this region, and many of them have twitched what they came to call ‘Alto Pisones Tapaculo’. But during all this time, ‘Alto Pisones Tapaculo’ had no formal English, or scientific, name. This situation finally was resolved when Stiles and colleagues (2017) published a formal description of this tapaculo.

They named the species after Humberto Álvarez-López, an influential Colombian ornithologist, and so it takes the scientific name *S. alvarezlopezi*. The formal English name is not ‘Alto Pisones’, but rather is Tatamá Tapaculo; the distribution of this tapaculo is centered on the region of Cerro Tatamá, in Parque Nacional Tatamá (Alto de Pisones is only a few kilometers outside of the park). The known distribution of this species, however, extends along the Pacific slope of the Western Andes from western Antioquia south to southwestern Valle del Cauca. As is typical of *Scytalopus* tapaculos, the male Tatamá Tapaculo is mostly grey, and is very similar to other species in plumage (although easily distinguishable by song); the female presumably is similar but browner, but its plumage still has not been described in detail.

A multiplicity of Musician Wrens

The song of Musician Wren *Cyphorhinus arada*, composed “of often complex and musical phrases accompanied by low guttural churring notes” (Ridgely & Tudor 2009), is a familiar sound in the understorey throughout the Amazon Basin. Bocalini & Silveira (2016) surveyed variation across the entire range of Musician Wren. They found that each of the six subspecies was distinguishable by plumage and in measurements; this may seem like an obvious conclusion, but bird taxonomy is replete with poorly defined subspecies, so confirmation of the ‘reality’ of all six is a bit unusual. Strictly on this basis, Bocalini & Silveira would recognise each of the six as a species.

As often is the case with understorey birds of the Amazon, however, the subspecies typically are separated from one another across major rivers, and so reproductive isolation cannot be tested directly. Bocalini & Silveira take the matter one step farther, and also surveyed songs across the range of the species. Due to the high levels of individual variation in the songs, this survey was a considerable challenge. The most distinctive songs were those of nominate *arada* of the Guianas and northeastern Brazil; *interpositus*, of east-central Amazonia (between the Tapajós and Xingu rivers); and *griseolateralis*, of eastern Amazonia (east of



Rio Xingu). One species? Four? Six? A familiar tale emerges: never take a common, widespread species for granted, but make sure to see them all, just in case! Names that have been suggested for each of the six subspecies/species are: Imeri Musician Wren *C. transfluvialis*; Grey-eared or Napo Musician Wren *C. salvini*; Ferruginous or Inambari Musician Wren *C. modulator*; Guianan Musician Wren *C. arada*; Rondonia Musician Wren *C. interpositus*; and Grey-flanked or Tapajos Musician Wren *C. griseolateralis* (Bocalini & Silveira 2016, del Hoyo & Collar 2016).

The final split for Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner?

Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner *Automolus infuscatus* is a common, widespread bird of the understorey of Amazonian forests. As is typical of foliage-gleaners, its plumage is drab and relatively unpatterned, and, in appearance, it looks much the same across its large range. But Zimmer (2002) showed that despite the apparent low levels of geographic variation, there's a different story to be told when vocalisations are taken into account.

Zimmer documented that the population in southeastern Amazonia has dramatically different vocalisations; based on this research, that



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Musician Wren *Cyphorhinus arada* may comprise as many as six species, four of which are illustrated here; English names are the author's own suggestions. **16** 'Rondonia Musician Wren' *C. (arada) interpositus*, Cristalino, Mato Grosso, Brazil, October 2014 (João Quental: flickr.com/jquental). **17** 'Guianan Musician Wren' *C. (a.) arada*, Presidente Figueiredo, Amazonas, Brazil, September 2017 (João Quental: flickr.com/jquental). **18** 'Ferruginous (or Inambari) Musician Wren' *C. (arada) modulator*, Reserva de Biosfera del Manú, Madre de Dios, Peru, November 2009 (Lars Petersson; larsfoto.se). **19** 'Grey-eared (or Napo) Musician Wren' *C. (arada) salvini*, Yasuni Research Station, Orellana, Ecuador, August 2010 (Nick Athanas; antpitta.com).



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20 Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner *Automolus infuscatus purusianus*, Los Amigos/CICRA, Madre de Dios, Peru, September 2007 (Joseph Tobias). Olive-backed Foliage-gleaners in southwestern Amazonia (subspecies *infuscatus* and *purusianus*) are now suggested to be a species distinct from those in northern Amazonia (taxa *cervicalis* and *badius*, collectively called Olive-crowned Foliage-gleaner *A. cervicalis*).

population was split off as what we now recognise as a separate species, Para Foliage-gleaner *A. paranesis*. Zimmer also pointed to differences in songs between Olive-backed Foliage-gleaners north of the Amazon (subspecies *badius* and *cervicalis*), and those in southwestern Amazonia (subspecies *infuscatus* and *purusianus*), and suggested that each also could be recognised as a separate species.

At the time he held off from pressing this point, in part because the vocal differences between these subspecies pairs are more subtle than those between the quartet and Para Foliage-gleaner. A recent genetic survey, however, provides strong evidence that Zimmer should have been less reticent about advocating for this additional split: Schultz *et al.* (2017) found that the populations north and south of the Amazon are not 'sisters' (that is, are not each other's closest relative), and so each should be recognised as a species. Schultz and colleagues do not slow down to propose English names for the two populations, but good enough names already in use are Olive-capped Foliage-gleaner for the northern population *A. cervicalis*, and Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner for birds of southwestern Amazonia *A. infuscatus* (del Hoyo & Collar 2016).



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Central American and South American populations of Spotted Nightingale-Thrush *Catharus dryas* should be split into, respectively, **21** 'Gould's Nightingale-Thrush' *Catharus dryas* (here subspecies *ovandensis*, El Triunfo, Chiapas, Mexico, February 2012; Christoph Moning) and **22** 'Sclater's Nightingale-Thrush' *C. (dryas) maculatus* (Milpe Bird Sanctuary, Pichincha, Ecuador, March 2013; Nick Athanas/antpitta.com).

A cryptic *Catharus*

Thrushes of the genus *Catharus* tend to be retiring, and relatively drab and unpatterned. Perhaps the most distinctive species in this group, Spotted Nightingale-Thrush *C. dryas*, does its best to break the mould. It is shy, to be sure, but takes its name from the heavily spotted underparts, all overlain with a pale yellow wash, and topped off with a glossy black head that contrasts with

an orange bill and eyering. This species occupies the understorey of humid forests from southern Mexico south through the Andes to northern Argentina, although, in contrast to most species with a similar geographic pattern, it does not occur in Costa Rica and Panama (and only barely enters Nicaragua). Several subspecies of Spotted Nightingale-Thrush are recognised, but at first blush all populations are very similar, and this species has attracted little attention from the taxonomy throng. That was the case, anyway, until Halley *et al.* (2017) conducted a commendably multifaceted review of variation in this species.

Genetically, Central American and South American populations are rather deeply divergent (although still are each other's closest relatives); Central and South American groups also can be distinguished consistently by subtle differences in plumage, by measurements, by song (with songs shorter, but containing more notes, in Central American birds), and by habitat (or so is predicted, anyway, from an assessment of environmental niche models). Halley and colleagues interpret the consistency of these different lines of evidence to point to only one conclusion: Spotted Nightingale-Thrush is ripe for a split!

They recommend retiring the English name 'Spotted Nightingale-Thrush', which seems fair enough, and then propose 'Gould's Nightingale-Thrush' for the population in Central America *C. dryas*, and 'Sclater's Nightingale-Thrush' for the South American species *C. maculatus*. My suspicion is that the better names must be available: can the birding crowd generate any contenders?

Black-billed Thrush: mistakes were made?

Earlier (*Neotropical Birding* 19: 37), I reported on a genetic analysis (Cerqueira *et al.* 2016) that recommended a three-way split in Black-billed Thrush *Turdus ignobilis*, a common, widely distributed thrush of northern South America. To briefly recapitulate, Black-billed Thrush has five subspecies: two of the Colombian Andes (*ignobilis* and *goodfellowi*); *murinus* of the tepuis of Venezuela and Guyana; *debilis* of humid forest edge in the Amazon Basin; and *arthuri*, also of the Amazon, but inhabiting white-sand forests and savanna, primarily in eastern Amazonia. Cerqueira and colleagues found that *murinus* was only distantly related to the other subspecies, and that *debilis* and *arthuri* formed a group with a different species, Marañon Thrush *T. maranonicus*.

Therefore they suggested that Black-billed Thrush should be split into three: (i) *ignobilis*,

goodfellowi and *murinus*; (ii) *debilis*; and (iii) *arthuri*. A weakness of this study, however, is that it did not include samples from the two Colombian subspecies. Cerqueira *et al.* suggested that these were related to *murinus*, based on plumage similarities and that all three occupied highland areas; but, reasonable as this seemed, it was just their best guess.

More recently Avendaño *et al.* (2017) conducted an independent genetic study of this species, and were able to include *all* subspecies. Avendaño *et al.* confirmed a key finding from the earlier study, that *murinus* of the tepuis is not related to the four other subspecies (and so is a clear candidate for a split). The two Andean subspecies, however, are *not* related to *murinus* after all, but are closer to the two lowland populations. Avendaño *et al.* were not able to completely unravel the relationships among these four subspecies, which grouped closely with one another and, again, with Marañon Thrush. They strongly intimate, however, that *arthuri* also merits species rank, based in part on its differing habitat preferences. In sum, all agree that there are at least two species in Black-billed Thrush, and that there probably are three species, just with a different composition than Cerqueira *et al.* had proposed. Avendaño *et al.* suggest the English name 'Pantepui Thrush' for *murinus*; 'Campina Thrush' already is in use for those who prefer to get on with it already by splitting *arthuri* as well (del Hoyo & Collar 2016).

Pipits bring pleasure and pain

van Els & Norembuena (2017) use a combination of genetics and vocalisations to puzzle out a classification of the Neotropical pipits (*Anthus*). This leads to several recommendations for taxonomic revisions, some widely anticipated, but others of which are more of a surprise. A proposed split that will surprise no one is to recognise the Pacific coast subspecies of Yellowish Pipit *A. lutescens* as a separate species, Peruvian Pipit *A. peruvianus*. The vocal differences between *peruvianus* and other Yellowish Pipits have been known for a long time (Jaramillo 2003), and genetics now show that *peruvianus* is not at all closely related to Yellowish.

Less expected is the discovery that the Venezuela subspecies (*meridae*) of Paramo Pipit *A. bogotensis* is also very divergent, genetically, from other populations of that species. Unfortunately, genetic data for *meridae* are relatively sparse, and there also are very few available recordings of *meridae*. Therefore van Els & Norembuena refrain



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As anticipated, research has shown that **23** 'Peruvian Pipit' *Anthus (lutescens) peruvianus* (Puerto Etén, Chiclayo, Peru, August 2017; Nick Athanas/ antpitta.com) is a different species to **24** Yellow Pipit *A. lutescens* (Recreio dos Bandeirantes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, August 2016; Aisse Gaertner). More surprising is that **25** the Venezuela subspecies (*meridae*) of Paramo Pipit *A. bogotensis* (Páramo La Culata, Mérida, Venezuela, December 2014; Jay McGowan) is genetically divergent from other populations of that species.



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for now from elevating it to a species, but this will be one to keep an eye on.

Finally, on the basis of moderate levels of divergence in both genes and song, they propose to split Short-billed Pipit *A. furcatus*, elevating the Andean population as Puna Pipit *A. brevirostris*. The other side of the coin is the discovery that South Georgia Pipit (*A. antarcticus*) is genetically indistinguishable from Correndera Pipit *A. correndera*, and its song also is similar to that of Correndera (although it has the most distinctive song within the Correndera group). van Els & Norembuena therefore take the rare

step of advocating a lump, and would recognise *antarcticus* as no more than a subspecies.

What's in a warble?

All populations of Black-and-rufous Warbling Finch *Poospiza nigrorufa* have a similar pattern, but the coloration differs subtly: populations of the Andes of Bolivia and Argentina (*whitii*) are dark chestnut below and dark gray above, whereas birds from central Argentina to southeastern Brazil (*nigrorufa*) are paler overall, and in particular are cinnamon-rufous below. These sometimes



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There is now strong evidence to support what many birders have argued since the 1980s: that **26** 'Black-and-chestnut Warbling Finch' *Poospiza (nigrorufa) whitii* (Jujuy city, Jujuy, Argentina, July 2008; James Lowen/jameslowen.com) of the Andes is a different species to **27** Black-and-rufous Warbling Finch *Poospiza nigrorufa* (Ribera Norte, Buenos Aires, Argentina, February 2008; James Lowen/jameslowen.com) of further east.

are recognised as separate species (e.g. Ridgely & Tudor 2009, del Hoyo & Collar 2016), but more on the basis of a good hunch than on a detailed analysis. Enter Jordan *et al.* (2017), who extensively document that *whitii* and *nigrorufa* have different songs, and that each responds only to playback of its own population. Jordan *et al.* also document that the two differ in habitat preferences. Coupled with earlier work reporting a moderate level of genetic divergence between these two populations (Shultz & Burns 2013), one is left wondering why anyone *wouldn't* split these two. English names for each are well-established: *nigrorufa* remains Black-and-rufous Warbling Finch, and *whitii* is known as Black-and-chestnut Warbling Finch (Ridgely & Tudor 2009, del Hoyo & Collar 2016).

Rearranging the Arremon sparrows

Pectoral Sparrow *Arremon taciturnus* is a common bird of the understorey of humid forests, mostly in eastern South America. The English name refers to a black breast band that contrasts with white underparts, although this pectoral band is geographically variable: almost always complete in the Guianas and the Atlantic Forest region, incomplete or absent in southwestern Amazonia, and completely variable in central Amazonia. The truly different population is *axillaris*, which occurs at the base of the Andes in Colombia

and Venezuela, and which is geographically isolated from all other Pectoral Sparrows. It also differs by its mostly yellow (not black) bill, and more extensively yellow wing coverts. Buainain *et al.* (2017) suggest that *axillaris* therefore merits recognition as a separate species. They acknowledge that its vocalisations, however, are very similar to those of 'mainstream' Pectoral Sparrow, with the caveat that there are very few available recordings of its voice. These authors don't recommend an English name for *axillaris*; del Hoyo & Collar (2016) propose 'Yellow-mandibled Sparrow', which is a bit of a mouthful, but *is* descriptive.

Buainain and a slightly different set of collaborators also turned their attention to Saffron-billed Sparrow *A. flavirostris*, which occurs from Bolivia to eastern Brazil (Buainain *et al.* 2016). The relevant populations are green-backed *dorbignii* of the Andean foothills; grey-backed *polionotus* of eastern Bolivia to central Brazil; and green-backed *flavirostris*, of eastern Brazil. The two geographically separated green-backed forms apparently have different vocalisations. On the other hand, grey-backed *polionotus* and green-backed *flavirostris* sound similar to one another, but their distributions abut, apparently with no hybridisation.

Accordingly, Buainain and colleagues recommend recognising these as three species, but again, they do not suggest English names. del

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The geographically isolated population of **28** Pectoral Sparrow *Arremon taciturnus axillaris* (Norte de Santander, Colombia, August 2009; Hugo Loaiza: [flickr.com/38074970@N04](https://www.flickr.com/photos/38074970@N04/)), called 'Yellow-mandibled Sparrow' by del Hoyo & Collar (2016), is a proposed split from **29** other Pectoral Sparrows (here subspecies *taciturnus*, Manaus, Amazonas, Brazil, April 2015; Anselmo d'Afonseca). The situation with Saffron-billed Sparrow *A. flavirostris* is less clear, with nobody yet bold enough to claim full-species status for any taxa, despite some differences in plumage and vocalisations. **30** Saffron-billed Sparrow *A. f. polionotus*, Esquina, Corrientes, Argentina, September 2012 (Cláudio Dias Timm: [flickr.com/cdtimm](https://www.flickr.com/photos/cdtimm/)). **31** Saffron-billed Sparrow *A. f. flavirostris*, Chapada dos Veadeiros, Goias, Brazil, August 2011 (João Quental: [flickr.com/jquental](https://www.flickr.com/photos/jquental/)). **32** Saffron-billed Sparrow *A. f. dorbignii*, El Galpón, Salta, Argentina, October 2015 (Giselle Mangini).

Hoyo & Collar (2016) have not accepted these splits in Saffron-billed Sparrow but recognise three subspecies groups, with the names ‘Stripe-crowned Sparrow’ (*dorbignyi*), ‘Grey-backed Sparrow’ (*polionotus*), and ‘Saffron-billed Sparrow’ (*flavirostris*). (That said, they slightly hedge their bets by acknowledging that a more detailed review may elevate *dorbignyi*, and ‘perhaps also *polionotus*’, as full biological species.)

Note that a slightly different picture emerges from a genetic survey by a different group of researchers (Trujillo-Arias *et al.* 2017). This group confirmed a genetic divergence between *dorbignyi* and the eastern populations, but the molecular approach could not reliably distinguish *polionotus* from *flavirostris*. Trujillo-Arias and colleagues therefore recognise only two species in this group, *dorbignyi* and *flavirostris* (including *polionotus*). Experts disagree – who would have imagined?

The significance of different colours in the Unicolored Blackbird

Males of Unicolored Blackbird *Agelasticus cyanopus* are all black, hence the English name. The story is different in the female, however, in which, among other differences, the underparts may be bright yellow (Bolivia to southwestern Brazil and northeastern Argentina: *cyanopus*),

blackish, with an olive-yellow wash (northern and central Brazil: usually called *xenicus*, although the proper name for this subspecies may be *unicolor*); or simply olive-yellow (southeastern Brazil: *atoolivaceus*). Jaramillo & Burke (1999) suggested that Unicolored Blackbird could encompass more than one species, although they did not suggest how it might be split.

However, Lopes (2017) – a very busy, productive fellow this year! – undertook a comprehensive review of variation in this species. His conclusion is that it should be partitioned into a minimum of two species, a western *A. cyanopus* and an eastern *A. atoolivaceus* (including *unicolor*), based on differences in female pattern, and on the parapatric distributions of these two groups, with no evidence of hybridisation. Under a more relaxed species concept, with less importance placed on interbreeding, Lopes would consider each of the three groups to be a separate species. As so often is the case, Lopes does not recommend English names for these proposed new species. Perhaps Yellow-breasted Blackbird (for *A. cyanopus*) and Azara’s Blackbird (for *A. atoolivaceus*)? Suggestions welcome!

One is the loneliest number

Some of the greatest enigmas in avian taxonomy are species that continue to be known only from a single decades-old specimen. It becomes all too

Differences in female coloration supports the proposed split of Unicolored Blackbird *Agelasticus cyanopus* into at least two species: **33** the western *A. (c.) cyanopus* (Reserva El Bagual, Formosa, Argentina, October 2007; James Lowen/jameslowen.com) and **34** the eastern *A. atoolivaceus* (here *xenicus*, Mazagão, Amapá, Brazil, October 2014; Alexander Lees: freewebs.com/alexlees). Suggestions for English names welcomed!



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easy to dismiss such singletons as representing an odd hybrid combination or just a freak oddball of a well-known species. Every so often, however, a mystery is solved when a zombie species comes roaring back to life, as with the 2001 rediscovery of the spectacular White-masked Antbird *Pithys castaneus* (Lane *et al.* 2006, Schmitt *et al.* 2017). On the other hand, Gary Graves has made a cottage industry out of pinpointing the hybrid parentage of many putative hummingbird ‘species’. One mystery hummingbird that Graves has not (yet?) examined, however, is Alfaro’s Hummingbird *Amazilia alfaroana*, known from a single specimen from northwestern Costa Rica.

Kirwan & Collar (2016) join Weller (2001) in advocating recognition of *alfaroana* as a species. Kirwan & Collar also raise the unpleasant prospect that *alfaroana* possibly may be extinct; few birders or ornithologists are aware of it, however, so we can hope that it simply has been overlooked. In contrast, the fate of Natterer’s Tanager *Tachyphonus nattereri* seems sealed. Known with certainty from a male specimen collected in Mato Grosso, Brazil, in 1825, ‘Natterer’s Tanager’ now is assessed as a hybrid between two widespread species, Flame-crested Tanager *T. cristatus* and White-shouldered Tanager *T. luctuosus* (Lopes & Piacentini 2017). A second specimen, sometimes also attributed to *nattereri*, is a female; Lopes & Piacentini consider this specimen to be a perfectly typical example of a female Flame-crested Tanager. And with that, Natterer’s Tanager is no more.

To be or not to be

Silva *et al.* (2017) describe a new species of parrot, Blue-winged Amazon *Amazona gomezgarzai*, from the Yucatán Peninsula. (For those who prefer to refer to all *Amazona* as ‘parrot’ rather than ‘amazon’, note that there already is a Blue-winged Parrot, *Neophema chrysostoma* of Australia and Tasmania.) This species is known from only two individuals, both now in captivity but captured in the wild; unfortunately there seem to be no photographs or other documentation of the free-flying individuals. Genetically Blue-winged is almost identical to White-fronted Parrot *A. albifrons* but differs vocally and has only red on the face, lacking blue and white. New species, or rare hybrid, or...? Let’s just take a ‘wait and see’ approach on this one.

It has been known for some time that there is of some kind of a yellow finch in the Sierra de la Ventana, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, but the identity of this bird has been unclear. Narosky *et al.* (1984) referred to it as Patagonian Yellow Finch *S.*

lebruni, of Patagonia, but Areta *et al.* (2012) regard it as Greater Yellow Finch *Sicalis auriventris*, which otherwise occurs in the Andes of eastern Chile and western Argentina. López-Lanus (2017) begs to differ with all! He describes this isolate as a new species, Ventania Yellow Finch *Sicalis holmbergi*; the scientific name honors Eduardo Ladislao Holmberg, who apparently encountered this yellow finch as early as 1884 (but whose critical specimen now is lost). The diagnosis of Ventania Yellow Finch acknowledges that it is essentially identical to Greater in plumage, and although it is said to be larger, the size difference is very small. Much hinges, then, on the vocal differences that López-Lanus describes between Ventania and other yellow finches. Another ‘wait and see’, perhaps?

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THOMAS S. SCHULENBERG

Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY, 14850, USA

E-mail: tss62@cornell.edu

Website: neotropical.birds.cornell.edu

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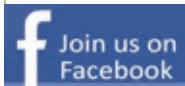
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Visiting Robinson Crusoe Island (and coming back!)

Fabrice Schmitt

Immediately before the Neotropical Bird Club fundraising tour to Chile in 2016 (*Neotrop. Birding* 21: 12–21), the author led an excursion to the Juan Fernández Islands. He recounts his experience and offers guidance for future visitors.

About 700 kilometres west of Valparaíso (Chile), three small islands form the archipelago of Juan Fernández: Santa Clara, Robinson Crusoe and Selkirk. It was on Isla Robinson Crusoe that Alexander Selkirk was marooned for four years in the first decade of the 18th century, a tale that inspired Daniel Defoe's famous novel, published ten years later. Quite aside from the island's cultural history, Robinson Crusoe is also the easiest to reach of the three islands. Best of all, two endemic birds reside here – a splendid hummingbird and a terrific flycatcher – as well as several fantastic seabirds. In November 2016, I led a short trip to Robinson Crusoe (an extension to the Neotropical Bird Club Conservation Tour; see Jeffers & Schmitt 2016). To encourage readers to organise their own visit there, I share a few tips and photographs.

Getting there

There are not many ways to reach Robinson Crusoe. The cheapest is to take the monthly goods boat. This departs from Valparaíso for the archipelago's sole village, San Juan Bautista.

Taking 30–48 hours, it's actually a great way to travel, offering a wonderful opportunity



All photographs were taken on Isla Robinson Crusoe, Juan Fernández, November 2016 (Fabrice Schmitt/WINGS).

to do some seabirding in the world's richest waters! However, departures often change at the last minute, and islanders get priority access to cabins, making any planning quite difficult.

The other option is to take one of the regular flights from Santiago. But even with two or three weekly flights to Robinson Crusoe, don't plan your trip on too tight a schedule! We learned this the hard way... our flight was initially postponed by a day, because the sea was too rough to allow us to sail from the airstrip to San Juan Bautista. And the following day it was too foggy on the island for the plane to land, obliging us to wait 5 hours for the fog to disappear!

When the flight finally departs, it takes 2 hours to fly the 675 km separating the continent and archipelago. Your first view of the volcanic island of Robinson Crusoe is stunning. It emerges from the sea via huge cliffs, rocky shores and steep slopes that tower upwards into sharp peaks! Naturalists, however, regard such impressive scenery with sadness, because it is quickly clear how much the island has been deforested...

Once on land, you are welcomed by the endemic subspecies of American Kestrel *Falco sparverius fernandensis*. After a short walk you reach Bahía El Padre, where you board a small boat that takes you to San Juan Bautista. During our November visit, the beach bordering the bay was covered by thousands of noisy Juan Fernández Fur Seals *Arctocephalus philippii* (Figs. 1–3). The

1. Kermadec Petrel *Pterodroma neglecta*. Seabirding' is outstanding off Isla Robinson Crusoe.



2



3



4

During the breeding season, **2** thousands of Juan Fernández Fur Seals *Arctocephalus philippii* find a safe place to give birth on **3-4** the beaches of Bahía El Padre.

island's sole endemic mammal was considered extinct in the early 20th century as a result of intensive commercial hunting. Fortunately, after its rediscovery in the mid-20th century and subsequent protection, the seal's population has increased to an estimated 16,000-plus mature individuals (Aurióles-Gamboa 2015).

The boat ride follows the jagged coastline, and can be a nice seabirding trip. During our visit, we saw a few dozen Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli*, probably attracted by some

dead fur seals, as well as several Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris* and Pink-footed Shearwater *Puffinus creatopus*. But the few Kermadec Petrels *Pterodroma neglecta* and Masatierra Petrels *Pterodroma defilippiana* flying in front of some impressive cliffs won most of our attention!

After a long day of waiting, flying and sailing, we finally reached San Juan Bautista, which lies in Cumberland Bay and is surrounded by fantastic island peaks!

Landbirds

Any birder visiting Robinson Crusoe will split his time between 'land birding' to look for the two endemics (Juan Fernández Firecrown *Sephanoides fernandensis* and Juan Fernández Tit-Tyrant *Anairetes fernandezianus*) and some classy seabirding. Even those visitors lacking 'sea legs', and thus suffering from the boat ride, rapidly return to form and sprint to the nearest garden to see the splendid Fernández hummingbird!

The firecrown is Critically Endangered with severe deforestation having caused a precipitous population decline to 1,000 birds in 2011 (BirdLife International 2017). Nevertheless, this beauty remains relatively common in village gardens. Look for blooming endemic Cabbage Tree *Dendroseris littoralis* (best recognised by the huge, white-veined leaves and the clusters of large bright-orange flowers) and for ornamental flowers,

5 Male Juan Fernández Firecrown *Sephanoides fernandensis* is a good candidate for the most beautiful hummingbird in the world, but competition is hard – and he even has to compete with

6 the splendid-looking female!
7 Juan Fernández Tit-Tyrant *Anairetes fernandezianus* remains relatively common in dense shrubland. It can even be found close to San Juan Bautista village.

and you should find the Firecrowns (plural, as Green-backed Firecrown *S. sephanioides* is also present).

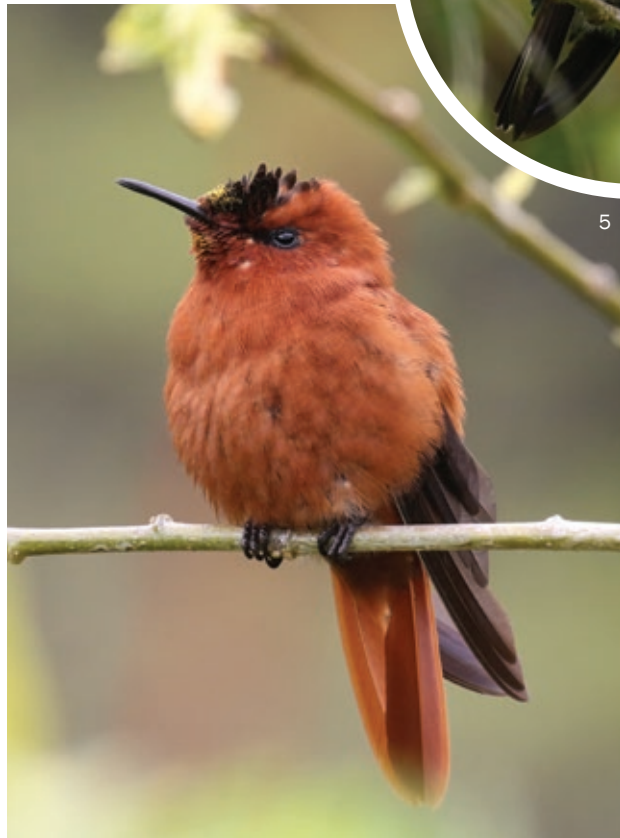
Juan Fernández Firecrown alone is worth the trip to the island itself. So extreme is its sexual dimorphism that each sex was initially described as distinct species (Colwell 1989, Roy *et al.* 1998)! The sexes vie with one another to be the most beautiful. Which triumphs is a matter of personal taste. Do you prefer the large, rich-chestnut male or the female with her bluish-green back and green-spotted, snow-white underparts? Both sexes have an iridescent crown, yellow-red or blue respectively for male and female, usually dusted with pollen. On our visit we only observed individuals undergoing post-breeding moult; nesting itself is confined to the dwindling native forests.

Sadly, all forest near the village has been destroyed and replaced by introduced *Eucalyptus*. To reach some native vegetation, you have to

hike the steep slope towards El Mirador, a tourist viewpoint offering a wonderful perspective over Cumberland Bay and the other side of the island.

After c.1 hour walking through the lifeless plantation, you reach Plazoleta El Yunque.

This is a great place to find Juan Fernández Tit-Tyrant. It is hard to believe that,





Visitors walk through stands of gigantic **8** *Gunnera* sp. on your way to El Mirador. Upon arrival, you are greeted by **9** a great view of the island's rough coast and impressive landscape of the island.

9



8



10

10 Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* is one of the archipelago's few non-endemic taxa.

many moons ago, one or more pairs of an ancestral tit-tyrant made the journey to the Island and evolved into this terrific little bird! Fortunately, Juan Fernández Tit-Tyrant tolerates degraded habitat, making its conservation status of less dramatic concern than the endemic Firecrown. Nevertheless, it is Near Threatened.

En route to El Mirador, you walk through beautiful native forest hosting an impressive flora found nowhere else in the world. The island harbours more than 200 endemic plants. Sadly, deforestation has rendered over half endangered: a dozen species have fewer than 10 individual plants left. Even visitors without botanical knowledge will be impressed by the unique vegetation, by the gigantic *Gunnera*, weird flowers and unique trees.

During your ascent to El Mirador, you may spot a Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* hunting over the low vegetation. If you are lucky, you may encounter the rare and endemic subspecies of Variable Hawk *Geranoaetus polyosoma exsul*: 'Juan Fernández Hawk' is a good candidate for a split.

Seabirds

Having seen the endemic landbirds, you now need a pelagic excursion. There are few boats that can take tourists for such trips. The best option is to go with Marcelo Rossi, owner of Refugio Náutico Ecolodge. Marcelo knows what birders want and where to go, prepares an enticing chum, and savvily positions his boat so birders can have great views of the special seabirds.



11

You don't have to travel very far off Robinson Crusoe Island to enjoy great pelagic birding. Prospects are good of encountering **11** Juan Fernández Petrel *Pterodroma externa*.

Identification of smaller *Pterodroma* petrels can be difficult, but, given good views, it is easy to separate **12** Masatierra Petrel *Pterodroma defilippiana* (with its pale tail and white supercilium) from **13** Stejneger's Petrel *Pterodroma longirostris* (which is dark capped and has a dark tip to the tail).

On a typical pelagic off Robinson Crusoe, you should see no fewer than five very special seabirds. Juan Fernández Petrel *Pterodroma externa* (Vulnerable) tops the list. Its entire population breeds from December–March on the nearby Selkirk Island, making a pelagic off Robinson a good place to see one! Intriguingly, few birders have seen this tubenose far from its breeding grounds – and this despite its huge migration into the North Pacific Ocean.

The world population of Masatierra Petrel (Vulnerable) is fewer than 3,000 breeding pairs (Hodum 2012). Colonies are only found on a few Chilean Islands (breeding July–December), including a few hundred pairs on Santa Clara. Other than a pelagic off central Chile (see Jaramillo 2008), your best chance to see one demands a visit to Juan Fernández. Stejneger's Petrel *Pterodroma longirostris* (Vulnerable) breeds solely on Selkirk Island (November–May). It migrates even deeper into the Pacific than Juan Fernández Petrel, usually staying so far from coast that it is one of the world's most difficult seabirds to catch up with. During our trip, we had splendid views of a few birds attracted by the chum and following our boat.

Even though it breeds on several Pacific islands over a very large area, Kermadec Petrel is also a difficult seabird to see. If you don't see one on the boat ride between airstrip and village (passing cliffs where they probably breed), you should see



12

13



it on the pelagic. Finally, White-bellied Storm-Petrel *Fregetta grallaria* ranges widely into the South Pacific and South Atlantic, and can be seen in many places. However, Juan Fernández Islands holds a breeding population of the very local subspecies *segethi*. Not only is this worth seeing for 'insurance purposes' (splits are always to be expected with seabirds!) but Shirihai *et al.* (2015a) also suspect the presence of at least one cryptic population of White-bellied Storm-Petrel in the archipelago!

Obviously, some other seabirds can be seen during a trip off Robinson Crusoe Island, including Black-browed Albatross, Salvin's Albatross *Thalassarche salvini* (Vulnerable) and Buller's Albatross *Thalassarche bulleri* (Near Threatened), Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*,

PLAN YOUR TRIP

When to go: November or December are the best months to see seabirds – although Shirihai *et al.* (2015a) found Defilippi's Petrel near breeding grounds until March. A trip during the austral winter is possible but more difficult (flights are frequently cancelled), and you will have little chance of seeing Stejneger's and Juan Fernández Petrels.

How to get there/accommodation: You will find all the necessary information to plan your trip on the excellent website www.experiencerobinson.com

There is plenty of accommodation on the island, from basic to really fancy, and some excellent restaurants. Don't miss your chance to taste the endemic lobster and the endemic beer! For pelagic boat trips, contact Marcelo Rossi via Refugio Náutico Ecolodge (<http://islarobinsoncrusoe.cl/en/>).



14

14 The succulent endemic lobster and endemic beer helped celebrate our trip to Robinson Crusoe Island!

Selkirk Island: The Critically Endangered endemic, Masafuera Rayadito *Aphrastura masafuerae*, occurs here, as do two endemic subspecies – Variable Hawk *Geranoaetus polyosoma exsul* and Grey-flanked Cinclodes *Cinclodes oustaleti baeckstroemii* – which are both good candidates for splits. However, the island is 130 km west of Robinson Crusoe, and is both very complicated and expensive to reach. You would either need to charter a boat or beg passage on a fishing boat going to Selkirk to harvest lobsters. (Either way... good luck!)

Information: Plenty of excellent gen concerning the Juan Fernández birds is provided by Shirihai *et al.* (2015a).

52 Neotropical Birding 22

Northern Giant Petrel, or Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus* (Near Threatened). Vagrant seabirds have also been found here (Barros & Schmitt 2015), including Gould's Petrel *Pterodroma leucoptera* (Vulnerable) and Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardenna carneipes* (Near Threatened).

Finally, a few thousand pairs of Pink-footed Shearwater *Ardenna creatopus* (Vulnerable) breed on Robinson Crusoe and Santa Clara, including a few pairs in San Juan Bautista itself! Don't miss your chance to listen, at dusk, to these pelagic wanderers returning to their colony. Follow the signs or ask locals to find the colony. The miaowing

During our November trip we also had great views of **15** Buller's Albatross *Thalassarche bulleri* and **16** White-bellied Storm-Petrel *Fregetta gallaria*, two taxa that are ripe for splitting in the author's view.



15



16

of the shearwaters will provide an unforgettable memory of your visit to Robinson Crusoe Island.

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FABRICE SCHMITT

c/o WINGS, 1643 N. Alvernon Way, Suite 109, Tucson, Arizona 85712, USA

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A vagrant from the Old World: a mysterious gull in Trinidad

Nigel Lallsingh

In *Neotropical Birding* 19: 56–58, we celebrated the discovery of the first Whiskered Tern *Childonias hybrida* for South America. Now we share another scoop: the finder's account for the region's first Audouin's Gull *Ichthyaeetus audouinii*, another Old World species on the wrong side of the Atlantic.

Always expect the unexpected when it comes to birds' is an adage that has come true for me many times over my years as an avid birdwatcher. However, the magnitude of one of my recent discoveries is one I would never have imagined – even in my wildest dreams.

All photographs are of Audouin's Gull *Ichthyaeetus audouinii*, Brickfield, Trinidad (Nigel Lallsingh). Dates are specified in the individual captions, which serve as a field description.

It began as a routine visit to the central-west coast of Trinidad on 10 December 2016, timed to coincide with the afternoon's rising tide. It started as any other Saturday evening in the past 22 years: a 5-minute drive from my home to my favourite birding hotspot. This harbours extensive mangrove-fringed tidal mudflats bordering the Gulf of Paria, which provides a safe haven for thousands of herons, ibis, egrets, waders, gulls, terns and skimmers. Importantly, there are several good viewing areas.

1 10 December 2016. For a 'medium-sized' gull, large and robust, with sloping forehead that peaked behind the eye; long wings and long, rather droop-tipped bill. Head white with dusky smudge surrounding the eye, and faint grey-brown flecking to rear ear-coverts and rear crown. Iris black with obvious white upper eye-crescent; the lower crescent, however, was much less apparent. Bill similar in shape to Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla* but much stouter; basally dark grey darkening towards the tip. Legs grey-black.



Trinidad is not known for its diversity of gulls. On many days out, only Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla* (at times by the thousand) and the occasional Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* are seen. Nevertheless, regular birding visits have turned up no less than seven species of gull over the years, including rarities such as Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*, Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*, Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini* and Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*.

Stumped by a mysterious gull

I arrived at the fishing depot at Brickfield, which allows access via a raised bund. As expected, a short distance out onto the mudflats, there were several hundred Laughing Gulls cramped in a small area. It would take a keen eye and patience to carefully skim through the flock to see whether there was something different mixed in. Normally, the gull after the next is another Laughing Gull. But, on occasion, my persistence is rewarded with something good.

I soon spotted an adult Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan*, a species I have seen a few of here every year for the last five years. I also located an immature Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* – the first here in almost a decade. Neither was new in that day, however, as they had both been present for a week.

I then began to slowly and systematically scan the large roost of Laughing Gulls. Suddenly my heart skipped a beat as I caught sight of something different. I felt a sudden rush of excitement as my eyes stopped abruptly on a much larger, white-headed, pale-mantled gull that had previously been crouched down, hidden within the flock. I immediately realised that this was a species that I had never seen before.

When upright the mystery gull dwarfed adjacent Laughing Gulls. Although not directly alongside a Lesser Black-backed Gull (to enable direct size comparison) its size approached that species. Instinctively I reached for my camera and, without thinking, fired off a few shots, only to immediately realise that the evening's setting sun was directly behind the bird, causing the photos to come out very dark.

I hastily adjusted the camera settings to overexpose a little, which did the trick. Satisfied that I had obtained some good record shots showing the bird's features, I made a phone call to Martyn Kenefick, a fellow Trinidad and Tobago Bird Status and Distribution Committee member and birding expert with much gull-identification experience the world over. I gave him a 'live', on-the-spot description of the gull. He later related to me that his hands were shaking as I was describing the bird, because he could hear the excitement in my voice, and because he would not make it to the site in time on this day as the sun would soon be gone.

Seconds after hanging up, the gull did something that baffles me even to this day. It suddenly started walking and made a complete U-turn. To my great appreciation, the sun was now behind my back when viewing the bird. Even better, it became very co-operative, allowing close-range photographs of it standing and flying, including showing both upperwing and underwing patterns. I also took field notes (which form the basis of the captions to Figs 1–3). Despite the dwindling light, I was pretty confident that I had enough images and information to make a tentative identification – but had no idea, at that point in time, of the great magnitude of the discovery.

2 10 December 2016. Sides of neck and upper breast dirty white with extensive brownish mottling, becoming plainer on lower breast and belly. Fore-mantle pale grey with more pronounced and larger brownish blotching. Scapulars, lower mantle and rump plainer pale grey, with occasional darkish feathers admixed. Wing-coverts and flight feathers brownish-black. Rump and upper tail-coverts white, contrasting with wholly black tail.

3 10 December 2016. Underwing predominantly dark brownish-black, with obvious broad very pale central white stripe reaching the inner primaries.



2



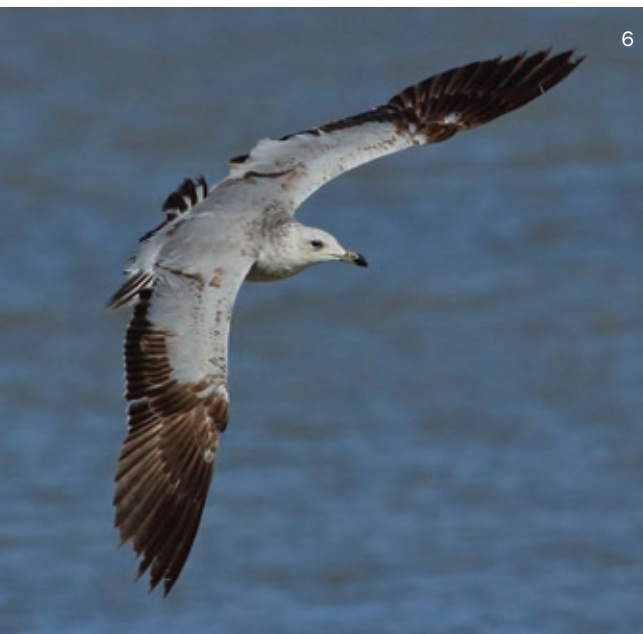
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6



7

4 13 January 2017. During the intervening month, some body moult had taken place as both mantle and upper breast appeared more uniform.

5 30 March 2017. By now, the face and underparts had become much cleaner and brownish mottling was restricted to small markings on nape and fore-mantle. The basal two-thirds of the bill had turned greyish-yellow.

6–7 30 March 2017. By now, the tail and flight feathers were badly worn.

While driving home, images of the bird were flooding my mind. I tried to figure out what in the world I had just seen. Its mantle was pale as an adult Ring-billed Gull, yet it was almost as big as Lesser Black-backed Gull. Although its mantle tone was better for Herring Gull *Larus argentatus smithsonianus*, it was too small for that species. Moreover, the gull's legs were almost jet-black. Neither Ring-billed Gull nor Herring Gull (nor, indeed, *any* large white-headed gull I had seen or observed photos of) ever shows black legs. Accordingly, at the back of my mind I knew the find had to be a *really* good one.

Frustration and disappointment

Upon arriving home, I scanned *A reference guide to gulls of the Americas* (Howell & Dunn 2007) from cover to cover, hoping for a positive identification. Frustratingly, I was unable to match 'my' gull to any species in the entire book. I resorted to burning the midnight oil, searching the internet for images of gulls from across North and South America. Still no positive identification: nothing came close to the mystery gull. I mused about it being a hybrid gull – possibly a Laughing x Ring-billed? No luck, either. I couldn't find a single



8 3 April 2017. Newly moulted feathers are visible. As in Fig. 5, with Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*

image of a hybrid gull that even came close to resembling the gull I saw.

I certainly had a mystery on my hands. I returned to the site at dawn, joined by a number of local birders all hoping to get a glimpse of the gull. We were to remain disappointed as there was neither any sign of it that morning nor during the subsequent week.

The mystery is solved!

In the meantime, I sent photos to Floyd Hayes, a former member of the Trinidad and Tobago bird status and distribution committee. Floyd was the first to suggest that the bird may be an Audouin's Gull *Ichthyæetus audouinii*, a European/African species I had never heard of before.

In view of the potential mega-rarity of the sighting (and the distinct possibility that it would never be seen again), Martyn Kenefick and I shared photographs with the various bird-identification forums and approached 'gull experts' on both side of the Atlantic. Many expressed utter disbelief. But rather than this surprise relating to the bird's identification, it was about what an Audouin's Gull was doing on an island in the Caribbean Sea. In fact, respondents unanimously agreed with our identification. There was no mistake: it was a first calendar-year Audouin's Gull!

Excitement of finding a first for the New World

Wait! Audouin's Gull?! I was aghast, drowning in disbelief. An internet search soon indicated why I could not find a match, for I was looking in all the wrong places! I needed to look on the *other* side of the Atlantic, since the breeding range of Audouin's Gull is restricted to the Mediterranean basin (both in Europe and Africa) and it winters along the coast of northwest Africa south to Senegal and Gambia.

Wow! This was an *extremely* lost bird! Moreover, it was a pretty rare one in global terms. In 1975, the population was estimated to be just 1,000 pairs. Thanks to conservation action, its population has subsequently risen to 21,300–22,300 pairs today (BirdLife International 2017).

Now I was even more excited about this gull – and about refinding it. So I maintained an almost daily vigil at Brickfield, timing my visits for rising or ebbing tides to maximise gull possibilities. Eventually, on 13 January 2017, I was rewarded by the Audouin's return! Sadly, it stayed only for a matter of minutes before being disturbed by an approaching fishing boat. I remained the only person to see an Audouin's Gull in the New World.

I kept at it, however. And again my persistence paid off. To my great delight, the Audouin's Gull showed up again on 30 March 2017. This time it stayed for almost the entire day! Fortunately, on this occasion my wife and two young daughters were on hand to see it. My wife frantically phoned fellow birdwatchers, and, soon enough, six locals were on site. Their number included Martyn Kenefick and Graham White, fellow members of the Trinidad and Tobago bird status and distribution committee. All watched in amazement. I was relieved that other birders were finally privileged to see this 'mega'. I was also ecstatic not only to have documented my inaugural 'first' for Trinidad (after a few second records for the country!) but also a first for the entire Americas.

Return of an old friend

The Audouin's Gull returned to Brickfield on 3 April 2017 – and remained for the entire day. But where had it been hiding when not at Brickfield? And how could a mega-rarity go unnoticed for weeks (even months) in succession?

This time I noticed that the gull's tail and flight feathers were extremely worn. This moult got me thinking about its feat of vagrancy. How did a species not thought to migrate far from its Mediterranean breeding grounds manage to get so terribly lost – some 7,000 km away from home with little prospect of ever returning. As I was writing this article, a local birder spotted the

Audouin's Gull on 18 August 2017, farther north up Trinidad's west coast, making it eight months that it has lingered since my initial sighting. Once again, wow!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Floyd Hayes (one of my mentors and friend) for the initial identification, David Copper, Richard Fairbank and James P. Smith for their constructive comments on the photographs in December. I am grateful to Martyn Kenefick, fellow member of the Trinidad and Tobago Bird Status and Distribution Committee (<http://tbsdc.ttfnc.org>) in providing great assistance at all times with his knowledge and expertise in birds. Special thanks to my wife Keisha, and daughters Nikel and Nilisha, for their understanding of and patience with my love of birds, and for allowing me to spend long hours in the field, without which I would never have discovered this addition to the New World avifauna.

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NIGEL LALLSINGH

Ablack Trace Beaucarro Road, St Mary's Village, Freeport, Trinidad
E-mail: nigellallsingh@gmail.com

Sponsored Memberships

Every year we allocate a number of sponsored memberships to people in the Neotropical region who are unable to join the Neotropical Bird Club under normal circumstances. These are chosen from suggestions by Club members. If you know of someone in the Neotropics who you think would benefit from being a member of the NBC, but who cannot afford to join, please contact Chris Balchin: secretary@neotropicalbirdclub.org. Please pass us their details and explain why you judge the Club should grant them sponsorship.

Please can members consider upgrading their membership to Sponsored Membership level? This will enable the Club to allocate more sponsorships to deserving Neotropical ornithologists and birders. If you choose not to specify a recipient we will allocate one from the list of suggestions submitted by members.

Join the NBC community on social media

The Neotropical Bird Club is very active on social media. The **Neotropical Bird Club Facebook group** has over 5,150 members, and new threads and images meeting the group's guidelines are posted daily. Please feel free to join the group and make contact with other members by searching for 'Neotropical Bird Club' or directing your browser to the URL www.facebook.com/groups/31491408108/.

Neotropical Bird Club is also on **Twitter**, which is an efficient and immediate way to spread the word about Neotropical birding and conservation. Find and follow us [@NeoBirdClub](https://twitter.com/NeoBirdClub) where we will be tweeting Club news and all things to do with birding, ornithology and bird conservation in the NBC region. Please tweet us with your Neotropical bird news and to share events in the region with like-minded souls.

NBC Conservation Awards update

Compiled by Christopher Sharpe and Rob Clay

Excitingly, the Neotropical Bird Club Conservation Awards Programme continues to grow, both in the amount of funds the Club is able to grant and in the number of proposals received. The organisers of the Programme share highlights of the bird-conservation work delivered.

The Neotropical Bird Club Conservation Awards Programme (NBC CAP) continues to go from strength to strength. We are very grateful for the ongoing support of the March Conservation Fund of Tides Foundation, which continues to be a major contributor to the NBC Conservation Fund, especially to Ivan Samuels who also plays an active role in project evaluation. Also, special thanks to our sometime Corporate Supporters Birdquest, WINGS/Sunbird and Birding Ecotours, who procured generous donations. We would also like to extend warm thanks to the family of Juan Mazar Barnett, and in particular his mother Cristina, for generously making possible the award in his name. This year, we received a donation in memory of Roger Lewis

Jones, specifically to support projects in southeast Brazil, which enabled us to make an additional grant available to SAVE Brasil for vital work to conserve the Endangered Black-fronted Piping-guan *Pipile jacutinga*. As usual, awards of \$1,500, \$3,000 and \$5,000 were available.

2017 awards

Of eight strong finalists from our January 2017 round of applications, we were able to finance four projects. A total of 68 proposals were received for our July round: 27 made it through to the final evaluation, with 10 successfully obtaining NBC CAP funding. The total amount disbursed during 2017 was \$37,487. The 14 projects financed are summarised in the adjacent box.

PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE NBC CONSERVATION AWARDS PROGRAMME DURING 2017

Ecology and conservation of **Cuban Parakeet *Psittacara euops*** in Parque Nacional El Pico Cristal, eastern Cuba. Inés Lourdes Fernández Rodríguez. Awarded \$3,000.

Foraging habitat of the Endangered **Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata***: using spatial ecology to inform conservation. Ernst Rupp, Dominican Republic. Awarded \$2,989.

Distribution, diversity, and abundance of **Grenadian birds**, including endemic and restricted-range species. Ramon Williams, Grenada. Awarded \$1,500.

Natural history and ecology of **Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird *Lepidopygia lilliae***: generating baseline information to monitor and conserve a Critically Endangered hummingbird. Ángela Caguazango, Colombia. Awarded \$3,000.

Analysis of the historical and current geographical distribution of **Psittacids** in Venezuela. Eliana Blanco Pérez, Venezuela. Awarded \$2,920.

Conservation of **Recurve-billed Bushbird (Hormiguero Pico de Hoz) *Clytoctantes alixii*** on the eastern slope of Sierra de Perijá, Venezuela. Lisandro Moran Quiroz, Venezuela. Awarded \$2,448.

Programme for the release of **Great Green Macaw *Ara ambiguus guayaquilensis*** in the Ayampe Reserve. Eliana Montenegro, Ecuador. Awarded \$3,000.

Designing nestboxes to conserve the Endangered **Grey-cheeked Parakeet *Brotogeris pyrrhoptera*** and other cavity nesters in western Ecuador. Mike Ellis, Ecuador. Awarded \$2,780.

Distribution and habitat of **Peruvian Plantcutter *Phytotoma raimondii*** in the Pómac Forest Historical Sanctuary (PFHS) and other sites in Lambayeque, Peru. Jeremy Flanagan, Peru. Awarded \$2,600.

Does microclimate change explain observed declines of **terrestrial insectivores**? Vitek Jirinec, Brazil. Awarded \$3,920.

Conservation of game birds in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest: reintroduction and monitoring of **Black-fronted Piping-guan *Pipile jacutinga***. Alecsandra Tassoni, Brazil. Awarded \$4,830.

Protecting breeding **Masafuera Rayadito *Aphrastura masafuerae***. Héctor Gutiérrez Guzmán, Chile. Awarded \$3,000.

Monitoring of **Chaco Eagle *Buteogallus coronatus*** in Telteca. Elena Mendoza, Argentina. Awarded \$1,500.

Population restoration of the Endangered **Yellow Cardinal *Gubernatrix cristata*** in Selva de Montiel Important Bird Area, Entre Ríos, Argentina. Fabricio Reales, Argentina. Awarded \$1,500.

Updates from past awards

The following summary highlights achievements from projects that NBC has already funded, as explained by the recipients.

Zapata Rail in Cuba

Zapata Rail, the most elusive and most poorly-known Cuban endemic bird. New surveys in 2016. \$3,000. Project dates: 2016–2018.

The project received NBC CAP support in 2016, and has been extended to run until at least 2018, thanks to an additional grant (the Pamela and Alexander F. Skutch Research Award from the Association of Field Ornithologists). The main objectives of the project are to find the Critically Endangered Zapata Rail *Cyanolimnas cerverai*, to obtain visual evidence (photographs or videos), and to acquire basic information on its biology. The last previously reported sighting of the rail came from the well-known area of La Turba, in 2014, at a location subsequently destroyed by fire.

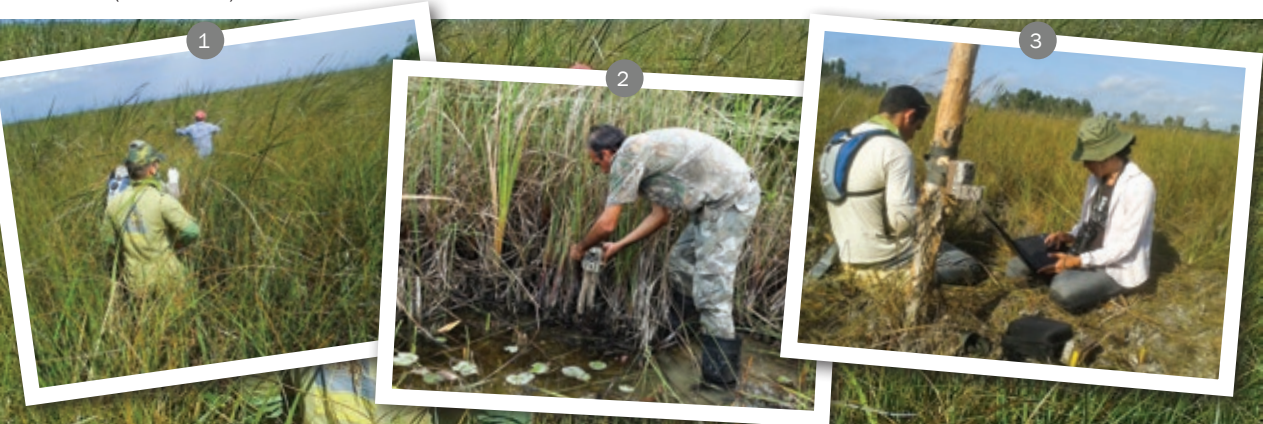
In order to orient fieldwork, Nils Navarro interviewed the most experienced local and national ornithologists to compile and evaluate unpublished and published sight records. Nils also analysed letters from Fermín Cervera (the Spanish zoologist commemorated in the scientific name of Zapata Wren *Ferminia cerverai*) to his family. A complete list of sightings made from 1926–2015 was assembled. The most-recent documented sightings came from disturbed areas that were closest to the towns and roads, frequently burned by fires and stressed by intense human impact. It transpired that these areas are located on the outer, more accessible, edges of the swamp. Most exciting of all, Nils discovered what he believes to be the only photograph of the Zapata Rail in the wild, taken by Pedro Regalado almost 50 years ago.

Nils and a team from the Cuban Institute of Ecology and Systematics, Cuban Society for Zoology, and Zapata Swamp National Park Office carried out an expedition to Zapata Swamp during 25 March – 7 April 2017. Seven trail cameras were located in the areas of sawgrass or in ditches, in prime rail habitat close to the wettest areas. Unfortunately – but not unexpectedly – Zapata Rail was not encountered. However, fieldwork in such an important area has spin-off benefits. Since the expedition was timed with the breeding season of various endemic birds, new information was obtained on the natural history of little-known endemic species such as: Grey-fronted Quail-Dove *Geotrygon caniceps* (Vulnerable), Blue-headed Quail-Dove *Staroenas cyanocephala* (Endangered), Fernandina's Flicker *Colaptes fernandinae* (Vulnerable), Cuban Trogon *Priotelus temnurus* and Bare-legged Owl *Margarobyas lawrencii*. Moreover, all information gathered during the field trips will be used to update and enrich the forthcoming *Field guide to the birds of Cuba* on which Nils is presently working.

The subsequent expedition took place in late 2017. This used boats to enter the core zone of Zapata Swamp, in the vicinity of the type-locality for Zapata Rail. In the future, NBC CAP's Chris Sharpe intends to make a visit to the area to meet with the project team.

Nils Navarro

- 1 Cuban Zapata Rail project team exploring sawgrass in the vicinity of La Turba, Zapata Swamp, Cuba (Nils Navarro).
- 2 Nils Navarro setting one of the trail cameras in the sawgrass habitat, Zapata Swamp, Cuba (Nils Navarro).
- 3 Members of the Zapata Rail project team downloading images from the trail cameras in Zapata Swamp, Cuba (Nils Navarro).



Red Siskin in Venezuela

*Assessing the illegal trade in Red Siskin *Spinus cucullatus* in Venezuela. \$2,936. Project dates: 2016–ongoing.*

Red Siskin *Spinus cucullatus* is a globally Endangered Neotropical bird that has been nearly eliminated throughout its former range across northern Venezuela, Colombia and Trinidad as a result of historic and ongoing over-exploitation for the illegal cagebird trade (Sharpe 2016). Within Venezuela, it is Critically Endangered – and is regarded as the country’s most urgent avian-conservation priority.

Although illegal trade has long been identified as the main threat to this songbird, very little is known about how that particular business works. Understanding where Red Siskin extraction occurs, how birds are taken to market, who is involved, and what drives the market, is necessary to facilitate the best possible decision-making for conservation management and reduction of threats. In this project we aim to strengthen efforts to promote the recovery of wild Red Siskin populations in Venezuela by seeking to understand three key aspects of illegal trade. We aim to: determine the key roles of actors in illegal Red Siskin trade, from harvesters to final consumers; characterise actors’ motives and their dependence on the context and value of the market; and calculate the extraction rate, defined by the number of individuals sold per year.

During March–October 2017, across 34 localities in central and western Venezuela, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 41 trappers, 20 breeders and six dealers. We interviewed 17 informants (not involved directly in Red Siskin trade) and 18 ornithologists. We also interviewed three breeders from Spain (three breeders), one from Ireland and one from the United States, plus one dealer from Brazil. Additionally, for six months we scrutinised discussion on 122 potentially relevant Facebook groups from Europe, Asia, North America and South America, and on 10 WhatsApp groups from Brazil and Spain.

From the interviews we have compiled 198 confirmed records of Red Siskin trade, while the



4 Captive female Red Siskin *Spinus cucullatus*, discovered at an undisclosed location in Venezuela (Jhonathan Miranda).

monitoring of social-media groups produced a further 500 records. Our preliminary analysis of interview data showed that the 198 trade records corresponded to 565 individual Red Siskins. Breeders were involved in 52% of records, with domestic dealers carrying out 20%, and international dealers (importers) accounting for 11% of the records. Local trappers were involved in 13% of trade records for Red Siskin. Some 65% of records indicate demand for adult males. The proportion of Red Siskin trade involving wild birds (49% of records) is similar to that for birds of captive origin.

Over the next few months we will analyse data from social-media groups and combine this with interview data to generate an updated evidence-based traffic-network model. This network approach may yield additional insights into how to identify principal actors with major influence in the network, either because they have a large commercial exchange with others or because they act as links between different actors. We also want to investigate the characteristics of the actors in order to understand how individual actions influence the functioning of the entire Red Siskin trade network.

Arlene B. Cardozo U. and Ada Sánchez-Mercado

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Rare birds in northeast Brazil

In pursuit of the rarest: using sound recorders to detect endangered and possibly extinct bird species at Serra do Urubu, Pernambuco, Brazil. \$5,000. Project dates: November 2016 – November 2018.

The Pernambuco Centre of Endemism in northeast Brazil is one of the most threatened regions in the Neotropics. It harbours some of the realm’s most imperilled species, several of which are Critically

Endangered, and some – such as Alagoas Foliage-gleaner *Philydor novaesi* and Cryptic Treehunter *Cichlocolaptes mazarbarnetti* – are feared extinct (see Lees *et al.* 2014). Serra do Urubu, within

which the Reserva Particular do Patrimônio Natural Pedra D'Anta is located, is an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area that is home to many of these globally threatened and endemic species, and is therefore a key area for conserving and monitoring them. However, it is often difficult to detect and monitor elusive or threatened species in the wild.

For this project, Brazilian researchers aimed to employ a new method for detecting and monitoring endangered bird species at Pedra D'Anta reserve, using autonomous sound-recording systems and automated species identification. Thanks to a NBC Conservation Award and to the logistical and local support of SAVE Brasil (BirdLife International Partner in Brazil), the team was able to acquire and install five sound-recording systems in the reserve. Since November 2016, four of the systems (the fifth has been stolen) have been recording for roughly 20 days per month, with about a week required for maintenance of the equipment (periodical download of recordings, recharge of batteries and reinstallation). The systems are scheduled to record in short intervals from dawn to sunset, amounting to a total of about 300 hours of recordings each month.

With the first year of the project complete, part of the acoustic data has already been analysed and some tests of automated identification/validation conducted. The large amount of data collected so far confirms the presence of some target species, e.g. Orange-bellied Antwren *Terenura sicki* (Critically Endangered) and Alagoas Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes ceciliae* (Endangered), although others such as Alagoas Foliage-gleaner are sadly absent.

These results, albeit preliminary, help clarify the extent to which existing perceptions of the species' conservation status, based largely on other methods and observations, is correct. In addition to generating extremely important records of threatened species, a further output of this project is the creation of a permanent acoustic record of the avifauna of Pedra D'Anta reserve. This enormous amount of acoustic data can be interpreted to generate ecological information which can be used to understand the structure and dynamics of the avian community in this highly endangered area. The monitoring program will continue, and further work will include moving the recording systems to different parts of the reserve. We will also keep collecting and analysing the acoustic data and producing regular reports and scientific papers.

The records of the threatened species, or even of the possibly extinct ones, will help establish a more reliable baseline for renewed conservation efforts, at least at a local scale. They also indicate the need to urgently apply this technique on a wider scale, including in other forest remnants in the endangered Pernambuco Centre of Endemism.

Rather appropriately, considering the target species named in his memory, this project received the Club's Juan Mazar Barnett award.

*Thiago Vernaschi Vieira da Costa
with Bárbara Cavalcante, Carlos O. A. Gussoni
and Karlla V. C. Barbosa*

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5 Reserva Particular do Patrimônio Natural Pedra D'Anta, Pernambuco, Brazil (Carlos Gussoni). **6** Installation of the autonomous recording systems at Pedra D'Anta reserve, Pernambuco, Brazil (Carlos Gussoni). **7** An autonomous recording system set up at Pedra D'Anta reserve, Pernambuco, Brazil (Carlos Gussoni).



Rufous-faced Crake in Paraguay

*Advancing the conservation of Rufous-faced Crake *Laterallus xenopterus*. \$1,500. Project dates: September 2016 – September 2018.*

Rufous-faced Crake *Laterallus xenopterus* is one of the most poorly known members of the Rallidae, and is currently listed as globally Vulnerable.

This secretive species was discovered in 1933 in Paraguay but there was no further information about the bird until 45 years later in 1978, when a specimen was captured by Helmut Sick in Brazil. Since then, a handful of studies have produced new information about the species. Its distribution remains incompletely known, with records from just a few isolated and widely separated localities over a very extensive area between Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay. This project aims to: (1) obtain new high-quality sound-recordings of the vocalisations of Rufous-faced Crake; (2) take blood samples in order to analyse the phylogenetic relationships of the species; (3) create a niche model to predict the distribution of the species; and (4) raise awareness of the species in local communities where the species is known to occur.

The team planned a field trip to Aguara-Ñu, Reserva Natural del Bosque Mbaracayú, Canindeyú, Paraguay, in October 2016. Two weeks

before the visit, a large area of Aguara-Ñu was burned. Fieldwork went ahead, despite the setback, and 16 different Rufous-faced Crake territories were identified. Digital sound-recordings, comprising 1 hour 40 minutes of recorded sound, were made of vocalisations within the different territories. Moreover, previously undocumented vocalisations for the species were discovered. Two individual Rufous-faced Crakes were captured and measured, and blood samples were taken. We also recorded two species of rallid new to Mbaracayú: Rufous-sided Crake *L. melanophaius* and Grey-breasted Crake *L. exilis* (with one individual of the latter captured).

Mbaracayú hosts a school at Jejuí-mi research station. This, like the reserve is managed by Fundación Moisés Bertoni. Through an educational workshop with 17-year-old students, the team assessed the threats to the conservation of the region and the birds that inhabit it, emphasising the problems faced by the Rufous-faced Crake.

Emiliano Agustín Depino

8 Open grassland (*campo limpo, cerradão*), the habitat of Rufous-faced Crake *Laterallus xenopterus* in Aguara-Ñu, Reserva Natural del Bosque Mbaracayú, Canindeyú, Paraguay (Emiliano Agustín Depino). **9** Emiliano Depino sound-recording Rufous-faced Crake *Laterallus xenopterus* in a low-lying grassland in Aguara-Ñu, Reserva Natural del Bosque Mbaracayú, Canindeyú, Paraguay (Fabricio Gorleri). **10** Rufous-faced Crake *Laterallus xenopterus* in Aguara-Ñu, Reserva Natural del Bosque Mbaracayú, Canindeyú, Paraguay (Fabricio Gorleri). **11** Emiliano Depino sound-recording Ocellated Crake *Micropygia schomburgkii* in a relatively high-lying, shrubby grassland in Aguara-Ñu, Reserva Natural del Bosque Mbaracayú, Canindeyú, Paraguay (Fabricio Gorleri). **12** Valley slopes at Aguara-Ñu, Reserva Natural del Bosque Mbaracayú, Canindeyú, Paraguay. Foreground: burned hillside dominated by *yatay poñí* palm *Butia paraguayensis*. Background: unburned hillside protected by the swampy low valley (Emiliano Agustín Depino).

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Chaco Eagle in Argentina

Conservation of Chaco Eagle Buteogallus coronatus in Córdoba, Argentina: mapping new areas to protect. \$1,500. Project dates: March 2016 – February 2017.

The project was based on a survey of areas with previous records of Chaco Eagle *Buteogallus coronatus* (Endangered), in order to confirm presence and breeding. During each survey, consultations were also made with local villagers, and during the year some educational activities were carried out. Based on the interviews, unpublished species records were compiled. We prioritised sites where there were recent records of juvenile Chaco Eagle.

Most locals interviewed knew nothing of the species, even though they lived in sites with frequent verified records. Those villagers who were familiar with the species generally recognised it by its characteristic whistling call and habit of eating *quirquinchos* or *mulitas* (armadillos), and did not

view it as a threat to their own way of life. Only in El Chacho, Serrezuela, did respondents indicate that the species is locally persecuted because it eats *mulitas*, and this competition over resources influenced public opinion more than the benefits of snake-depredation offered by the eagle. For their part, rangers, biologists, mountain guides, naturalists and ornithologists – interviewed as inhabitants or frequent visitors – mostly recognised the species but were not so familiar with its habits and conservation status. All showed a wish to collaborate by providing many previously undocumented records.

Prior to the project, there was only one verified nesting site in Córdoba, namely in Luyaba. In this study two other possible breeding sites were identified: Campo El Titán, El Chacho, Serrezuela, and Reserva Privada Natural Los Chorrillos, Tanti. More surveys are needed at these two sites to confirm nesting. A total of six educational activities were carried out, through which 728 people were reached (451 in the province of La Rioja and 277 in the province of Córdoba). Further work is ongoing.

Verónica Serman

The deadlines for Conservation Award Programme applications are 1 January and 1 July each year. Full details of the Awards Programme and application process can be found at www.neotropicalbirdclub.org/conservation/conservation-fund/. Without the generous support of independent organisations and private individuals, the NBC Conservation Awards Programme would be unable to finance so many worthwhile projects. If you or your organisation would like to donate to the programme please contact the authors. With additional funding we will be able to do even more to help local conservationists protect Neotropical birds.

CHRISTOPHER J. SHARPE & ROB CLAY

NBC Conservation Award Programme Co-ordinators

E-mail: nbcawards@gmail.com

Website: www.neotropicalbirdclub.org/conservation/conservation-fund/

Members' e-mail addresses

With ever increasing postage costs the Club can save considerable money by using e-mail to communicate with members. We would like to move to sending membership renewals by e-mail instead of by post. If we do not have your preferred e-mail address or you have changed it recently it would help the Club if you could please send it to us at membership@neotropicalbirdclub.org.

The refreshed NBC website

If you want to keep up to date with what the Neotropical Bird Club is doing then please regularly visit the Club's website at www.neotropicalbirdclub.org. The website also offers a simple way to join the Club or renew your membership. The website's appearance has been slightly altered to accommodate the new online membership options, for which our sincere thanks go to Sue Gregory and Simon Howarth of Zenith Marketing (www.zenith-marketing.co.uk).

Reviews

The new Neotropical companion by John Kricher. 2017. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 448pp, 18 colour illustrations, numerous colour photographs. Softback. ISBN 978-0-6911-1525-2. \$35/£27.95.

The original '*Neotropical companion*', published in 1989, has long found a home on many a wildlife enthusiast's bookshelf. It excelled as an accessible, non-academic reader that interprets the biodiversity, biogeography and ecology of the New World Tropics. Covering the whole of tropical America, it described the species and habitats most likely to be encountered by residents or visitors, and encompassed every major ecosystem in the region – from lowland rainforests to the high Andes.

I missed out on what aficionados termed 'The Little Green Book', but got in on the act in 1997, when the second edition was published. Two decades later, US academic John Kricher has provided a third version. To mark what the author considers a major overhaul, the book has a novel title: *A Neotropical companion* has become *The new Neotropical companion*. So what's new about it – and is there sufficient novelty to render the previous edition obsolete?

Placing the second edition side-by-side with the new book, the first thing you will notice is that the book has 'grown'. Although roughly the same thickness and total page count, *The new Neotropical companion* is about 20% wider than its predecessor. The extra width enables text to be laid out across two columns, which improves readability. It also grants inclusion of numerous colour photographs – with 2–12 images per double-page spread. The result is a much more visually attractive product. Moreover, whereas one previously simply *read* about the Neotropics, now one can *see* it too. For the reader, I can see no downsides to the increased size; unlike a field guide, this is not a book to be lugged up and down Andean slopes.

Although the text follows broadly the same structure – tropical climates, rainforests, evolution, broad biogeographical realms, and faunal overviews – its broader coverage is spread across more chapters (18 versus 14). Moreover, much of the text has been comprehensively – and admirably – rewritten. It is deliberately lighter in tone, thus broadening the target readership. The text is also very largely updated in substance

to reflect two further decades of scientific exploration and understanding.

If you have (and value) either of the two editions of *A Neotropical companion*, it is very much worth upgrading. And if your library is somehow presently devoid of either edition, but you have at least a layman's interest in the Neotropical realm beyond seeing and identifying birds, then this new book demands to be your friend. Your companionship will be long-lasting.

James Lowen



Raptors of Mexico and Central America by William S. Clark & N. John Schmitt. 2017. Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press. 304 pp, 32 colour plates. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-6911-1649-5. \$39.95/£32.95.

Raptors are, of course, one of those particularly charismatic bird groups that attract numerous life-long admirers. The raptors of Middle America are as beguiling and fascinating as anywhere in the world, with the added magic of very concentrated migration through the region twice a year (as featured in *Neotropical Birding* 8: 12–21). The distinctive passion shown by dedicated raptor aficionados is expressed by Bill Clark and John Schmitt, the two formidable experts who have authored the *Raptors of Mexico and Central America*. Both have clearly spent countless hours in the field observing birds of prey and have produced books on raptors in other regions, thereby qualifying them as global authorities on the identification and illustration of raptors. Clark and Schmitt have produced this particular guide because – in their view – most existing field guides for the region did not cover diurnal raptors well or accurately enough.

This book has evidently been a labour of love, involving the collection of new data for some of the 69 species and one subspecies of diurnal raptors covered. The book offers itself as both a portable field guide and reference book for study at home, perhaps before a trip or when reviewing sightings after an outing in the field. As Lloyd Kiff points out in his foreword, this book will be

particularly useful to those taking part in raptor monitoring and migration watch projects.

The taxonomy followed is that of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) and South American Classification Committee, with AOU common names used alongside recommended Spanish names. The book starts with an extensive glossary and excellent section on raptor topography. Then come the 32 superb colour plates. These cover plenty of different ages and plumage morphs for most species. Rendering of colour is excellent. Some plates may feel a little cluttered to some readers, although each includes only four or fewer species. The plates are well organised, with similar species usually shown on the same spread. There are, however, some exceptions such as no direct comparison of Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii* and Sharp-shinned Hawk *A. striatus* in flight. Some species could have benefitted from more illustrations – although space is at a premium in such a compact book. Useful additional illustrations are included for some species, such as a kettle of Swainson's Hawks *Buteo swainsoni* and a Zone-tailed Hawk *B. albonotatus* in flight with Turkey Vultures *Cathartes aura*.

Overall, the plates compare very favourably with many in both established and more recent field guides for the region. The illustrations themselves are a pleasure to study and, as far as I can judge, their accuracy is excellent. I only have minor quibbles over the wing shapes shown for Grey Hawk *B. plagiatus*, Grey-lined Hawk *B. nitidus* and Short-tailed Hawk *B. brachyurus*, which I think are proportionately slightly longer and perhaps more rounded than illustrated. Beginners getting to grips with separating similar species in flight may want to study comparison plates provided elsewhere (e.g. Sibley 2014).

Plate annotations are on the opposite page; these are well organised and easy to follow. They briefly describe the species and its habitats, before providing specific identification notes to accompany each illustration.

The text accounts are fairly comprehensive and concise. They are accompanied by 213 colour photographs, most of which are very good or better. Those of lower quality are of species that are very difficult to see well, let alone photograph. The photographs are mostly of perched birds, and could have been accompanied by more photographs of birds in flight.

The text is logically structured and very informative, with some interesting snippets for such a compact guide. An identification summary gives a very helpful overview of the characteristics



of each species. Notes on similar species are typically very clear and useful, although I dislike being directed between species accounts. I was also surprised to see that Laughing Falcon *Herpetotheres cachinnans* and Yellow-headed Caracara *Milvago chimachima* are not listed as similar species for the benefit of beginners, although these species are illustrated on the same plate.

The section on behaviour is particularly interesting, and evidently includes some of the authors' detailed field observations. The notes on vocalisations do not always provide a lot of detail (as is surprisingly the case for the highly vocal Laughing Falcon and Collared Forest-falcon *Micrastur semitorquatus*, for example). A section called 'Fine Points' often makes for fascinating reading, containing incidental points of interest (such as the facial skin of Crested Caracara *Caracara plancus* changing with mood). More experienced birders will find the detailed descriptions particularly useful: where this book comes into its own is in sorting out tricky immature plumages such as for White-tailed Hawk *Geranoaetus albicaudatus* and the *Buteogallus* species.

There is a lack of information on population estimates, threats and conservation status for most species, although these would admittedly become outdated fairly quickly. Some readers will be left yearning for more information on each species's biology and ecology, and they may want to refer to other titles for more detail (e.g. Whitacre 2012). The editing of the text accounts is very good overall, and I found very few typographical errors. I noticed, however, that some text is repeated word-for-word, both for the same species and between different species.

Range maps accompany the text accounts for all species except vagrants and introduced populations. These provide a useful quick reference for species' distributions. Some readers

may have preferred more detailed maps with hotspots marked, and it may have been helpful to have placed the range maps with the plates for quick reference when in the field. Some of the colours used in the range maps are rather unintuitive, with dark blue for resident, grey for winter and green for migration. Furthermore, the distribution of most subspecies is not demarcated in the maps and only briefly described in the text. I noticed some omissions among the range maps. For example, the distribution of Hook-billed Kite *Chondrohierax uncinatus* shows a large gap in west-central Honduras, and Yellow-headed Caracara is omitted from southern Nicaragua. The authors point readers to national and regional field guides for more detail on species' distributions.

This book does appear to be particularly suited to those studying raptors in the region, although the bibliography seems quite sparse and would not be sufficient for many of those wanting to delve deeper into the literature on Neotropical raptors. Overall, the *Raptors of Mexico and Central America* is a superbly produced book that straddles the market for specialised field guides and sumptuous coffee table reference books. This balancing act is difficult, and of course it is not possible to please everyone. The colour plates are of excellent quality, and the text accounts provide much material to be pored over when not in the field. Furthermore, birders will enjoy the photographs that accompany the text accounts, especially if suffering withdrawal symptoms due to a prolonged period without Neotropical raptors to enjoy. I am sure that fans of raptors and birding in the Neotropics will gain a lot of pleasure from owning a copy.

Joseph Taylor

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Birds new to science by David Brewer. 2017. 416pp, numerous colour photographs. London: Christopher Helm. Hardback. ISBN 978-1-4729-0628-1. \$60/£44.99.

Nothing excites like the new. Discovering a species unknown to science is surely a dream of pretty much every *Neotropical Birding* reader (and if it's not, it should be!). This compelling new book from the well-known Helm imprint (now owned and

managed by Bloomsbury) is a cornucopia of such reveries realised.

Each of 288 species described as new to science since 1960 is treated to an account spanning 1–2 pages. Unsurprisingly, the speciose Neotropical realm features prominently; more than half the new species were discovered in South America, with an additional seven species from Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean.

Each species account includes details of how it was discovered, a brief description, details of habitat, food and feeding, breeding, voice, movements (if any), the known range, its conservation status, and etymology (which often contains fascinating snippets). It is the synopsis of how the species was discovered that really brings the book to life – and speaks to one's own yearning to unveil the new. This is an excitement that this magazine has celebrated in the past, with articles from the discoverers of Jocotoco Antpitta *Grallaria ridgelyi* (*Neotropical Birding* 10: 4–8) and Scarlet-banded Barbet *Capito wallacei* (*Neotropical Birding* 11: 27–32), a spectacular species gracing the front cover of *Birds new to science*.

Each account benefits from the author's detailed examination of the literature. The reference list extends to roughly 1,400 sources. Almost all species are treated to one or more colour photographs; the publishers have done a fine job in tracking down images of what are, in some cases, obscure and rarely seen birds. (The downside of this success – the cost of buying such images – may be reflected in the book's rather high price. Would publishing as a softback have lowered the cost, I wonder?)

To justify inclusion of a species in the book, the author follows what he admits to be a 'liberal' approach: as long as the taxon is recognised as a species by at least one leading authority, it's in. The concept of what constitutes a species is thus fundamental to this book. Appropriately then, an introductory chapter summarises the major approaches to defining this taxonomic unit; the result is as readable an account of this thorny issue as I have come across.

A suite of chapters towards the



end of the book makes for similarly fascinating reading. One encompasses a non-exhaustive, annotated list of future new species – apparently novel taxa that the ornithological world knows are ‘out there’, but have yet to be formally described. From the Neotropics, these include several tapaculos *Scytalopus*, puzzling *Ciccaba* owls in Peru (announced in *Neotropical Birding* 10: 9–13) and Ecuador/Colombia, Colombia’s mystery *Thamnophilus* antshrike (featured in *Neotropical Birding* 21: 21–24), and an unidentified *Streptoprocne* swift from Honduras. Another fascinating chapter covers species described since 1960 but subsequently shown to be invalid. Neotropical examples include ‘Estudillo’s Curassow *Crax estudilloi*’ from Bolivia, various hummingbirds and antwrens, ‘Cipo Cinclodes *Cinclodes espinhacensis*’ from Brazil, and ‘Narosky’s Seedeater *Sporophila zeilichi*’ from the Southern Cone. Final musings – all intriguing, worthwhile reads – cover potential future discoveries, the ethics of collecting and conservation issues.

The concept of *Birds new to science* is beautifully simple, the information meticulously researched, and the product neatly put together. This is an engaging, inspiring book – one into which you can dip briefly or delve deeply. Strongly recommended.

James Lowen

Aves de Chile, sus islas oceánicas y Península Antártica [*Birds of Chile, its oceanic islands and the Antarctic Peninsula*] by Enrique Couve, Claudio F. Vidal & Jorge Ruiz T. 2016. Punta Arenas, Chile: FS Editorial. 550pp. Numerous colour illustrations & maps. Softback. ISBN 978-9569824005. CHP\$24,000 (roughly US\$39/£29).

Aves de Chile is a propitious addition to the sluggishly growing library of South American field guides. The book is in Spanish – although an English edition is due in 2018. The species and area covered do indeed comprehensively reflect the ambitious title and include all of the far flung Chilean Pacific islands, including those on which few researchers are allowed to set foot (i.e. the Desventuradas, and Salas and Gómez), in addition to the Antarctic Peninsula and a variety of islands in the Scotia Arc (territories also claimed by other countries). The book is robustly bound, is printed on reasonably strong paper and has been made to withstand the rigours of the field by dint of a transparent plastic protection jacket. It has an elongated format and weighs almost 800 grams.

A very informative colour geographical relief map adorns the inside front cover. This is the only map that names the regional district boundaries (referred to throughout the texts), so many users will need to flick back to it regularly. The map also shows the maritime relief including the all-important Humboldt shelf drop that makes Chile such a magnificent country for seabirding. Useful colour-coding allows quick access to individual families, while the inside rear cover depicts the offshore islands and Antarctic Peninsula in relief.

There are just eight introductory pages, filled with the usual prologue, acknowledgements and notes on the texts, taxonomy and maps followed by the obligatory topography of a bird. A major omission is a habitat map and explanation of the ecoregions found in Chile. This would help users in understanding the distribution and biogeography of Chilean birds. Nor are there notes on bird families or genera, so the book plunges headlong into its *forte* – the plates and texts on some 443 species that the authors consider to be the true ‘Chilean’ species. These include year-round residents, regular migrants and occasional visitors with historical and/or recent records. To put this coverage into perspective, one could expect to see 300 species on a well-organised and comprehensive three-week trip to Chile.

The texts evince a vast untold amount of research and will be useful to ornithologists in any part of mainland or offshore Chile. Most importantly, the book layout allows for just two species accounts/illustrations per double-page spread – a much lower ratio than for typical field guides. This has advantages (extensive texts) and disadvantages (although many confusion species have been paired, novice birders could find it time-consuming to flick through the guide and identify birds).

I found the standard and accuracy of the artwork to be very high and pleasing on the eye. All illustrations have useful annotations that rapidly draw attention to the most important identification features. I was particularly impressed with the wader and seabird illustrations, which form a considerable portion of the book. That said, such large artwork could take a bit of getting used to in the field. The evolution of Jorge Ruiz’s paintwork can be seen in his accidental species, which look fresher and crisper than the majority of the book; I would hazard a guess that these were painted much more recently. Overall, the book would have benefited from more illustrations. For example, some authorities consider Plain-mantled Tit-Spintail *Leptasthenura aegithaloides* to comprise up to four species within Chile – so



the single illustration here is insufficient (and, moreover, the taxon involved is not specified).

Each species text comprises four sections. The first and longest deals with identification. The most salient features are underlined which is useful for those who seek a rapid identification. Subspecific identification is included in synthesis when multiple subspecies occur in the region. I compared some difficult-to-identify species pairs by randomly checking texts to see how the book measured up, and was largely satisfied.

The other sections cover habitat, range and habits. All provide adequately detailed and often novel information. Personally, this was the most interesting aspect of the book as the information adds to the general knowledge on many species. The text on 'range' includes details of accidental records with localities and dates although observers are not credited and there are no citations for published records, even where these are included in the bibliography. The text on habits provide behavioural descriptions, some breeding data and the occasional voice description. The latter baffles me – and is a significant drawback. Knowledge of birds' vocalisations is sorely needed for many skulking species; Chile's wonderful forests vibrate with tapaculo songs that are easy to identify... if you have a simple description.

The inclusion of a few species caused my jaw to drop. Andean Tinamou *Nothoprocta pentlandii* and Rock Earthcreeper *Ochetorhynchus andecola* are both included (as they were in Jaramillo *et al.* 2003), yet neither species has been confirmed to occur in Chile. The photographs in Barros (2015) of the sole Chilean specimens of 'Andean Tinamou' and 'Rock Earthcreeper' clearly depict Ornate Tinamou *N. ornata* and Buff-breasted Earthcreeper *Upucerthia validirostris* respectively.

The maps have solid red shading with no attempt to depict migratory patterns, while red dots indicate accidental records. I was baffled by some of the mapped distributions; in particular that of White-banded Mockingbird *Mimus triurus*, which is known from just 33 Chilean records (Barros & Schmitt 2015) yet the map has more than a third of Chile shaded in solidly, deluding the reader into thinking it might not be a difficult bird to find. The inclusion of mapped ranges (in pink/light red) for neighbouring countries gives a better overall perspective to readers but – for Argentina and Bolivia, at least – were often a little askew.

Sixty pages of addenda cover 88 accidental species. This section comprises double-page spreads that mostly cover three species (rarely two or four). All have colour illustrations, maps and somewhat more concise texts. As previously mentioned, there is a fine line between what is considered accidental and occasional so readers could end up trying to find a species in the wrong part of the book. The bibliography comprises 13 pages of tiny print; whilst very comprehensive, it is not cross-referenced to the species texts.

In summary, *Aves de Chile* provides an important contribution to our knowledge. It is filled with fine artwork and, notwithstanding the above reservations, is a must for any student of Neotropical ornithology.

Mark Pearman

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Wildlife of Ecuador: a photographic field guide to birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians by Andrés Vásquez

Noboa. 2017. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 286pp, 411 colour photographs, 341 maps. Softback. ISBN 978-0-6911-6136-5. \$29.95/£24.95.

There can hardly be a *Neotropical Birding* reader who is unaware of the spectacular birdlife of Ecuador. Less widely celebrated are its other faunal groups. This book – in the exclusively photographic Wildlife Explorer Guides series, under Princeton University Press’s WILDGuides imprint – aims to redress the balance. It claims to be the first ‘go-to, all-in-one [wildlife] guide geared to the general reader’, covering a selection of the most commonly encountered birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians – 350 species in total.

The book starts with a useful overview of Ecuador’s biogeography. This explains – in lay terms – the reasons for Ecuador’s ‘incredible biodiversity’, and summarises the country’s habitats and bioregions. The book ends with a map of the country’s top 48 protected areas. Sandwiched between are 125 double-page spreads with the field guide proper (the ‘plates’), with each spread covering up to four species.

Birds form 60% of the guide (223 species), with the remainder split between mammals (71 species; all large mammals or bats), amphibians (37) and reptiles (40). It would have been useful for the book to have put these numbers in perspective by giving the country totals for each faunal group. Readers would need to look elsewhere to glean whether 37 amphibians illustrated represent a high or insignificant proportion of the Ecuadorian total.

The species selected appear to have been carefully thought through. Nevertheless, there was the occasional oddity. Seasonally, Swainson’s Thrush *Catharus ustulatus* can be one of the commonest birds in the Ecuadorian Chocó – yet does not feature in the guide. For a book ‘geared to the general reader’, the inclusion of Jocotoco Antpitta *Grallaria ridgelyi* and Giant Antpitta *G. gigantea* surprised me. Granted, they are key attractions for serious birders, but are surely less likely to be on the itinerary of a standard ecotourist. Their exclusion might have made space for more than one species of North American warbler, perhaps. Whilst most of the amphibians selected appeared widely distributed, two – Goblin Rainfrog *Pristimantis sobetes* and Plain Marsupial-



Frog *Gastrotheca litonedis* – have tiny ranges and are globally threatened. They seem surprising inclusions – but perhaps they are locally common at sites visited by ecotourists. Among mammals, Domestic Guinea Pig *Cavia porcellus* is an odd inclusion given that the text states it is ‘never [seen] in the wild’.

Back to the double-page spreads. Each species account includes a paragraph of text, a very useful map and one or more colour photographs. Texts are succinct, accurate and focus on identification. They avoid the mistake of describing what the reader can see in the photos, instead majoring on how to distinguish the species from similar-looking creatures. (I wish more field guides did this!) In some cases, accounts for similar species are efficiently brigaded – such as for Ocelot *Leopardus pardalis* and Margay *L. wiedii* – sometimes with an additional confusion species weaved into the text (in the above example, *Oncilla L. tigrinus*).

Although I found no obvious errors in the text, I was left a little wanting in some cases. For example, I was unconvinced that the caiman text enabled differentiation of Spectacled Caiman *Caiman crocodilus* from Black Caiman *Melanosuchus niger*. The former is certainly paler than the latter, but it is hardly ‘whitish’, as claimed. Moreover, I would have liked to see more here on morphological differences between the two species, such as the former’s prominent, bony upper eyelids and the latter’s large eyes and relatively narrow snout. Among birds, I query whether Silver-throated Tanager *Tangara icterocephala* is best described as ‘a duller version of Golden Tanager [*T. arthus*]’ which implies far greater similarity than is the case for these very different congeners.

The maps are impressive. I wasn’t aware, for example, that the distribution of Ecuador’s herptiles was so well known. This presumably reflects the vigour of the outstanding young

Ecuadorian herpetologists brigaded under the banner Tropical Herping (see www.tropicalherping.com), who also drafted the reptile and amphibian texts.

The photographs are almost all good or very good – sharp and well exposed – with layout pleasing to the eye. A little extra depth of field in some amphibian shots would have been useful – and, artistically pleasing though they are, I'm not persuaded that head-on shots are the most useful for identification purposes. A couple of the images could surely have been improved upon: Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* springs to mind, and perhaps White-collared Swift *Streptoprocne zonaris* (admittedly a trickier species to capture). Birds of prey would have been better illustrated by more flying individuals. The Puma *Puma concolor* photograph doesn't feel particularly useful for identification either (as well as giving the impression of being a captive individual). Finally, accuracy seems robust. I could only spot one minor glitch: Grey-breasted Martin *Progne chalybea* and White-collared Swift are numbered the wrong way round on page 190.

All in all, this is an attractively designed, intelligently written, efficiently informative and superbly portable guide to the wildlife most likely to be encountered by the visitor to Ecuador. So... should you buy it? If you're a keen birder (as anyone reading this magazine is likely to be) and if birds are your sole wildlife interest, then you're unlikely to choose this guide over a product covering a wider range of bird species (e.g. Ridgely & Greenfield 2001; Athanas & Greenfield 2016, reviewed in *Neotropical Birding* 21: 62–63; or Restall *et al.* 2016, reviewed in *Neotropical Birding* 20: 68–70). If, however, you are a birder with at least a passing interest in herptiles and/or mammals, then this guide would make an excellent addition to your luggage. And if you're a general ecotourist – the principal market for the guide – then this book is absolutely up your *calle*.

James Lowen

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Quatro estações. História natural das aves na Mata Atlântica: uma abordagem trófica

[*Four seasons. Natural history of birds of the Atlantic Forest: a trophic approach*] by Ricardo Parrini. 2015. Rio de Janeiro: Technical Books Editora. 354 pp, 83 colour photographs. Softback. ISBN 978-8-5613-6847-0. R\$150 (roughly US\$47/£33). Available from tinyurl.com/parrini-book.

In the post-Helmut Sick world of modern Brazilian avifaunal studies, there are recognisably fewer brighter stars in the firmament than Ricardo Parrini, despite on the one hand his eschewing 'social media' and on the other having published comparatively few papers in major international journals. Instead, Parrini, one of the very first true amateur birdwatchers in Brazil, has acquired his legendary status through dint of careful and unrelenting field observation, and a fistful of extraordinary discoveries, among which the most remarkable was of course his electrifying resurrection from the dead of the Kinglet *Calyptura calyptura cristata* after far more than 100 years of solitude. This, Parrini's first book, which was launched to widespread acclaim at the XXI Brazilian Ornithological Congress in Rio de Janeiro, in late 2015, inaugurates what I suspect will prove to be a series of crowning achievements in his studies of the foraging behaviour and diets of Brazilian birds.

In the foreword to *Quatro estações*, his long-standing friend and collaborator, Fernando Pacheco, himself one of the current 'greats' in modern South American ornithology, likens Parrini's presence on the ornithological stage to that of Alexander Skutch. This is a bold and grand comparison indeed, but is certainly deserved. In my experience, few recent bird books can claim to be so richly based on personal and novel field observations, and to have built so dramatically on what has gone before.

This book comprises 31 chapters covering a wide range of topics. Some of them represent single-species studies, for example of the foraging behaviour of Olivaceous Woodcreeper *Sittasomus griseicapillus*, the specialisation of Buff-browed Foliage-gleaner *Syndactyla rufosuperciliata* on dead vegetation, and the diets of Yellow-legged Thrush *Turdus flavipes* and Maroon-bellied Parakeet *Pyrrhura frontalis*, while others are more general investigations into genera or families, for example foraging segregation among the genus *Philydor*, specialisation by the genus *Xenops*, diets of the Atlantic Forest species of *Thraupis*, folivory (leaf-eating) by the genus *Saltator* and resource use by hummingbirds.

Other chapters cover wider themes, for example specific associations among mixed-species flocks, and seeding events of the bamboo *Guadua tagoara* in the Serra dos Órgãos, but also insectivore use of bromeliads, birds that feed on frogs and toads, and cicadas, use of *Euterpe edulis* palms by dendrocolaptids and other furnariids, feeding methods by a plethora of insectivores in relation to live foliage, and the use of a variety of different fruits (among them *Cecropia* and melastomes) by birds. Throughout, the text is supported by many well-taken colour photographs, which are both attractive and graphically illustrate points made in the text, as well as a series of tables.

Although the reference list used by Parrini to compile his text runs to 14 pages, *Quatro estações* is very heavily based on the author's personal observations, some of them already published in a series of papers, mainly in the Brazilian journal *Atualidades Ornitológicas*. The sole major criticism that I can level at this work is that a comprehensive index of species names would have added significantly to the book's utility and, to some extent, accessibility, especially for anyone whose Portuguese is more limited; and in these days of electronic 'tagging' would have been so easy to produce that to have not done so seems almost lazy. For anyone able to read Portuguese and with a serious interest in the ecology of Atlantic Forest birds, this book represents a night-on essential reference and one exceptionally rich in personal knowledge. Even better news is that it will be available in English, as an e-book, during 2018. Very highly recommended.

Guy M. Kirwan

The birds of the Falkland Islands: an annotated checklist by Robin W. Woods. 2017. *Tring*, UK: British Ornithologists' Club. 256pp, 64 colour plates. ISBN 978-0-9522-8866-4. \$42/£29.99.

The year 2016 saw the 40th anniversary of the regional checklist series initiated by British Ornithologists' Union (BOU), then published collectively by the BOU and the British Ornithologists' Club (BOC). Just shy of 20 years in the making, this annotated checklist to the avifauna of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) is the 25th in the series, and the first to be published solely by the BOC. The author is a well-known expert on these South Atlantic islands, with experience stretching across six decades.

Those familiar with other examples in the series (which, in the

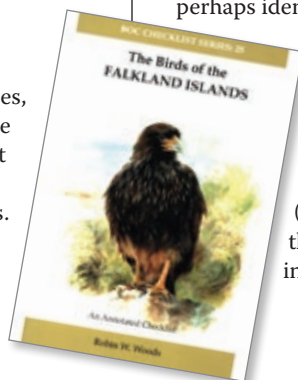
Neotropical region, includes several Caribbean publications) will swiftly feel at ease with the format and appearance of this latest instalment. An introduction contains essays on geography, climate, habitats and ornithological history of the Falklands (Malvinas). It also offers an overview of the avifauna, some thoughts on palaeornithology and – harnessing one of the author's particular interests – a fascinating insight into human–avian interactions and the development of wildlife conservation.

The systematic list covers all 205 species for which there is robust evidence for occurrence in the Falklands (Malvinas), of which 55 are resident, 17 regular visitors and the remainder 'transients' or vagrants, plus another 54 species for which further confirmation is required (usually comprising undocumented sight records). The text – as you would expect from such an authority – is meticulously researched and impeccably referenced; faultless, as far as I could judge.

The seven appendices include a gazetteer, a list of Important Bird Areas (now Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas) designated by BirdLife International and a table succinctly summarising the status of all species recorded or claimed on the islands. Sixty-four colour plates display an enticing selection of Falkland (Malvinas) birds; I particularly swooned at the adult male American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*, one of two recent records of this species – an astonishing 6,500 km south of the recognised wintering grounds.

And herein lies my major regret about this checklist. The American Redstart is far from alone as an outlandish rarity. Almost two-thirds of the 205 species adequately documented to have occurred in the Falklands (Malvinas) are 'transients' or outright vagrants (and the proportion rises to three-quarters if you exclude marine birds). As mooted by Jez Bird and others in a recent *Neotropical Birding* article (Bird *et al.* 2016), there may be no more remarkable vagrant 'trap' in South America. In my view, it is an opportunity missed not to have some analysis of vagrancy in the Falklands (Malvinas), perhaps identifying key locations or correlating

arrivals of vagrants with weather conditions and precise seasonality. Whilst fascinating in itself, such thinking would also have the potential to *excite* birders about rarity-finding in the Falklands (Malvinas) – and excitement is one thing in short supply in such an inevitably arid checklist.



In his editorial foreword, David Wells suggests that 'the rate of detection of non-marine vagrants reaching the Falklands (Malvinas) has increased... more or less any future first is possible! Every avifauna is dynamic: there are additions (and sometimes subtractions), population increases and declines, clarifications of true status, and deepening mysteries. Which leads me to wonder about the very concept of a static, hard-copy checklist in our technological age. When the BOU started its checklist series in the 1970s, there was no alternative. Nowadays there is no need to be satisfied with the constraints of a single snapshot in time. Electronic annotated checklists – freely available online and routinely updated with new information – would convey advantages of near-constant accuracy and widespread accessibility. For a publisher (BOC) that has recently made its stellar journal online-only and free-to-access, that is surely a step to consider.

James Lowen

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REQUEST FOR HELP

Photos of South American mammals

Jeff Blincow (who helped set up the Neotropical Bird Club) and Richard Webb are working on a Princeton University Press photographic field guide to roughly 350 of South America's larger land-based mammal species. They seek NBC members' help in providing images to complement those already generously donated by the region's lodges and tour guides plus many other photographers. Jeff and Richard are interested in good-quality, high-resolution images of all species and any images of uncommon or rarely photographed species, ideally taken in the wild. All photographers will be credited and, budget permitting, a modest fee may be payable. For a list of species for which photographs are needed and to obtain details of how to send photos, please contact Jeff (e-mail: jblincow@hotmail.com) or Richard (e-mail: guigna@aol.co.uk).

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Mountain Avocetbill *Opisthoprora euryptera* feeding at *Fuchsia*, Oyacachi, Napo Province, Ecuador, December 2016 (Niels Poul Dreyer).

Photospot: Mountain Avocetbill in Ecuador

Niels Poul Dreyer and Niels Krabbe

You can never be bored by hummingbirds! This short Photospot celebrates one sought-after *colibri* from the Andes.

Occurring in the Andes of Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, Mountain Avocetbill *Opisthoprora euryptera* inhabits upper-elevation forests and roadside vegetation. Mountain Avocetbill is rare and local through most of its range, with relatively few localities known. In Ecuador, where these photographs were taken, it has been reported from sites along the length of the east slope of the Andes, south to Loja and Zamora-Chinchipe, from 2,400–3,200 m altitude (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001) and was found to be fairly

common at Oyacachi and RÍo Anatenorio, Napo (Krabbe *et al.* 1997).

The only species in its genus (and, according to research into phylogenetic relationships, a member of the coquette clade of hummingbirds, to which also metaltails are referred; McGuire *et al.* 2009), this hummingbird's most striking feature is enshrined in its English name. Uniquely, the lower mandible of its short, black bill is sharply recurved at the tip, thus prompting thought of the bill of an avocet *Recurvirostris*.



Mountain Avocetbill *Opisthoprora euryptera* feeding at *Fuchsia*, Oyacachi, Napo Province, Ecuador, December 2016 (Niels Poul Dreyer).

Mountain Avocetbill usually is seen feeding alone at small, tubular flowers in low dense vegetation, but otherwise it is very poorly known – with no information at all on territoriality or breeding, precious little on behaviour (Schulenberg 2014), and only five existing sound recordings (www.xeno-canto.org/species/Opisthoprora-euryptera).

Being a hummingbird, Mountain Avocetbill is primarily nectarivorous – but there is little documentation of the plant species that it visits (Schulenberg 2014). Schuchmann (1999) reports that it feeds on nectar of flowering Ericaceae, Onagraceae (especially *Fuchsia*), Rubiaceae, and Lobeliaceae. Nineteen observations at Oyacachi and Río Anatenorio were mostly of birds feeding, which they did exclusively by piercing flowers of the genus *Centropogon* (family Campanulaceae) (Krabbe *et al.* 1997). However, as these images testify, there is now hard evidence that the hummingbird may also exploit other sources of nectar such as *Fuchsia*.

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NIELS POUL DREYER AND NIELS KRABBE
E-mail: nkkrabbe@gmail.com

Club Noticeboard

Compiled by Chris Balchin, NBC Secretary

AGM 2018

The Club's 2018 AGM – plus a talk by Hernán Casañas of Aves Argentinas on the project being supported by the 2018 British Birdwatching Fair – will take place on Saturday 18 August at the 'Birdfair' (Rutland Water, UK). Please join us at 18h30 in Lecture Marquee 1 (refreshments from 18h00). You do not need a valid Birdfair ticket to attend, but please e-mail Chris Balchin (secretary@neotropicalbirdclub.org) if you plan to arrive after the Birdfair closes at 17h30.

A successful 2017 AGM

The Club's 2017 AGM was held at the Brazilian Embassy, 14-16 Cockspur Street, St. James's, London SW1Y 5BL, UK, on 13 July. The meeting included presentations by Alexander Lees on identifying new species in the region, by Rick Simpson on life as a birdwatching guide in Brazil, by Lilas Nascimento of the Brazilian Tourist Board UK (www.visitbrazil.com) on conservation initiatives in Brazil, and by Raymond Jeffers on Neotropical Bird Club fundraising trips, as well as the Club AGM. The AGM minutes can be viewed on the Club's website at www.neotropicalbirdclub.org/nbc-blog.

1 Elisa Badia of Lynx Edicions presenting Mike Edgecombe with a prize from prize the 2017 NBC raffle, a copy of the *HBW and BirdLife International Illustrated checklist of birds of the world, volume 2* (Chris Balchin).

2 David Fisher, NBC Chair, presenting binoculars from the Donated Binocular Scheme to Alejandro Pinto of the Colombian Project (Chris Balchin).

A Code of Practice for Birders

The Neotropical Bird Club, in line with the other 'regional bird clubs' (i.e. Oriental Bird Club, African Bird Club and the Ornithological Society for the Middle East), has published a guide to good behaviour wherever and whenever they are birding. This is available for free download from our website, www.neotropicalbirdclub.org. We would like to see all people interested in watching birds in the Neotropical region adopting a 'bird comes first' attitude. This guide clarifies what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour from birders under each of five 'key principles':

- The interests of the birds come first;
- Show respect for habitats and the environment;
- Show respect for local laws and customs;
- Think about the interests of wildlife and local people before passing on news of a rare bird, especially during the breeding season; and
- Be an ambassador for good birding.



British Birdwatching Fair 2018, 17–19 August 2018

As usual, the Neotropical Bird Club will have a stand at the British Birdwatching Fair ('the Birdfair'; www.birdfair.org.uk) at Rutland Water, UK, from 17–19 August 2018. We will again be in Marquee 2, so please come along to collect your copies of *Cotinga 40* and *Neotropical Birding 23*, which will be hot off the press. (Doing so also saves the Club considerable postage costs!). You can also buy a raffle ticket (you could win a pair of Swarovski binoculars, just like one lucky member did at the 2017 'Birdfair') or simply have a chat with us about anything Neotropical.

Donations – and making them regularly

We are grateful to the following for their recent donations to the Club: Steven Donovan, Jon J. Duerr, Keith Fisher, Clive Anthony Green, Alan Hands, Peter Lewis Jones, Gary Ludi, Bill and Jack Moorhead, March Conservation Fund of Tides Foundation (see Conservation Awards, pages 56–64), Frank S. Smith, Chris Spooner and Jeannie B. Wright.

We have made it easy for members to make donations to the Club on a regular basis, be it weekly, monthly or yearly. If you wish to help the Club in this way, please contact Chris Balchin: secretary@neotropicalbirdclub.org.

Opportunities to help the Club

- Do you live near to Rutland Water, UK, and have space (such as an attic) where we might store display material for the Club's stand at the British Birdwatching Fair (Birdfair)?
- Would you like a free ticket to the Birdfair? If so, then come and help us on our stand. Key responsibilities include distributing our new publications and selling raffle tickets for our prize draw.
- From time to time we need volunteers to take on roles for the Club. These are not trustee positions so do not involve becoming part of Council or attending Council meetings. We are particularly keen to find people with knowledge of web-editing, marketing or database management.
- In each case, if you are keen to help or learn more, please contact Chris Balchin: secretary@neotropicalbirdclub.org.

Binoculars to Colombia

Just before the 2017 Birdfair, we were contacted by Club member David Lemon who asked if it were possible to supply binoculars to two private schools in Medellín, Colombia, which were running birdwatching classes but had limited access to binoculars. We contacted Colin Hawkins, Donated Binocular Scheme Administrator at the RSPB (BirdLife International in the UK), who arranged for six pairs to be delivered to the Birdfair. We then arranged a handover to Alejandro Pinto of the Colombian Project to ensure safe transport to Medellín. Subsequently Sociedad Antioqueña de Ornitología suggested that we expand the scheme such that children from public schools would be 'mentored' by teachers and pupils from the private schools who were using the equipment from the RSPB Donated Binocular Scheme.



On behalf her husband John 'Jake' Ward, Ruth Ward accepts first prize in the 2017 NBC raffle – a pair of Swarovski EL 10x42 binoculars – from Peter Antoniou of Swarovski Optik UK, again a generous donor of our annual raffle (David Fisher). The draw was held at the British Birdwatching Fair in August 2017.

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Sword-billed hummingbird, Ecuador by Craig Brooks on a Geodyssey bird watching holiday

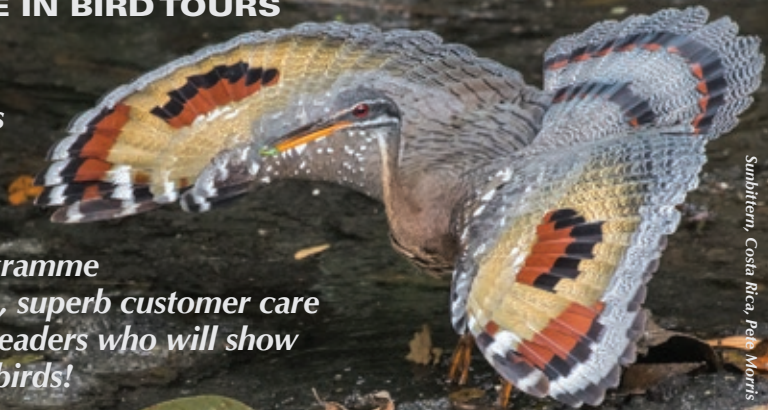


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The Neotropical Bird Club's magazine *Neotropical Birding*, published twice per year, provides a forum for articles on identification, birding sites and other information expected to be of use or interest to birders living in or visiting the Neotropics. We take pride in publishing good-quality images of rarely photographed species, and authors should take care to provide suitable digital files.

Contributions should be in English and are considered by the Editor and an Editorial Committee, and accepted subject to editing. All contributions or enquiries should be sent by e-mail to neotropical.birding@neotropicalbirdclub.org

Guidelines for contributors

Articles should be written clearly. Vernacular and scientific names should appear together at the first mention of a species, following which English names should be used alone. Names should where possible follow those of the South American Checklist Committee (see SACC: www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCBaseline.html) or the American Ornithological Society (1998 and subsequent updates; for Middle American and Caribbean birds). For compound bird names (e.g. Quail-Dove, tyrant flycatcher), follow the rules agreed by the International Ornithological Congress (see <http://www.worldbirdnames.org/rules-compound.html>). References should be cited in alphabetical order at the end of the paper in the same style as the current edition of *Neotropical Birding*. Internet sites/pages and unpublished reports are acceptable as references, but should only be cited *in extremis*.

Graphics files should be sent by e-mail, if possible. Please note that the editors reserve the right to reject any submissions that do not conform to the guidelines presented here. All contributions may be subject to peer review by one or more independent referees. The Editorial Committee reserves the right to make changes that it deems necessary, and, in the minimum of cases, without prior reference to the author. Maps are welcome, but we cannot accept copyrighted material. It is assumed that all contributors submitting material understand and accept these conditions.

Articles can be submitted at any time and will be published as soon as possible following acceptance by the Editorial Committee.

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Country Representatives

Argentina: Ignacio Roesler, Calle 64 No 674, Piso 2 dpto "c". La Plata (1900), pcia Buenos Aires. E-mail: kiniroesler@gmail.com

Belgium: Dr Johan Ingels, Galgenberglaan 9, BE-9070 Destelbergen. E-mail: johan.ingels@skynet.be

Brazil: Andy Foster, Serra dos Tucanos Lodge, CP 98125, Cachoeiras do Macacu, CEP 28.680-000, Rio de Janeiro. E-mail: serradostucanos@hotmail.com

Chile: Manuel Marin, Casilla 15, Melipilla. E-mail: mma95@hotmail.com. Alejandro Kusch, Casilla 19, Puna Arenas. E-mail: alekusch@yahoo.com

Colombia: Diego Calderón, Carrera 83A # 37C-45, Medellín. E-mail: tocsdiegocalderon@gmail.com

Denmark: Morten Heegaard, Admiralgade 23, DK-1066, Copenhagen K. E-mail: morten.heegaard@get2net.dk

Ecuador: Manuel Sanchez Nivicela, Eugenio Santillan N34-200 Y Maurian, Quito. E-mail: clandestine.bird@gmail.com

France & French Guiana: Nyls de Pracontal. E-mail: nyls.depracontal@gepog.org

Italy: Giuseppe Micali, Via Volterra 3, I-20146, Milano MI. E-mail: micali_giuseppe@libero.it

Norway: Atle Ivar Olsen, Skogsoy, 8700 Nesna, Norway. E-mail: atle.i.olsen@gmail.com

Paraguay: Paul Smith. E-mail: fauna-paraguay@yahoo.com.ar

Peru: Rob Williams. E-mail: Robsrw@gmail.com

Uruguay: Agustín Carriquiry, Aves Uruguay, PO Box 6955, Correo Central, Montevideo. E-mail: aguscarriquiry@hotmail.com

Venezuela: David Ascanio. E-mail: david@abtbirds.com

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