

Birds in Brazil: a natural history by Helmut Sick, 1993 (translated by William Belton). Princeton: Princeton University Press. 703 pp, 47 colour and black-and-white plates by Paul Barruel and John P. O'Neill. US\$140.00.

The publication of Helmut Sick's magnum opus *Ornitologia brasileira: uma introdução* in two volumes in 1985 by the University of Brasília Press revolutionised Brazilians' access to information on the nation's avifauna. Never before had such a wealth of accurate ornithological information been made available in the country's own language. After eight years of meticulous translation and updating by William Belton, the work was made available in English in 1993. As stated in the translator's comments, this is much more than a simple English version of Sick's earlier book. Sick had hoped that a second edition of *Ornitologia brasileira* would come out soon after the first. As it became clear that the second Brazilian edition would be delayed *sine die*, Sick became direct collaborator with Belton on the English-language edition. Sick continued to revise and update the text during the course of translation until his death in 1991. Thus, *Birds in Brazil* stands as an entity distinct from the first edition of *Ornitologia brasileira*, representing at the time of publication the most complete compendium of information available in any language on the Brazilian ornith.

This is a tome (the copy here on my desk weighs 3.2 kg!), not by any means something to be carried into the field when one takes a birding trip to Brazil. It is a hefty and extraordinary reference volume, not a field guide. The bulk of the book is divided into two major parts. Part one has five chapters: the Country and its Birds; A Short History of Ornithology in Brazil from the Sixteenth Century to the Early Twentieth Century; Conservation in Brazil; Biogeography and Speciation (by Jürgen Haffer with supplemental comments by Helmut Sick); and The Birds (with a section on Fossil Birds by Herculano Alvarenga, Brazil's leading avian palaeontologist). Part Two is the heart of the book and is an illustrated guide to the orders and families of Brazilian birds.

The Country and its Birds includes sections on Morphoclimatic Domains, Terrain Types and their Avifaunas, and Principal Habitats of Brazilian Birds (including Amazonian Rain Forest and its sub-types; Atlantic Rain Forest; Cerrado, Gallery Forests and Buriti Groves; Rio Branco and Amapá Campos, Minas Gerais and Bahia Plateaux, High Montane Campos, and Restingas; Caatinga and the Mato Grosso Pantanal; Gaucho Region; Cave Environments; Mangroves; Aquatic and Marine Environments; Oceanic Islands; and Environments altered by Man), with black-and-white photos of most of these.

The chapter on the history of Brazilian ornithology covers the most important researchers in the country and those who studied material of Brazilian origin. The principal ornithological collections in the country—at the Zoology Museum in São Paulo, the Emilio Goeldi Museum in Belém, and the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro (where Sick himself worked)—figure prominently. The first depiction of Brazilian birds in the Old World is of Scarlet Macaws *Ara macao* on Alberto Cantino's 1502 Map of the World (the Brazilian portion is splendidly reproduced as the final colour plate). This chapter takes us from Pedro Vaz de Caminha who accompanied Cabral in 1500 (mentioning only "green parrots") and the "great liar" Pigafetta who travelled with Magellan, to the great contributors of the first half (and a little beyond) of the present century, including Emilie Snethlage (to whom the book is dedicated), Miranda Ribeiro, Olivério Pinto and Fernando Novaes, and the collectors Ernst Garbe, João Lima, Emilio Dente and the Olallas.

Conservation in Brazil includes a brief history of the conservation movement, a rundown on existing conservation units (divided by major ecosystem), an accolade to Thomas Lovejoy and collaborators' Biological Dynamics of Forest Fragments Project north of Manaus, two sections on conservation problems, focusing separately on Amazonia and the Atlantic Forest, a discussion of reforestation (with a tempered condemnation of the "silent" [i.e., biologically dead] forests of pine and eucalyptus plantations, which he recognised can, in fact, reduce exploitation pressure on native forests), pollution, illegal trade in birds, and new prospects for conservation with regional environmental planning.

The Biogeography and Speciation chapter has sections by Sick and Jürgen Haffer, identified by their names in brackets for each portion of their authorship. The contributions flow nicely and first discuss general patterns of avian diversity in the Neotropics, before outlining the three major theories of differentiation: the Paleogeography Theory, the River-barrier Theory, and the Refuge Theory.

The Birds chapter first discusses the general patterns of avifaunal composition in the Neotropics, outlining the endemic families, those limited to the New World, those of pantropical distribution, those with centres of diversity in the Old World, and those that are cosmopolitan. The second section is a timely contribution on fossil birds by Herculano Alvarenga, who begins with the work of O. Winge in 1888 based on material collected by Peter Lund at Lagoa Santa in Minas Gerais. Alvarenga's own contributions are impressive and briefly outlined, including a reproduction of the phorusrhacid *Physornis brasiliensis*, which was over 2 m tall and had a head the size of a horse's, armed with a massive, predatory bill. The oldest Brazilian avian fossil is a feather from the Chapada de Araripe in north-east Brazil from the lower Cretaceous that is over 100 million years old. Sick then discusses the categories of Brazilian birds, including resident species, endemics (with a table of the 177 endemic

species), visiting and migrant species (distinguishing between resident migrants and hemispheric migrants, the latter 88 species listed in a table), introduced and recent immigrants, and synanthropic species. He then discusses population analysis and biodiversity, including the problems of calculating a total for the Brazilian avifauna (c.1,635 species), due to the discovery of new forms and the problem of taxonomic level, where some consider a given taxon a subspecies while others give it species status. The population analysis section cites the pioneer works in population studies with mist-nets by Novaes and Lovejoy, as well as discussing species-richness studies for Belém, Rio de Janeiro, the Reserva Ducke in Manaus, and the states of Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and the Federal District (Brasília). The final section of this chapter—"Sources"—seeks to explain the basic works followed in the book to orient taxonomic order and nomenclature (both scientific and vernacular).

The real heart of the book, however, begins on page 83, with an "Illustrated Guide to the Orders and Families of Brazilian Birds," where silhouettes of one member of each family are presented, along with a citation of the page number where the family treatment begins in the text. From here to page 642 one has a family-by-family introduction to the Brazilian avifauna, beginning with general considerations on world distribution (both geographic and ecological), fossil history, discussion of origins and relations with other birds, morphology, special adaptations and identification, vocalisations, feeding, behaviour, population analysis, annual cycle and mating, eggs, parental care and young, among other topics, depending on the particular family treated. There then follow individual species treatments, with emphasis on Atlantic forest and cerrado species (those that Sick knew best). There is information on total length, mass, status, distribution, vocalisations and biogeography. The relevant literature is cited and a specific bibliography completes each family treatment. In these sections, there is a wealth of first-hand information unavailable elsewhere. Sick was above all a field ornithologist and his more than 50 years of bird observations are consolidated on these pages. Sick was first trained as a musician, and his renditions of vocalisations were written in his own system. An old-style field man, he never, to my knowledge, carried a tape-recorder and microphone. Belton has thoughtfully translated even the Portuguese orthographic forms of Sick's versions of the vocalisations to a more English-language-compatible format.

A reason apart from acquiring this book is the beautiful set of illustrations, which depict a wide selection of Brazil's avifauna, but only about 20% of the total number of species. Paul Barruel is responsible for the majority of the pen-and-ink drawings generously scattered through the text, and the majority of the plates. The 43 original plates (i.e., also in the first Brazilian edition) are all his and 34 are in colour. Barruel is best known to bird book aficionados for his illustrations of *The birds of Surinam*. His paintings for Sick's book are even more handsome than those for Haverschmidt's. Plates 44 and 45 are new for the English edition and painted by John O'Neill. These illustrations are mostly of Brazilian endemics omitted from the original set and include Golden Parakeet *Guaruba guarouba*, Pearly Parakeet *Pyrrhura perlata*, Three-toed Jacamar *Jacamaralcyon tridactyla*, Great Xenops *Megaxenops parnaguae*, and the recently rediscovered Cherry-throated Tanager *Nemosia rourei* and Kinglet *Calyptura calyptura cristata* (the last two both feared extinct when the book was published). Plate 46 is a spectacular example of Urubu-Kaapor Indian feather work incorporating plumes from Channel-billed Toucan *Ramphastos vitellinus*, Guianan Red Cotinga *Phoenicircus carnifex* and Spangled Cotinga *Cotinga cayana*. It is not stated in the text, but Sick identified the sources of the feathers for Darcy and Berta Ribeiro's classic *Arte Plumária dos Índios Kaapor*, published in Rio de Janeiro in 1957. Misleading in the text accompanying the plate is acknowledgement to the Safra Bank for the illustration, leading one to believe that the piece belongs to the bank. In fact, it is part of the Goeldi Museum's ethnographic collections. In any case, Sick would be very pleased to know that this is now part of his book. The final plate is the reproduction of the Brazilian coast in Cantino's 1502 map, mentioned above, rather strangely referred to as a frontispiece (it is at the very end of the book).

Everyone interested in Neotropical birds must have this book or one of its Brazilian editions. For those who read Portuguese, the new (and unpredicted by Belton) Brazilian edition is the volume to acquire. As *Birds in Brazil* is extraordinary, *Ornitologia Brasileira* is simply magnificent. It has incorporated all the modifications present in the English language edition, but is even more up-to-date. José Fernando Pacheco (a student of Sick's) essentially retranslated *Birds in Brazil* back into Portuguese and re-incorporated the sections on morphology, biology and vocalisations lacking in the American edition (absent because they present items necessary for an introduction to ornithology, superfluous in a volume specifically on Brazilian birds for non-Brazilians). He also had access to Sick's extensive notes when he needed to check information. Pacheco is Brazil's leading ornithological historian, keeps a vast network of correspondents and is an avid devourer of the literature. Thus, virtually every new fact revealed from the closing of the American edition in 1993 until the closing of the new Brazilian edition in December 1996 has been incorporated. The new plates are included, as is a list of newly described species, those removed from the national list for nomenclatural reasons or lack of solid evidence, and changes in generic names. More surprising than the simple lists is that all these changes have been incorporated into the text. What's more, the bibliography is now more exhaustive, even including

additional references prior to 1993. Choosing *Birds in Brazil* or *Ornitologia brasileira* is a simple task based on language skills. Although US\$140.00 or R\$150.00 (essentially equivalent prices) may appear expensive, these books are worth every penny (or centavo).

David C. Oren

Handbook of the birds of the world Volume 4: sandgrouse to cuckoos edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott & Jordi Sargatal, 1997. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions. 674 pp, 70 colour plates, numerous colour photographs and distribution maps. UK£100 / US\$185.

Five years after the launch of the *Handbook of the birds of the world* the fourth volume has appeared. Previous volumes in the series have been welcomed with unparalleled enthusiasm worldwide and the editors must feel considerable pressure to keep up to expectations.

Judging from this volume they can handle it: building on the acclaimed format with the help of an impressive team of contributors, this volume starts with a foreword on species concepts by Jürgen Haffer and then covers six families: sandgrouse, pigeons and doves, cockatoos, parrots, turacos and cuckoos. A total of 837 species is treated, a record number for a single volume in the series so far. The contents of the species accounts, again with many references to recent literature, differs somewhat between the families. Voice for example is mentioned only for cuckoos, whereas only for parrot species is it mentioned whether they occur in a restricted range (using the somewhat awkward phrase “A BirdLife ‘restricted-range’ species”). All species are illustrated, on 70 plates. Many of these are real treats and some are dazzling: the macaws of course, but with stiff competition from turacos, rosellas, lorries etc. On the other hand a few birds are distinctly pale compared to their excellent portraits elsewhere in the book, for example Kakapo *Strigops habroptilus* and the crowned-pigeons *Goura* spp. Again all birds painted are not engaged in any activity other than sitting or standing. This continues to be a bit odd, but of course the pictures in the family accounts are there to make up for that.

The family introductions (apparently not covered in the index) are again well written, but there are only a few of them compared with earlier volumes. This has a side effect: they contain fewer pictures: 236 compared to an average of c.350 in earlier volumes. Whereas this must be considered a pity the quality is again excellent, with many rare, remote or otherwise remarkable species shown. I will admit to having been spoilt considerably by the earlier volumes. Surely pictures of the likes of Henderson Fruit-dove *Ptilinopus insularis* deserve more than a passing glance! Fans of Neotropical birds will probably be delighted to see beautiful shots of, for example, the Spix’s Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii*, a Purple-winged Ground-dove *Claravis godefrida* and a Red-fan Parrot *Deropterus accipitrinus* among many others. Nevertheless one would have to be quite single-minded not to be distracted by species from other regions: perhaps by a juvenile Long-billed Cuckoo *Ramphomantis megarhynchus* from Papua New Guinea that looks rather like a nunlet, or by a Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scythrops novaehollandiae* from Australia with the looks of a toucan!

Volume 4 is a worthy successor to the first three volumes. According to information on the publisher’s website (www.hbw.com), the next exciting volume “Barn Owls to Hummingbirds” (which also contains potoos *Nyctibius* spp., Oilbird *Steatornis caripensis* etc.) is well underway and scheduled to appear in July 1999. Don’t miss it.

Willem-Pier Vellinga

Una Lista anotada de Las Aves del Ecuador Continental / An annotated list of the birds of mainland Ecuador by R. S. Ridgely, P. J. Greenfield & M. G. Guerrero, 1998. Fundacion Ornitologica del Ecuador, CECIA. 132 pp. \$10.00.

This is a long-awaited and updated replacement for the 1990 *Lista de Aves del Ecuador*: 179 additional species have been recorded in the country since the first publication. Introductory and explanatory texts are provided in Spanish and English. For each species, scientific, English and Spanish names are presented; the Spanish names have been well chosen from the many possibilities available. The authors acknowledge that this has been a difficult task. Surely it is time for someone to produce a standardised list of Spanish names before the often unsuitable translations presented in the *Handbook of the birds of the world* gain general currency. It is pleasing to see that the English generic of whitestart has been adopted for the genus *Myioborus*.

Each species’ abundance in 14 life zones of the country is shown, with a geographic modifier clarifying the distribution within a life zone if necessary; this system is easy to use and makes the information readily accessible. The taxonomy follows that in the eagerly awaited *The Birds of Ecuador*; it is nice to see the new tapaculo *Scytalopus* taxonomy¹ included: this will surely make life a lot easier for visiting birders. The application of the term endemic to species restricted to Ecuador and Colombia or Peru is slightly unusual with

some relatively wide-ranging species being, in consequence, classified as endemic. Perhaps indicating species with restricted ranges (as in the BirdLife International approach) would have been more appropriate. All proceeds from sales of this book go to CECIA for conservation work in Ecuador. This great little book will be an indispensable tool for all with an interest in the birds of Ecuador and represents exceptional value for money—buy one and send a donation as well!

Rob Williams

Reference

1. Krabbe, N. & Schulenberg, T. S. (1997) Species limits and natural history of *Scytalopus tapaculos* (Rhinocryptidae), with descriptions of the Ecuadorian taxa, including three new species. *Orn. Monogr.* 48: 47–88.

The birds of Cabañas San Isidro by John V. Moore and Mitch Lysinger (1997) 154 species on two cassettes. Available from the largest suppliers of bird tapes in the US and the UK, UK£19.95. In Ecuador available from Libri Mundi and Cabañas San Isidro Quito office.

John V. Moore continues his splendid series of tapes of birds of Ecuador. He has taken previous criticism seriously (see *Cotinga* 6: 45) and is now cooperating with Mitch Lysinger, with additional recordings being supplied by Jonas Nilsson and Niels Krabbe. This is almost as complete as the selection can get.

Cabañas San Isidro is situated just north of the Guacamayos range on the east slope of the Andes. At present the lodge of San Isidro is the most comfortable place to access the subtropical zone on this slope, between Colombia and Peru.

The two tapes have an impressive number of cuts of 154 bird species. There are usually several cuts of each species, illustrating song, calls and response to playback. Recording of many species not previously available on commercial tapes are included. Some are widespread and common through the Andes, but others have restricted ranges or are rare. Although these tapes document the avifauna of a single locality, they will be useful for visitors to areas well away from the Guacamayos. I started finding Scaled Fruiteater *Ampelioides tshudii* at many localities once I learnt the call. Particularly helpful is the inclusion of the tapaculos, as these are better identified by vocalisations than plumage characters.

Even if there are calls that I will probably never be able to learn to separate at species level, such as high-pitched ‘squeaks’ of certain tanagers and fruiteaters, I am pleased to see them included, as they will be needed for reference and to identify background calls on my own recordings. Calls of obvious birds are also important to learn before a trip. For instance, I have always been alerted by the dry flight calls of Pale-footed Swallow *Notiochelidon flavipes*, but it is difficult to be certain without such a reference as this. Here you have Blue-and-white Swallow *N. cyanoleuca* and Pale footed Swallow in sequence. Distinguishing these two species should now be possible, even without optimal light conditions.

While playback of canned tapes should be used with much care, as the authors emphasise, especially at heavily birded sites, these tapes will be an excellent tool for exploratory birders undertaking fieldwork in less birded areas. I am sure that, with the help of these tapes, birders will find new localities for threatened and little-known species such as Bicolored Antvireo *Dysithamnus occidentalis* and White-faced Nunbird *Hapaloptila castanea*.

While the set is almost complete I missed a few key birds from the Guacamayos range. Two of these are the newly discovered form of Moustached Antpitta *Grallaria alleni* and Giant Antpitta *G. gigantea*—the latter more commonly known from sites near Mindo on the west slope. Both species have been recorded near Cabañas San Isidro. Perhaps the exclusion of these is due to the fact that the former awaits formal description and the latter has only recently been rediscovered (and taped) on the east slope of the Andes. Swallow-tailed Nightjar *Uropsalis segmentata*, Lyre-tailed Nightjar *Uropsalis lyra* and White-throated Screech-owl *Otus albogularis* are also not included, but this is a minor inconvenience as most birders will also carry the nightbird tapes (see *Cotinga* 6: 45–46).

The authors’ strategy has been to publish a near-complete set of recordings rather than wait until a complete set of recordings could be made, thus avoiding the risk of the product never being published. Considering that Moore has now published four lowland tapes and two from the subtropical Andes since 1993, I applaud this strategy. This is a very impressive production speed for a one-man initiative, of which even ARA records could be envious.

Although the loudness of the output could have been increased a little, the quality and clarity of the recordings are otherwise largely excellent. The identifications appear correct, although the authors have informed me of one minor misidentification: background calls announced as Emerald Toucan *Aulacorhynchus prasinus* on cuts 85.1, 118.4, and 133.2 actually belong to Highland Tinamou *Nothocercus bonapartei*. In summary, Moore and Lysinger present an excellent two-volume set which is strongly recommended to any

birder with an interest in the subtropical zone of the northern Andes. I am looking forward to future volumes covering other areas in Ecuador. Presently the authors are working, in conjunction with Paul Coopmans and Bob Ridgely, on a series covering the west slope, with the first tapes appearing later this year. It must be emphasised that birders planning to use these recordings should purchase their own copies. An initiative such as this definitely deserves all the support it can get.

Gunnar Engblom

Parrots. A guide to the parrots of the world by Tony Juniper & Mike Parr, illustrated by Kim Franklin, Robin Restall, Dan Powell, David Johnson and Carl D'Silva, 1998. Robertsbridge: Pica Press. 584 pp, 88 colour plates, many distribution maps, £35.00.

After many years of waiting, birdwatchers, parrot-lovers and ornithologists have an outstanding and excellent guide to one of the most threatened bird families of the world—the Psittacidae. This book will fulfil all the expectation and represents a landmark in guide books to Neotropical birds. The plates vary from poor to good in quality, and all species and subspecies are illustrated both perched and in flight. However, some subspecies (e.g. *Pyrrhura leucotis*) are badly drawn and appear like “spot the difference” illustrations.

The text provides the English name, scientific name, identification details, voice, distribution and status, ecology, description, sex / age differences, measurements, geographic variation and a list of references consulted. Each species' distribution is also mapped; these also show major rivers and political boundaries. Prior to the species texts, the book commences with a section discussing the origins and evolutionary relationships of the Psittacidae, parrot classification and their natural history. The conservation chapter is also very appropriate and up-to-date. Moreover, the authors fortunately used the new systematic classification for Neotropical parrots.

There are, however, some inevitable mistakes in a work of this magnitude which should be corrected in any future edition. I found many mistakes in the literature which was cited and for several species the text presents data not found in the bibliography (e.g. the diet of *Aratinga aurea* is based on Galetti & Pedroni¹ but this work is not listed in the references). Several well-known papers on parrot ecology appear to have been missed. A broader review of the literature concerning the Psittacidae can be found in the most recent volume of *Handbook of the birds of the world*. It would also have been useful to have included the local name(s) for species, where known, as this would have given the book more use in non-English-speaking countries. This is particularly important during field surveys, where useful information can often be gathered through interviewing local people. The distribution maps for some species are incorrect: for instance the range of *Amazona amazonica* within the Atlantic forest, and *Tricalaria malachitacea* is not mapped for Argentina and in some areas of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, where it occurs. These are just a few examples, and I am, obviously, not going to detail all the errors noted for each species, but more care needs to be taken when delimiting range maps.

Nonetheless, I am pleased to recommend this book. It is the most comprehensive and up-to-date guide to parrot ecology available, and I am sure it will help raise the level of awareness and interest in this poorly studied group of birds.

Mauro Galetti

Reference

1. Galetti, M. & Pedroni, F. (1996) Notes on the diet of the Peach-fronted Parakeet *Aratinga aurea* in the Serra do Cipo, Minas Gerais, Brazil. *Cotinga* 6: 59–60.

Birds of the West Indies by Herbert Raffaele, James Wiley, Orlando Garrido, Allan Keith & Janis Raffaele, principally illustrated by Tracy Pedersen & Kristin Williams, 1998. London: Christopher Helm (A. & C. Black). 511 pp, 86 colour plates, many distribution maps, UK£35.00.

Here it is—the long-awaited and eagerly anticipated successor to James Bond's book of the same name. It is, in short, superb and well worth the wait. As you would expect from a Helm identification guide, the book is beautifully presented and edited. The plates and species accounts are laid out in the same way as the other volumes in the series. What sets this one apart is the first 40 pages which cover not only explanations of the contents and scope of the book, but two brilliant chapters: one on biogeography of the Caribbean and the other conservation in the region. The conservation chapter includes a series of accounts for each major West Indian island or island group “prepared by a resident expert infinitely knowledgeable about local bird conservation concerns”. Both are clear, concise and accurate. There should be some sort of electronic device attached to the book, preventing anyone from looking at the plates and species accounts before they have read and digested the earlier chapters.

Another very useful feature of the book is the complete locality checklist showing the status of every species in each of the 25 islands or island groups. This is invaluable. There is also a complete index of local names as well as the usual index of English and scientific names. Unfortunately there is no complete bibliography, just one page of selected references. I know it would probably have made the book enormous (it already weighs in at over 1,200 g) but references for the Caribbean avifauna are spread over such a wide range of journals, some of them difficult to obtain, that I think a superb opportunity to bring these together has been missed.

There are 86 colour plates in the book of which 65 cover all species recorded in the West Indies, including a depiction of different island forms and sexes. Thirteen are of single important endemic species painted in habitat and eight are thus: two plates of Cuban endemics, two plates of Hispaniolan endemics, two plates of Jamaican endemics, one plate of Puerto Rican endemics and one of nine endemics found on other islands.

The standard of illustration is high but, as is often the case, jizz is a problem. I know the artists cannot hope to see every bird in the wild but some birds are shown with the wrong stance, others with the incorrect 'expression' and the colours are not always true. Having said that, incorrect identifications are unlikely to result from these inaccuracies.

The species accounts contain several sections for each species. The identification section is deliberately brief and concentrates on the diagnostic features. As the section on using the book explains, "we believe the plates suffice for distinguishing the species". Quite so. Voice, habitat and nesting have their own headings, as do status and range; this latter concentrates on details of the Caribbean situation. For most species, there is also a section headed "Comments" and these are a treasure trove—concise, helpful and often at variance with the dry prose typical of field guides. The descriptions of voice are also striking. Examples of both include: Wood Stork *Mycteria americana* voice "a gaspy grunt"; Great Lizard-cuckoo *Saurothera melini* "some country people claim that boiling this species in soup improves a person's appetite"; for American Kestrel *Falco sparverius* we learn that its Spanish name, Cernícalo, "is a modification of Tsar Nicholas, a formerly "high-perched monarch"; Puerto Rican Screech-owl *Otus nudipes*—"Puerto Rican folklore suggests that this owl feeds on coffee beans and can be used as a cure for asthma"; Grasshopper Sparrow *Ammodramus savannarum*—"on Cuba, it is disliked by quail hunters because their dogs erroneously point to the sparrow, rather than a hoped-for Northern Bobwhite"; Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*—"the distinctive call note sounds like a stone being thrown into a pile of gravel"; and Least Poorwill *Siphonorhis brewsteri*—"the downy young look like a fluffy ball of white cotton and appear to mimic a round, whitish cactus which grows on its nesting grounds. In fact, the first nestling was discovered by a botanist collecting cacti. The bird was thought to be a cactus until it moved". There are many more such gems to be found in the book.

Of course, it isn't perfect. I found eight typographical errors and, strangely, the figure "4" appears in the centre of the Swainson's Warbler *Limnothlypis swainsonii* illustration. Other errors or contentious points are few. Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* is described as a four-year gull but second-summer birds are virtually indistinguishable from adults. The description of Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* states that the head is black, although the plate correctly depicts it as being dark brown. The authors state that Greater Antillean Nightjar *Caprimulgus cubanensis* is considered two species by some authorities on the basis of coloration and vocalisations, but under "Voice" only the call given in Cuba is described. Both in the species account and facing the plate, Worm-eating Warbler *Helminthos vermivorus* is described as having greenish grey upperparts, but the illustration shows (correctly, in my view) brownish grey upperparts.

I am confused by the accounts for Thick-billed Vireo *Vireo crassirostris* and Mangrove Vireo *V. pallens*. Under "Similar species" to Thick-billed, we read "Mangrove Vireo, which reportedly occurs on Providencia", then under "Voice", "On Providencia the call is limited to a chatter", and under "Comments", "Thick-billed Vireos in Providencia have such a different song that some experts suggest that they belong to a separate species". Then under the brief account for Mangrove Vireo the authors state that "It is believed that former reports of Thick-billed Vireo from Providencia were mis-identifications. Providencia records of that species likely pertain to Mangrove Vireo". So, just what is the position? Does Thick-billed Vireo occur on Providencia or not?

The next point is perhaps more a matter for amusement. Each plate has pointers to key identification areas (in the manner of Peterson guides) and Plate 28, Pigeons and Doves 2 is no exception. For the sake of completeness, Passenger Pigeon *Ectopistes migratorius* has been included together with two identification pointers. I think that these could have been safely omitted!

These errors and quibbles seem, on the whole, trivial and in the context of the scope and detail of this book they are exactly that. Make no mistake—this book is superb. It should be on the bookshelves of every Neotropical Bird Club member and more affluent purchasers should take a spare copy to give away when they next visit the region. Royalties from the book will be used to support environmental efforts in the West Indies, so you will be helping twofold!

Andy Mitchell

Voices of Mexican sparrows (songs and calls) by J. W. Hardy & Larry L. Wolf, 1993. *Nineteen species on one cassette. Produced by ARA Records, Gainesville, Florida. Available in the UK from: Wildsounds, P. O. Box 9, Holt, Norfolk NR25 7XH, UK£10.95.*

The songs and calls of 19 species are reproduced on this tape. As usual the quality is very fine due to its production in the Bioacoustic Laboratory of the University of Florida. For some reason Bachman's (Pine Woods) Sparrow *Aimophila aestivalis* is featured on this tape. This species, as far as I can ascertain, has never been recorded in Mexico, being found solely in the south-eastern USA; whereas one of the rarest Mexican sparrows, the Sierra Madre *Ammodramus baileyi* is excluded. The Yellow-eyed Junco *Junco phaeotus* complex is ignored, and due to the fact that recent splits may soon occur, is unfortunate. This tape is very good, but could have been made excellent with the preceding additions and deletions.

Voices of Neotropical wood warblers by J. W. Hardy, Ben B. Coffey, Jnr. & George B. Reynard, 1994. *Sixty-three species on one cassette. Produced by ARA Records, Gainesville, Florida. Available in the UK from: Wildsounds, P. O. Box 9, Holt, Norfolk NR25 7XH, £10.95.*

This long-awaited tape is fantastic. The warbler songs of the West Indies, Central and South America are finally available to birders. The very first good recording of the Wrenthrush *Zeledonia coronata* is presented; the elusive insect-like buzz of the Elfin Woods Warbler *Dendroica angelae* can be heard if just faintly, while the ringing song of the Whistling Warbler *Catharopeza bishopi* blasts the eardrums like a cannon. The Arrow-headed Warbler *Dendroica pharetra* actually precedes the Elfin Woods Warbler on the tape, but not on the printed schedule, which is only a minor flaw. Grayson's Warbler *Parula (pitiayumi) graysoni* of Socorro Island, which the authors regard as specifically distinct from Tropical Parula *Parula pitiayumi*, has not yet been recognised by the American Ornithologists' Union.

Songs of Mexican birds by Ben B. Coffey, Jnr. & Lula C. Coffey, 1990. *Revised edition. Two hundred and forty-six species on two cassettes. Produced by ARA Records, Gainesville, Florida. Available in the UK from: Wildsounds, P. O. Box 9, Holt, Norfolk NR25 7XH, UK£21.95.*

These tapes are invaluable when birding Mexico, and have stood the test of time. They are still excellent, and among the best available. They are also entertaining as the folksy Coffey—the narrator—minces no words in his descriptions.

G. Michael Flieg