Neotropical Birding

THE BIRDING MAGAZINE OF THE NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB

Number 25 • Autumn 2019

SPECIAL 25TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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

NBC publishes two issues of *Neotropical Birding* and one issue of *Cotinga* each year.

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Neotropical Birding

BIRDING MAGAZINE OF THE NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB • NUMBER 25 • AUTUMN 2019

Adult male Three-wattled Bellbird *Procnias tricarunculatus*, Angeles Norte, San Ramón, Alajuela, Costa Rica, April 2016 (Jorge Chinchilla A.)

Welcome to *Neotropical Birding* 25!

In 2019, the Neotropical Bird Club (NBC) marks its 25th anniversary. In celebration, the 25th *Neotropical Birding* is a special edition. Across 96 pages (rather than the usual 80), it features articles commissioned to reflect on how the world of Neotropical birds has evolved over the past quarter-century.

Chris Balchin – as intimately involved in the NBC as anyone – guides us through the NBC's creation and development (page 3). Alex Lees, Joe Tobias and I present the outcome of late nights debating what might constitute the region's 25 most remarkable avian discoveries since 1994 (page 11). Raymond Jeffers offers a personal assessment of the 25 best Neotropical bird books published since the NBC was 'born' (page 33).

Contributors take as a baseline articles published in the first two volumes of *Cotinga* to review subsequent developments. Harold Greeney assesses the revolution in our understanding of antpittas since Niels Krabbe wrote about the then barely known Giant Antpitta *Grallaria gigantea* in 1994 (page 42). Alan Chamorro and Constantino Aucca consider efforts to save Peru's Junin Grebe *Podiceps taczanowskii* since Thomas Valqui used *Cotinga* 1 to express concern about the flightless waterbird's critical plight (page 52).

Continuing the theme of globally threatened birds, Graeme Green furnishes a personal perspective on the species enshrined in NBC's logo, Three-wattled Bellbird *Procnias tricarunculatus* (page 57). Meanwhile, *Neotropical Birding* has long been a platform for those who bird 'at the cutting edge'. On page 63, Juan Freile relates the unexpected discovery of a new hummingbird, Blue-throated Hillstar *Oreotrochilus cyanolaemus*. Tom Schulenberg then conjures his much-appreciated magic on recent taxonomic changes (page 73). In our final feature (page 80), I explore the South American Bird Fair, a now-annual event that would have been unthinkable back in 1994 when the Neotropical Bird Club was launched.

James Lowen, Senior Editor

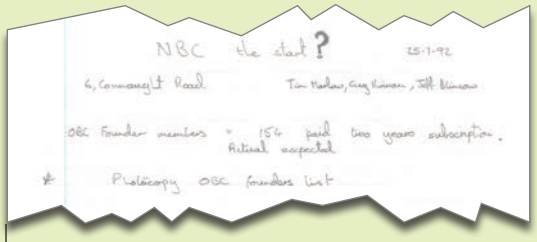
A potted history of the Neotropical Bird Club

Chris Balchin

How did the Neotropical Bird Club start – and why? And what has it achieved in the 25 years of its existence? Neotropical Birding *invited the man who has probably dedicated more of his life than anyone to helping the NBC to give his personal perspective on its story.*

For me, it all started in 1992 when fellow British birder Tim Marlow contacted me and asked: "Are you interested in starting a new club for the Neotropics based on the Oriental Bird Club?" Tim had been impressed by what the 'OBC' had achieved in promoting birds and bird conservation in Asia, and – along with his friend Guy Kirwan – was keen to do something equivalent for South and Central America, and the Caribbean. Tim's suggestion fell on fertile ground. As a 'world birder', I had always been motivated by the belief that I should give something back to conservation as opposed to just adding ticks to my list. I had also had numerous conversations with other birders about whether any North Americans might be forming such an organisation.

The credit for starting the ball rolling goes to Guy, who struck up discussion with Tim while they were journeying aboard on an overnight bus between Quito and Guayaquil in Ecuador. By the time they arrived, the pair had galvanised themselves into forming a 'club' dedicated to the birds of the Neotropics. In July 1992, Tim, Jeff Blincow and I gathered at Guy's house in Norwich, UK, to discuss how we might put the idea into practice. Between us we put together a list of people who might also be interested in establishing such an organisation and bounced around ideas about what it might most usefully do (Fig. 1). To be frank, I am not sure if *any* of us really knew what we were getting into – but we had a great deal of enthusiasm and knew we could benefit from the experience of two existing organisations: the Oriental Bird Club (formed in 1984; see orientalbirdclub.org) and the Ornithological Society of the Middle East (OSME, formed in 1978; osme.org).

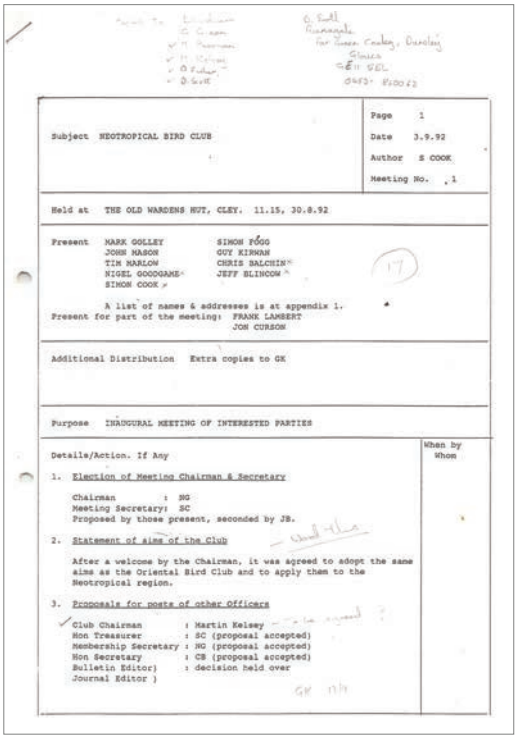

NBC the start? 25-1-92
6, Cromwell Road Tim Marlow, Guy Kirwan, Jeff Blincow
OBC Founder members = 154 paid two years subscription.
Actual expected
Photocopy OBC founders list

1 Chris Balchin's notes of the meeting (Norwich, July 1992) where the first plans for the Neotropical Bird Club were put in place. (Chris was clearly the NBC's natural secretary, right from the start! *Ed.*)

Momentum gathers

So it came to pass that on a warm sunny day the 'launch committee' convened at 11h15 on 30 August 1992 in the 'Old Warden's Hut' at Cley-next-the-sea, Norfolk, UK (Fig. 2). Those present were Jeff Blincow, Simon Cook, Jon Curson, Simon Fogg, Mark Golley, Nigel Goodgame, Guy Kirwan, Frank Lambert, Tim Marlow, John Mason and me. We agreed the name of the organisation – that bit was easy – and agreed to call our journal *Cotinga* (although *Crax* and *Tapaculo* ran it close). Given differences of opinion on what geographical coverage was intended by 'the Neotropics', we agreed to use the definition contained in *A dictionary of birds* (Campbell & Lack 1985), i.e.

"I enjoyed my spell chairing NBC and am proud of what NBC has done for its members and conservation over the last 25 years. Well done to all involved and especially to David Fisher, Chris Collins and Chris Balchin for their unstinting service and to Guy Kirwan and James Lowen for continuing to deliver such great products. When I retire, I hope to return to Council!"
Dave Capper, NBC chair 2001–03



Subject NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB

Page 1
Date 3.9.92
Author S COOK
Meeting No. 1

Held at THE OLD WARDENS HUT, CLEY. 11.15, 30.8.92

Present MARK GOLLEY, JOHN MASON, TIM MARLOW, NIGEL GOODGAME, SIMON COOK, SIMON FOGG, GUY KIRWAN, CHRIS BALCHIN, JEFF BLINCOW

A list of names & addresses is at appendix 1.
Present for part of the meeting: FRANK LAMBERT, JON CURSON

Additional Distribution Extra copies to GK

Purpose INAUGURAL MEETING OF INTERESTED PARTIES

Details/Action. If Any — When by Whom

1. Election of Meeting Chairman & Secretary

Chairman : NG
Meeting Secretary: SC
Proposed by those present, seconded by JB.

2. Statement of aims of the Club

After a welcome by the Chairman, it was agreed to adopt the same aims as the Oriental Bird Club and to apply them to the Neotropical region.

3. Proposals for posts of other Officers

Club Chairman : Martin Kelsey
Hon Treasurer : SC (proposal accepted)
Membership Secretary : NG (proposal accepted)
Hon Secretary : CB (proposal accepted)
Bulletin Editor) : decision held over
Journal Editor)

2 Official note of the August 1992 meeting that established the launch committee for the Neotropical Bird Club.

3 Never-previously-published candidate logos for the Neotropical Bird Club (Jeff Blincow).

Mexico, Central America, South America and its associated islands and the Caribbean.

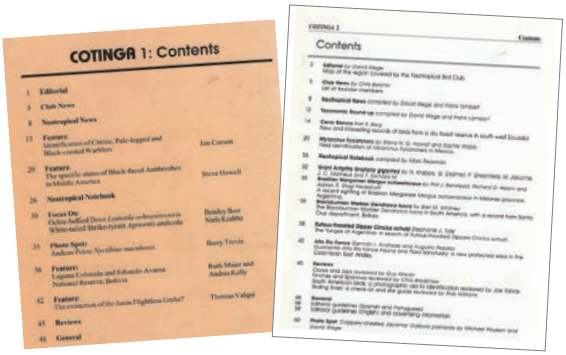
We also divvied out key responsibilities – including to people not present! Martin Kelsey was elected as chairman, Simon Cook as treasurer and Nigel Goodgame as membership secretary; I became secretary (a role I was to subsequently hold for a total of 17 years… and counting!). Jeff Blincow assumed the role of production & art editor, David Wege became senior editor of whatever publication we would produce. Mark Golley took charge of fundraising and publicity – immediately introducing a 'founder membership' scheme whereby new members would pay membership to cover the costs of the organisation's first year. In a little over two hours, we concluded the meeting, leaving with the enthusiasm to make the club happen, and a lengthy 'to-do' list...

Becoming real

We soon produced the first NBC flyer, which promoted the founder membership scheme. (I recall many excursions for vagrant birds across the UK where I took the opportunity to slip this promotional material under the windscreen wipers of my fellow twitchers.) Jeff Blincow presented the launch committee with a number of designs for the NBC logo, including those in Fig. 3. These featured a variety of charismatic Neotropical species including Andean Cock-of-the-rock *Rupicola peruvianus*, Long-wattled Umbrellabird *Cephalopterus penduliger*, Resplendent Quetzal *Pharomachrus mocinno*, Three-wattled Bellbird *Procnias tricarunculatus* and Toco Toucan *Ramphastos toco*. From this wealth of artistic talent, we ended up choosing Jeff's Three-wattled Bellbird – which remains as the NBC logo today (despite a very brief change to another design!). For more on this spectacular cotinga, see Graeme Green's article on page 57.

By late 1993, the launch committee had expanded to include Barnaby Briggs, Colin Bushell

"I'm so thankful and proud of the Neotropical Bird Club for what has achieved during these 25 years for bird research and conservation in the Americas. The articles in *Cotinga*'s 40 issues – being published in English, Spanish or Portuguese – are easily accessible to Latin American researchers."
Nancy Hilgert de Benavides, NBC patron



4 The contents page for *Cotinga* 1 and *Cotinga* 2.

(responsible for arranging speaker meetings), Graeme Green, Mark Pearman, Chris Sharpe, Joe Tobias and Rob Williams. We had accumulated 173 'Founder Members'. We were all set.

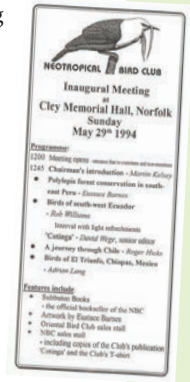
Go live

In February 1994 we published the first edition of *Cotinga* – 60 pages that included articles on birds as diverse as Junin Grebe *Podiceps taczanowskii*, Ochre-bellied Dove *Leptotila ochraceiventris*, White-tailed Shrike-Tyrant *Agriornis albicauda*, Black-faced Antthrush *Formicarius analis* and Black-crested Warbler *Myiothlypis nigrocristata* (Fig. 4). The issue also made clear the NBC's aim – "to foster an interest in the birds of the Neotropics amongst bird-watchers [sic] throughout the world and increase their awareness of the importance of support for conservation in the region" – and our objectives.

The issue included a tribute to Ted Parker III, the brilliant American field birder, who had sadly been killed in a plane crash in the previous August. A pioneer of modern Neotropical ornithology, Ted had been a major advocate of the NBC during its early development. In the inaugural *Cotinga* editorial, David Wege wrote that: "It is hoped that the NBC through the publication of *Cotinga* can in some small way start to redress this loss, but perhaps more importantly help to carry on what Ted did best – to fire and nurture an enthusiasm in **all** things Neotropical amongst anyone with their ears and eyes open and willing to listen and learn" (Wege 1994).

Meetings and gatherings

We held our first members' meeting at Cley-next-the-sea, Norfolk, in May 1994 (Figs. 5–6). This was an auspicious event, not least because it was used to launch the book *New World Warblers* by Jon Curson *et al.* (1994). We also raised funds by selling our first merchandise, a t-shirt featuring Clive



5 Flyer for the inaugural NBC meeting at Cley-next-the-sea, UK, in May 1994.

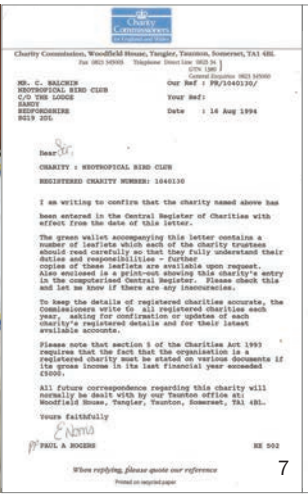
KEY FIGURES IN THE NBC, 1994–2019

Chairs Martin Kelsey (1992–97), Rob Williams (1997–2001), Dave Capper (2001–03), Carl Downing (2003–09), David Fisher (2009–11, 2015–) and Chris Balchin (2011–15). **Secretary** Chris Balchin (1992–2005, 2015–), Trevor Warren (2005–09), Megan Crewe (2009–10) and Gordon Ellis (2009–15). **Treasurer** Simon Cook (1992–93), Nigel Goodgame (1993–98) and Chris Collins (1998–). **Vice-chair** Andy Mitchell (1998) and Dave Capper (1999–2000).

Council and launch committee Chris Balchin (1992–2005, 2007–), Jeff Blincow (1992–95), Colin Bushell (1992–96), Simon Cook (1992–97), Jon Curson (1992–96), Simon Fogg (1992–97), Mark Golley (1992–93, Nigel Goodgame (1992–2004), Graeme Green (1992–2000), Guy Kirwan (1992–2004), Frank Lambert (1992–94), Tim Marlow (1992–2000), the late John Mason (1992–97), Mark Pearman (1992–95), Roberto Philips (1992), Chris Sharpe (1992–94, 2016–18), David Wege (1992–96), Rob Williams (1992–2002, 2016–), Nancy Hilgert de Benavides (1993), Barnaby Briggs (1993–94), Joe Tobias (1993–97), Cris Baker (1994–97), Natasha White (1995–97), Wendy Balchin (1996), Dave Gandy (1996–97), Ian Henshaw (1996–2002), Geoff McMullan (1996–97), Rick Simpson (1996–97), Chris Collins (1997–), James Lowen (1997–2008), Andy Mitchell (1996–2006), Carl Downing (1998–), David Fisher (1998–), the late Juan Mazar Barnett (1998–2002), Tom Stuart (1998–), Dave Capper (2001–04), the late Richard Ffrench (2001–02), Sue Johns (2001–06), Corinne Kennedy (2002), Keith Beswick (2003–05), Brian Cox (2003–12), Trevor Warren (2003–09, 2013–15), Thomas Donegan (2004–08), Patrick Warwick (2004–05), Jenny Arias (2006–09), Charles Wilkins (2006–), Megan Crewe (2007–13), Diego Cisneros–Heredia (2008–11), Gordon Ellis (2008–18), Stuart Elsom (2008–11), Martin Fowlie (2008–11), Jez Bird (2010–16), Alex Lees (2010–18), Rob Martin (2012–13), Graham Ekins (2013–15), Roberta Goodall (2013–), Manuel Sanchez (2013–), Mike Dawson (2016–) and John Thirtle (2016–).

Others There are also many people who have not served on Council or the launch committee, but who have made major contributions to the running of the club. We particularly thank Janette Rowland for looking after the club finances, Anna Hughes for support at the Birdfair and Raymond Jeffers for his advice and fundraising.

6



Charity Commissioners

Charity Commission, Woodfield House, Tangier, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4BL

MR. C. BALCHIN
NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB
C/O THE LODGE
SANDY
BEDFORDSHIRE
SG19 2DL

Our Ref : PR/1040130/
Your Ref:
Date : 16 Aug 1994

Dear Sir,

CHARITY : NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB

REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1040130

I am writing to confirm that the charity named above has been entered in the Central Register of Charities with effect from the date of this letter.

The green wallet accompanying this letter contains a number of leaflets which each of the charity trustees should read carefully so that they fully understand their duties and responsibilities - further copies of these leaflets are available upon request. Also enclosed is a print-out showing this charity's entry in the computerised Central Register. Please check this and let me know if there are any inaccuracies.

To keep the details of registered charities accurate, the Commissioners write to all registered charities each year, asking for confirmation or updates of each charity's registered details and for their latest available accounts.

Please note that section 5 of the Charities Act 1993 requires that the fact that the organisation is a registered charity must be stated on various documents if its gross income in its last financial year exceeded £5000.

All future correspondence regarding this charity will normally be dealt with by our Taunton office at: Woodfield House, Tangier, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4BL.

Yours faithfully

PAUL A ROGERS RE 502

When replying, please quote our reference

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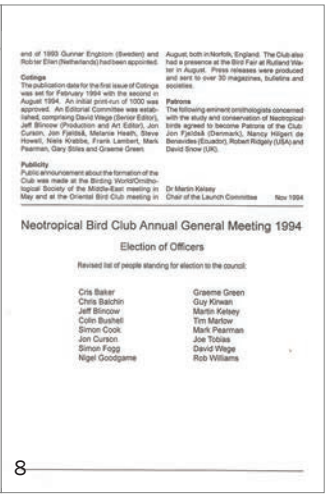

and of 1993 Gunnar Engblom (Sweden) and Rob ter Ellen (Netherlands) had been appointed.

Cotinga
The publication date for the first issue of Cotinga was set for February 1994 with the second in August 1994. An initial print-run of 1000 was approved. An Editorial Committee was established, comprising David Wege (Senior Editor), Jeff Blincow (Production and Art Editor), Jon Curson, Jon Fjeldså, Melanie Heath, Steve Howell, Niels Krabbe, Frank Lambert, Mark Pearman, Gary Stiles and Graeme Green.

Publicity
Public announcement about the formation of the Club was made at the Birding World/Ornithological Society of the Middle-East meeting in May and at the Oriental Bird Club meeting in August, both in Norfolk, England. The Club also had a presence at the Bird Fair at Rutland Water in August. Press releases were produced and sent to over 30 magazines, bulletins and societies.

Patrons
The following eminent ornithologists concerned with the study and conservation of Neotropical birds agreed to become Patrons of the Club: Jon Fjeldså (Denmark), Nancy Hilgert de Benavides (Ecuador), Robert Ridgely (USA) and David Snow (UK).

Dr Martin Kelsey
Chair of the Launch Committee Nov 1994

Neotropical Bird Club Annual General Meeting 1994

Election of Officers

Revised list of people standing for election to the council:

Cris Baker
Chris Balchin
Jeff Blincow
Colin Bushell
Simon Cook
Jon Curson
Simon Fogg
Nigel Goodgame
Graeme Green
Guy Kirwan
Martin Kelsey
Tim Marlow
Mark Pearman
Joe Tobias
David Wege
Rob Williams

8

6 (A youthful-looking) Chris Balchin at the first NBC meeting at Cley-next-the-sea, UK, in May 1994 (Jeff Blincow).

7 Approval of the UK Charities Commission for the establishment of the Neotropical Bird Club.

8 The first official Council of the newly established Neotropical Bird Club – taken from the trustees report to the first AGM in November 1994.

Byers' painting of manakins which had adorned the cover of *Cotinga* 1. The record for that meeting noted more than 150 attendees and sales of 50-plus t-shirts and numerous copies of *New World Warblers*.

We were already spreading the word far and wide. The previous year, I had represented the fledgling NBC at the British Birdwatching Fair ('Birdfair'), sharing a stand with the West African Ornithology Society (which was later subsumed into the African Bird Club). In 1996 the NBC attended the Birdfair in our own right and with our own stand. We have been present ever since, handing out hot-off-the-press publications and nattering about all things Neotropical with perhaps tens of thousands of visitors over the years.

We also took pains to promote the NBC in the Neotropical region. I have a special memory from December 1994, when Rob Williams and I visited Loja in southern Ecuador. I took the opportunity to distribute NBC flyers and car stickers to local birders, including those from Fundación Arcoiris Ecuador, and to young British conservationists running a project called 'Parrots in Peril'. I was a passenger in car travelling to Zamora when the driver excitedly pointed at the car in front of us, which was proudly sporting a car sticker.

Back in the nineties, birders could also act as walking billboards for the NBC, by wearing Club clothing. We built on the success of the first NBC t-shirt by producing new designs each year (Fig. 9). These were eagerly awaited and sold well, raising important funds for the NBC. Somewhere around the turn of the millennium, bird-design t-shirts seemed to go out of fashion. Sadly they are no longer economic to produce. The NBC is enormously grateful to the various artists who produced these designs for us – and I lament their demise.

"As nominated Chairperson, I approached possible patrons. David Snow immediately responded positively. I think that he would have been hugely proud of the NBC's achievements. Bob Ridgely was also delighted to become a patron. His initial response spoke volumes: "How come it's you Brits that come up with these great ideas?"
Martin Kelsey, NBC chair 1992–97

Corporates, charity and credibility

Alongside founder members, we also sought 'corporate supporters' (originally known as 'corporate sponsors') to boost finances and make a clear connection between the worlds of commerce and conservation. Although we got nowhere with some big corporations, other companies were pleased to support us. *Cotinga* 1 featured full-page advertisments for BirdQuest, Subbuteo Natural History Books, VIREO (remember them?!) and Ornitholidays. The NBC is enormously grateful

9 Sample NBC t-shirts on sale in the 1990s (Chris Balchin).

to the long list of corporate supporters over the subsequent 25 years.

One vital bit of bureaucracy involved establishing the NBC as a registered charity. UK rules governing the operation and conduct of charities are very strict and a number of conditions must be met. But by becoming a non-profit organisation, we avoided the need to run the NBC as a public or private limited company, which would have been unsustainable. To this end, we were required to form a committee of trustees (formally known as 'Council') and produce a constitution (which we based on that of the Oriental Bird Club). This was submitted to the UK Charities Commission and, after what seemed like ages although in reality was only a few months, we were granted charitable status on 16 August 1994 (Fig. 7).

To give the NBC further credibility, eminent ornithologists concerned with the study and conservation of Neotropical birds were invited to become patrons. Jon Fjeldså, Nancy Hilgert de Benevides, Robert Ridgely and David Snow helped us in this way; so too would Ted Parker III had his untimely death not intervened. *Cotinga* 2 was the first to mark their support.

On 19 November 1994 the NBC held its first Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Ealing town hall, London, UK. The 'launch committee' was stood down and replaced by first the first formally elected Council (Fig. 8). We were now officially the Neotropical Bird Club.

Conservation Awards Programme

Conservation has been integral to the NBC since the outset. Indeed, the word 'conservation' appears not once but six times in the NBC's initial aim and objectives as published in *Cotinga* 1. We have long made it a priority to give financial support to activities directed at conserving Neotropical birds, particularly those considered globally threatened given that these represent the most urgent conservation priorities. In 1996 we announced our first conservation award (*Cotinga* 6: 13–15), a grant to fund survey work in *Polylepis* woodland at Abra Malaga in Cuzco, Peru, home of Royal Cinclodes *Cinclodes aricomae* and White-browed Tit-Spinetail *Leptasthenura xenothorax*.

From this inaugural award, we have greatly expanded the scheme, increasing both the number of grants given and their value. To date what has become known as the NBC Conservation Awards Programme has allocated grants totalling £188,000 (US$250,000) to projects across 20 countries. A useful summary of the programme, including its impact on bird conservation and legacy, during the years 2001–2010 was published in *Neotropical Birding* 12 (Stuart *et al.* 2013), and an article on developments since is in the offing.

The Conservation Awards Programme has evolved greatly over the past 23 years. It is worth detailing the fine tuning of the current process, so that readers can understand how carefully the NBC funds conservation. All applications are initially assessed for suitability to ensure that they are compatible with the NBC constitution. Eligible applications are sent to an assessment sub-committee plus additional reviewers with expertise in a particular aspect of the application. Each reviewer scores the application against a suite of categories (e.g. conservation value, methodology and value to the local community). The sub-committee select the applications that they feel

THE COTINGA 'ART GALLERY'

The cover painting for *Cotinga* 1 – which depicted three genera of manakins – was by artist Clive Byers and reproduced courtesy of Graeme Green. Paintings have subsequently graced the front cover of each of the 40 volumes of *Cotinga* since – and the cover of *Cotinga* 41, produced alongside *Neotropical Birding* 25, comprises a collage of them. For this, we are very grateful to a series of talented artists from around the world. In order of first contribution, these are: Clive Byers, Jon Fjeldså, Lyn Wells, David Beadle, John P. O'Neill, Sophie Webb, Eustace Barnes, Kester Wilson, J. Searight, Aldo Chiappe, Pedro Regaldo Ruiz, Eduardo Parentoni Brettas, Andrew C. Vallely, Jaime A. Chaves, Oscar Tintaya, Barry Kent MacKay, Richard Johnson, Pat Latas, José Merizio, John Gale, Chris Lodge, Rafael Dutra, Luis G. Pagano, Jen Brunfield, Tomasz Cofta, David Tomb, Erin Johnson and Gonzalo Iván Nazati Velia.

10 A selection of *Cotinga* covers.

11 All 25 *Neotropical Birding* covers.

NBC CORPORATE SUPPORTERS/SPONSORS

The following have participated in the NBC Corporate Supporter or Corporate Sponsor schemes at some point since 1994. Our gratitude goes to them all plus other companies that have helped us considerably! Our thanks to Birding Brazil Tours, Birdfinders, Birding Ecotours, Birding North Peru, BirdQuest, Canopy Family, Ecuador Experience, El Septimo Paraíso, Geodyssey, Green Tours – Peru, In Focus, Kolibri Expeditions, Limosa, Lynx Edicions, Manu Expeditions, Napo Wildlife Center, Naturetrek, Ornitholidays, Rockjumper Birding Tours, Serra dos Tucanos, Subbuteo Natural History Books Ltd, Sunbird, Swarovski Optik Ltd, VIREO and Wildwings.

deserve a grant and recommends them to the NBC Council which then determines which to fund.

Running such a programme has required an immense amount of effort from a large number of individuals over the years – and the Club is grateful to them all. I congratulate every single recipient of a NBC Conservation Award.

Publications

Cotinga has gone from strength to strength since its launch issue. For the first 15 years, we published two volumes per year – but have since moved to a single 'bumper' volume. *Cotinga* has evolved from what was initially predominantly a 'birding' magazine into a peer-reviewed and highly regarded ornithological journal where, to quote the editorial guidelines, "the accent… is on new distributional and temporal information, including new country records, new data concerning biology, particularly breeding, and novel interpretations concerning taxonomy, particularly descriptions of new taxa". It has become a platform for upcoming ornithologists to publish their findings; many authors have become key figures in conservation in the Neotropical region. This is important stuff for which we must thank, above all, the four individuals who have served as Senior and/or Managing Editors (in chronological order): David Wege, Guy Kirwan, George Wallace and Juan Freile.

The transition of *Cotinga*'s focus from birding to ornithology created space for the NBC to produce *Neotropical Birding*. First published in 2006 and moving to two issues per year in 2009, 'NB' is explicitly and unashamedly 'the birding magazine of the Neotropical Bird Club'. For many people, *Neotropical Birding* has become the NBC's flagship, and members are highly complimentary of it. For this thanks are due to those who have taken the editorial helm: David Fisher, Chris Collins, James Lowen, Nacho Areta, Guy Kirwan and Chris Sharpe.

The next 25 years?

Now looking to the future, what are my hopes for the NBC? Where would I, personally, like the NBC to be in 2044, when, all being well, it will celebrate its 50th anniversary?

Firstly, I hope that the NBC will still be transmitting its core message – that of the importance of encouraging enthusiasm in the interest and conservation of Neotropical birds and their habitats. Secondly, I hope that we will have smashed the threshold of donating US$1 million to the region through our Conservation Awards Programme. Thirdly, I hope that the NBC becomes based in and run from the Neotropics: although I firmly believe in what we do, I am constantly conscious that the organisation is currently external to the region that we serve.

One thing is for sure there will always be species and habitats in the Neotropics that are under threat – the consequences of competing priorities between the environment and humanity. Until or unless this changes, there will always be a need for the NBC.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Jeff Blincow for permission to reproduce his logo designs and photograph, and all those listed in the sidebar as having played a role in the running of the NBC. I thank the NBC patrons and former chairs for offering messages celebrating our 25th anniversary.

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Frontiers of knowledge: a quarter-century of Neotropical discovery

James Lowen, Alexander Lees and Joe Tobias

There is arguably no greater thrill for a birder, ornithologist, ecologist or conservationist than to discover something new. But what are the most jaw-dropping Neotropical discoveries since the Neotropical Bird Club was founded in 1994? Specifically, what are our 'top 25' (revelations) of the last 25 (years)?

In this article, we seek to celebrate a quarter-century of ornithological discoveries across the Neotropical region since 1994, when the Neotropical Bird Club was established. Twenty-five remarkable discoveries across the last 25 years. We apply a broad church to the definition of 'discovery'. We showcase astonishing new species for science. We cheer for birds feared extinct but – against expectations – found to persist. We gasp at gobsmacking acts of vagrancy. We salute unanticipated information on avian distributions. And we doff our hats to amazing ecological discoveries and unanticipated taxonomic revelations.

Deciding what to include has not been easy. Anything novel, almost by definition, is exciting. And there is much from which to choose. That said, any selection involves considerable subjectivity because one person's remarkable can be another's run-of-the-mill. In the hope of reaching a balanced consensus, we joined forces as co-authors rather than giving a single writer free rein; we crowdsourced ideas in person and via social media (particular thanks to the many contributors to a thread on the NBC Facebook group); and we argued long into the night to whittle down a mighty longlist into the 25 discoveries that we hereby present. (In the text or

1 Pink-legged Graveteiro *Acrobatornis fonsecai*, Mascote, Bahia, Brazil, December 2017 (Ciro Albano/NE Brazil Birding).

in sidebars, we honour several events or species that narrowly missed out.) We don't ask that you agree with us on every single selection – but we do invite you to raise a glass to whomever made the discovery.

New to science

Can there be anything more heart-pounding for a birder than hearing or seeing a bird that is so different from anything known to exist that it is wholly, unequivocally, absolutely new to science? Two of us have an *inkling* what this feels like from our own Neotropical fieldwork, but only that – as none of our discoveries involved encountering a radically distinctive new species – so we can only imagine the joy, panic and work involved. AL recorded a mystery song in rainforests of the eastern Amazon which would later prove to be a tiny undescribed pygmy-tyrant (Lees *et al.* 2014a), informally known as 'Maranhao-Piaui Pygmy Tyrant'. AL also rediscovered a piculet of unknown taxonomic affinity (Lees *et al.* 2014b) and was a co-author on a new scythebill taxon for which recognition of species status has been contentious. JT has been hot on the heels of several discoveries, including Rufous Twistwing *Cnipodectes superrufus* in Peru – of which species, more later – and Santa Marta Screech-Owl *Megascops gilesi* in Colombia (Tobias 2007), and has also discovered two unnamed but not exactly distinctive taxa of his own in Bolivia – an antbird and an antpitta – both of which are in the very slow process of being described in publications. Exciting stuff, but not quite the bombshell ticket.

The new-species bombshell, in its purest form, involves breathtaking surprise and at least a frisson of mystique. JT fondly recalls visiting Luiz Gonzaga in 1995, opening a private specimen drawer in Luiz's office at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro… then pulling out a bird that utterly perplexed him. What the hell genus did it even come from? Luiz was coy about its identity – which was revealed the following year to be 1 **Pink-legged Graveteiro *Acrobatornis fonsecai*** (Pacheco *et al.* 1996; Figs. 1–2). With anatomical, plumage and behavioural features marking it out as a previously unknown genus of furnariid, the Graveteiro was a spectacular discovery in its own right. But even more astonishing was that it was apparently restricted to an anthropogenic habitat (cocoa plantations) and that its very obvious nests even dangled above the BR101, a major highway in a relatively populated region of Brazil. Discovered within a year of the

2 Pink-legged Graveteiro *Acrobatornis fonsecai*, Serra Bonita, Camacan, Bahia, Brazil, November 2010 (Ciro Albano/NE Brazil Birding). Adult (left) feeding the contrastingly brown juvenile.

NBC's inception, here was a bird hiding in plain sight. What better species to kick off this article?

The past quarter-century has witnessed an explosion in the number of Neotropical bird species – a phenomenon that has been integral to *Neotropical Birding* since its very first issue when Chris Balchin (2006) rummaged through "a potpourri" of recently described birds from the region. "The great majority [of new species] arose," wrote David Brewer – author of *Birds new to science* (Brewer 2018a) – in an article in this magazine last year (Brewer 2018b), "because forms previously regarded as subspecies were reclassified as full species". This splitting has been facilitated by our improved technical ability to analyse and compare vocalisations, an ever-increasing use of molecular genetics and greater rigour in the application of morphological criteria. Nevertheless, splitting does not generate the same adrenalin rush as finding a wholly new taxon, so we have excluded such 'discoveries' from our list. Instead we present only truly new taxa.

Two further Brazilian endemics make the grade. 2 **Araripe Manakin *Antilophia bokermanni*** (Fig. 3) is perhaps the most visually arresting novel species to have come out of South America for decades – which may explain why it has featured on the front cover of *Neotropical*

3 Araripe Manakin *Antolophia bokermanni*, Chapada do Araripe, Ceará, Brazil, June 2010 (Ciro Albano/ NE Brazil Birding).

Birding not once but twice (issues 5 and 23). Artur Coelho originally heard the bird singing in 1994, but it took until 1996 for him and Weber Silva to track down the songster and then two further years to describe it (Coelho & Silva 1998). The precise location where the duo first clapped eyes on the bird is now a water park and the remaining tiny population is restricted to a single plateau. Little wonder that this ivory, ebony and scarlet stunner is Critically Endangered. Despite its strikingly distinctive appearance, the highly localised Araripe Manakin is genetically similar to its widespread relative, Helmeted Manakin *A. galeata* (Rêgo *et al.* 2010, Luna *et al.* 2017), suggesting very recent divergence. Nonetheless, the two lineages seem to justify treatment as separate species because subsequent research has revealed consistent divergence across much of the genome and no sign of hybridisation (Amaral *et al.* 2018).

During the mid-late noughties, two of us (AL and JL) individually enjoyed excited conversations with the late Juan Mazar Barnett – Argentine ornithologist and former NBC Council member – about the latest developments with a furnariid that he and Dante Buzzetti had seen at Murici, Alagoas, in 2002 and subsequently. They were adamant it was undescribed, and that perhaps confusion had crept in because this mystery bird closely resembled Alagoas Foliage-gleaner *Philydor novaesi*, already treasured as a 'star' species at Murici, but displayed characteristics of a treehunter *Cichlocolaptes*.

Careful re-examination of museum specimens of *novaesi* led to their reidentification as this unnamed treehunter. Two years after Juan's death, the species was formally described as the aptly named 3 **Cryptic Treehunter *C. mazarbarnetti***, Dante simultaneously co-describing it with and naming the species after Juan (Mazar Barnett & Buzzetti 2014). That would be story enough, but in 2016 the Brazilian Government officially declared both Cryptic Treehunter and Alagoas Foliage-gleaner to be extinct, last seen in 2007 and 2011 respectively (Lees & Pimm 2015). A thrilling discovery and a double extinction: the stuff of fables and a reminder of how much remains to be learnt in the Neotropics, and how easily it can be lost.

The next trio of discoveries all come from Peru. The first is a slight cheat in that it covers not one but four species. As explained by Shany *et al.* (2007) and Alonso *et al.* (2012), a decade of bird surveys in a fairly small area of 4 **white-sand forests near Iquitos** (dpto. Loreto) led to the description of at least four biogeographical

endemics new to science between 1998 and 2005. The discoveries of Ancient Antwren *Herpsilochmus gentryi* (Fig. 4), Allpahuayo Antbird *Percnostola arenarum*, Mishana Tyrannulet *Zimmerius villarejoi*, and Iquitos Gnatcatcher *Polioptila clementsi* were significant in their own right (even if the taxonomic status of the latter is currently subject to dispute).

But such an unexpected accumulation of avian novelty also served to underscore the importance of poor-soil avifaunas – leading to new species such as Campina Jay *Cyanocorax hafferi* and Chico's Tyrannulet *Z. chicomendesi* being found in white-sand enclaves in the Brazilian Amazon (Whitney and Cohn-Haft 2013). Indeed, the latter remarkable agglomeration of new taxa – 15 presented as novel species – marginally misses out on a 'batch-award' berth in the top 25 because it is more of a 'watershed moment' (highlighting cryptic Amazonian diversity) than a standalone discovery and, to a certain extent, because of its publication in a non-peer reviewed outlet, which has prompted some controversy.

Rivalling Araripe Manakin for generating astonishment when its discovery was announced was **5 Scarlet-banded Barbet *Capito wallacei*** (O'Neill *et al.* 2000; Fig. 5). In July 1996 on an isolated mountain ridge – 'Peak 1538', now known informally as 'Barbet Peak' – in a remote part of southwest Loreto, Dan Lane clapped eyes on an unknown, brightly coloured barbet. "My jaw dropped," he later recalled in an article recounting the exciting discovery (Lane 2012). "The bird I am now looking at is a new species of barbet…" Lane somehow managed to calmly dictate into his tape recorder. Lane is now a well-established figure in Neotropical ornithology, but that Peru trip was the very first visit to South America for the man who will forevermore be nicknamed 'Barbet Boy'. What a start.

Lane has rarely been far from the action since, but arguably his most thrilling subsequent discovery has yet to formally hit the record almost

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4 Ancient Antwren *Herpsilochmus gentryi*, Allpahuayo-Mishana reserve, Loreto, Peru (José Álvarez Alonso).

5 Scarlet-banded Barbet *Capito wallacei*, Plataforma, San Martín, Peru, July 2018 (Steve Huggins; pbase.com/sjhuggins).

6–7 Undescribed tanager, nicknamed 'Kill Bill Tanager' or 'San Pedro Tanager', Parque Nacional Madidi, Bolivia, October 2018 (David Fisher).

8 Rufous Twistwing *Cnipodectes superrufus*, Extrema, Pando, Bolivia, November 2004 (Joe Tobias).

two decades on. This argues for its exclusion from this list. But how could we do such a thing, given that the bird is widely known, occasionally twitchable and even nicknamed **6** '**Kill Bill Tanager**' (Figs. 6–7) in homage to the yellow catsuit-clad character Beatrix Kiddo played by Uma Thurman in Quentin Tarantino's 2003 film *Kill Bill* (a far sexier moniker than 'San Pedro Tanager', the alternative name in circulation)? We bet the final common or scientific name will be good too…

In 2000, Dan was guiding when he found a striking golden-yellow tanager – almost recalling an Old World oriole *Oriolus* – near Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge on Manu Road. It took until the equivalent tour three years later for Dan to bump into the bird again. A subsequent expedition by Dan and NBC stalwart Barry Walker secured a specimen but – and bad luck does not even begin to describe what happened next – this was left unattended briefly… and was seriously damaged by a scavenging mammal, perhaps an opossum or rat. The next twist in the tale came in 2011 when Frank Rheindt found the tanager near Apolo, Bolivia, suggesting that it has a wider range or more extensive movements than previously believed. Truly remarkable.

Dan Lane is also integral to the story of our seventh new species for science:

7 **Rufous Twistwing *Cnipodectes superrufus*** (Fig. 8). This could easily have been the bird that got away. In 1990, Grace Servat collected a male in Manú, southeast Peru, prepared it as a specimen and made the best-guess that it was a Rufous Casiornis *Casiornis rufus*. Twelve years later, Dan Lane opened the casiornis drawer in Lima museum… and realised that he was looking at a new species of *Cnipodectes*. Shortly afterwards, after rumours had filtered to the UK,

9 Jocotoco Antpitta *Grallaria ridgelyi*, Tapichalaca, Loja, Ecuador, October 2009 (Nigel Voaden; flickr.com/photos/nvoaden).

Frank Lambert took brief video footage of an unidentified tyrant flycatcher and emailed it to JT, who told him it was likely the new mystery twistwing.

The bird was formally described in 2007 (Lane *et al.* 2007), by which time the voice had been recorded, leading to a flurry of in-field encounters from several sites, including records from Bolivia and Brazil (Tobias *et al.* 2008). Despite this region being fairly heavily surveyed by birders and ornithologists for many years, a sensational find had been lurking in dense lowland bamboo forests across a wide area (Tobias 2007). More than a decade on, almost everything that is known about this flycatcher is contained in the type description and in Tobias *et al.* (2008).

We now switch to a mossy trail through the cloud forests of southern Ecuador, where a small team of recordists heard a strange sound on 20 November 1997. "I knew instantly: no ornithologist or birder had ever seen this fabulous creature before! And it was close!" The words of Neotropical great (and NBC patron) Bob Ridgely (2012) in this magazine, describing his first thoughts on hearing the mystery bird uttering a "soft, measured hooting". The final new species for science included in our roll call of novelties is **8 Jocotoco Antpitta *Grallaria ridgelyi*** (Fig. 9). Discovered at Quebrada Honda, just south of Parque Nacional Podocarpus in Loja province, 'the Jocotoco' formally entered the taxonomic statute two years later (Krabbe *et al.* 1999).

In the standfirst to Ridgely's article, the then editor of *Neotropical Birding* Guy Kirwan considered the discovery as "surely one of the most remarkable 'new' birds described to science in modern times". The particular legacy of this antpitta, however, is the conservation organisation – Fundación Jocotoco – created in its name. The NGO now manages 13 reserves and five ecotourism lodges, among them Casa Simpson at Tapichalaca, where the famous antpittas perform shamelessly when 'bribed' with food.

One very striking connection between almost all of these new species is the primacy of field ornithology – perhaps we can call it birding? – in the discovery. For that, arguably, we need to acknowledge the late Ted Parker III, to whom *Cotinga* 1 was dedicated. The 'Parker era' of the late 1970s and 1980s marked a change from species discoveries produced by intensive bird collecting expeditions manned by teams armed with shotguns. Parker's renowned field skills and his massive contribution to the improved knowledge of bird vocalisations during that period meant that he and others started discovering new taxa on the basis of field observations, and particularly by ear. This period of new-species discoveries by fieldworkers wielding binoculars and sound-recording equipment was hugely exciting (see Stap 1990 for some juicy tales), helping to inspire a generation of Neotropical ornithologists, paving the way to the initial establishment of the Neotropical Bird Club and many of the subsequent discoveries celebrated here.

Rediscoveries

Readers of the Gospel of John may think of species rediscovered following feared or presumed extinction to be 'Lazarus birds'; the saint was reputedly restored to life by Jesus four days after his death. It follows that rediscoveries of lost species can provoke almost as much excitement as revelations about truly new ones. As one of us (JT) wrote in an article about species 'lost and found' in the very first *Neotropical Birding* (Tobias *et al.* 2006), "there is a special charm about finding a bird considered 'lost' for many years". Described

NEAR MISSES: NEW SPECIES

Species new to science – each with its own scintillating story – that narrowly missed out on inclusion in this 'top 25' include: Cryptic Forest-Falcon *Micrastur mintoni* (for which see *Neotropical* Birding 12: 26–30), Bald Parrot *Pyrilia aurantiocephala*, Antioquia Wren *Thryophilus sernai*, Munchique Wood-Wren *Henicorhina negreti* (Fig. 10), Cordillera Azul Antbird *Myrmoderus eowilsoni* and Predicted Antwren *Herpsilochmus praedictus*.

10 Munchique Wood-Wren *Henicorhina negreti*, Parque Nacional Natural Munchique, Cauca, Colombia, January 2010 (Nigel Voaden; flickr.com/photos/nvoaden).


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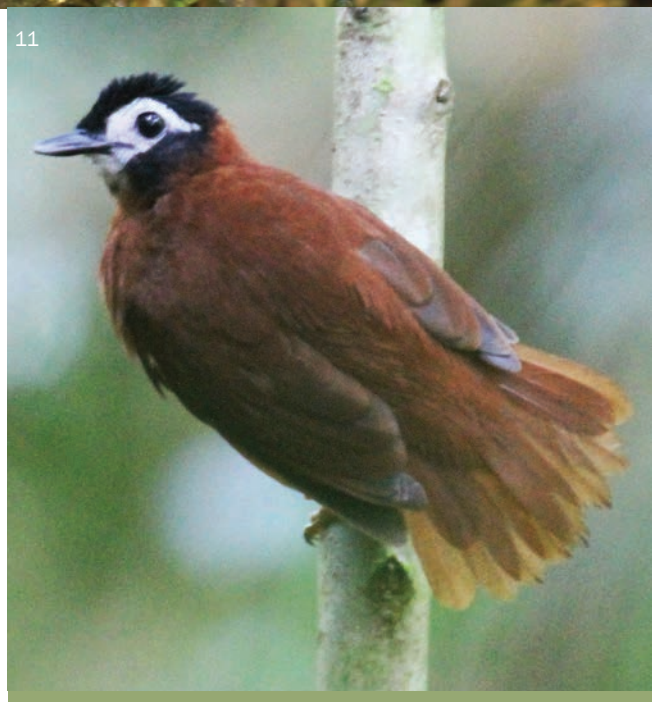
and catalogued long ago, these species "have escaped detection for decades on end". Irrefutable rediscoveries provide "moments of jubilation… [sending] ripples of delight, and sometimes astonishment, through the ornithological community".

The list of post-1994 Lazarus birds is long (see Balchin 2007, in the second issue of *Neotropical Birding*, for an insight). Picking a short subset to feature is fraught with difficulty. Yet there can be no dispute with the first major rediscovery of the NBC era, however – and it is gratifying that details were published in *Cotinga*. On 27 October 1996, Ricardo Parrini stumbled across **9 Kinglet Calyptura *Calyptura cristata*** in the foothills of southeast Brazil's Serra dos Órgãos. Pacheco & Fonseca (2001) describe being phoned by Parrini: "The call… was challenging, almost a tease. He did not want to state categorically what he had seen, preferring to lead Pacheco to the same conclusion he had reached." Over the following two days, several local birders successfully (albeit not easily) twitched the "Holy Grail of birdwatchers in Rio de Janeiro". And that was it. This tiny gem had been lost without trace for more than a century, then dramatically refound… then lost again ever since. How unfortunate that the sightings eluded documentation (and not without effort on behalf of the well-equipped observers). Who would not love to see a photo of Kinglet Calyptura?

Almost as revolutionary as the Calyptura was Thomas Valqui's face-to-face encounter with **10 White-masked Antbird *Pithys castaneus*** on 3 July 2001, near Tierra Blanca in Peruvian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11 White-masked Antbird *Pithys castaneus*, San Lorenzo, Loreto, Peru, June 2013 (Fabrice Schmitt/WINGS Birding Tours).

Amazonia. The species had been seen only once, almost 65 years previously, and its long absence had led many to mutter that it was most likely a hybrid rather than a valid species. Valqui and co. removed those doubts with a few seconds of heart-stopping birding (Lane *et al.* 2006), and this staggeringly attractive antbird is now routinely

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12 Long-whiskered Owlet *Xenoglaux loweryi*, Fundo Alto Nieva, Nueva Cajamarca, San Martín, Peru, December 2013 (Carlos Calle/ guiacalles.com).

13 Blue-bearded Helmetcrest *Oxypogon cyanolaemus*, San Pedro, Ciénaga, Magdalena, Colombia, January 2018 (Sebastian Ballesteros/ naturecolombiatris.com).

twitchable (see, e.g., Schmitt 2017; Fig. 11). How the world can change.

Not only was that man Dan Lane involved in the White-masked Antbird saga, but he also led the 2002 expedition that rediscovered **11 Long-whiskered Owlet *Xenoglaux loweryi*** (Fig. 12) in the Alto Mayo region of Peru. (Lane's rediscovery is slightly painful for one of us [JL], who in precisely the same month, had joined former NBC Chair Rob Williams in stumbling around Abra Patricia's stunted ridge forest at night, forlornly aspiring to the self-same encounter.) The tiny, bare-legged creature was known only from specimens mist-netted and collected in 1976 and 1978. Never seen in the field at the time or subsequently, it quickly became one of the world's most enigmatic birds. "In common with the Loch Ness monster," Dušan Brinkhuizen *et al.* (2012) suggested in *Neotropical Birding* 10, "tales were spun to fill in our lack of knowledge of the species, such as it being almost flightless…". Thanks to Dan Lane's brilliance plus subsequent encounters, notably within yards of an ecolodge run by Asociación Ecosistemas Andinos (ECOAN), the Owlet has been largely demythologised.

Third on our list of refinds is a species that contrived to be rediscovered twice, in quite separate ways. It took until 2013 for **12 Blue-bearded Helmetcrest *Oxypogon cyanolaemus*** to be formally recognised as a species, when Collar and Salaman (2013) pressed its case for a split from (what is now known as) Green-bearded Helmetcrest *O. guerinii*. The problem was that the last of the 62 specimens of this striking hummingbird had been collected in 1946, there were no subsequent records despite searches and the known range had suffered marked habitat degradation. When one of us (JL) interviewed Nigel Collar for a magazine article about his and Josep del Hoyo's wholesale revision of global avian

14 Blue-eyed Ground-dove *Columbina cyanopsis*, Reserva Natural Rolinha-do-Planalto, Minas Gerais, Brazil, February 2018 (João Sérgio Barros F. de Souza; flickr.com/photos/joaosouza).

NEAR MISSES: REDISCOVERIES

Quite a roll call of species was considered for inclusion in this section. They include Austral Rail *Rallus antarcticus* (whose rediscovery was the subject of a NBC Conservation Award), Dusky Starfrontlet *Coeligena orina*, Recurve-billed Bushbird *Clytoctantes alixii*, Tachira Antpitta *Grallaria chthonia*, Pelzeln's Tody-tyrant *Hemitriccus inornatus*, Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer *Diglossa gloriosíssima*, Cherry-throated Tanager *Nemosia rourei* and Cone-billed Tanager *Conothraupis mesoleuca*.

15 The glittering Dusky Starfrontlet *Coeligena orina*, Montezuma, Risaralda, Colombia, November 2018 (James Lowen/jameslowen.com).

taxonomy (del Hoyo & Collar 2013, 2016), Collar feared that *cyanolaemus* might "quite possibly be extinct" before it had even been admitted to the ranks of full species.

Collar's message was clear: to get conservation right, we need to get taxonomy right. In this case, the eventual split actually (if belatedly) paid dividends. It prompted Carlos Julio Rojas and Christian Vasquez to search Parque Nacional Natural Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. On 4 March 2015 they ended the lacuna of sightings and obtained the first-ever photographs of Blue-bearded Helmetcrest (Rojas & Vasquez 2015). The species is now on the radar of intrepid birders prepared to trek (e.g. Lorenz 2018; Fig. 13). It may be Critically Endangered, but Blue-bearded Helmetcrest is at least still with us.

A country the size of Brazil is bound to hold avian mysteries – and still offers the lure of high-profile rediscoveries for anyone blessed with vigilance and intrepid spirit. Of the Neotropics' top 20 target 'lost' species for birders to refind, as identified by Tobias *et al.* (2006), six were in Brazil. Two of these have since been judged extinct and extinct in the wild (Glaucous *Anodorhynchus glaucus* and Spix's *Cyanopsitta spixii* macaws respectively), at least one currently deemed to be an invalid taxon ('Hooded Seedeater *Sporophila melanops*') but two have been rediscovered.

It was a tough call which of this pair to include in our 'top 25': a stand-off between Kaempfer's Woodpecker *Celeus obrieni* and **13 Blue-eyed Ground-dove *Columbina cyanopsis***. There was a strong case for the former, including on the grounds of its stunning appearance and the recent realisation that it actually occurs across a vast swathe of the Brazilian cerrado, albeit restricted to stands of bamboo. But we have plumped for the stunning ground-dove (Fig. 14). Rafael Bessa relocated this cobalt-eyed wonder in Minas

Gerais in 2015, the first documented record for 74 years. He announced the rediscovery to a buzzing crowd at the 2016 Brazilian Birdwatching Festival in a highly anticipated talk about what was enigmatically advertised only as 'Species X'. Unlike the woodpecker, the ground-dove appears to be genuinely rare and at risk of imminent global extinction. The purchase of land by SAVE Brasil supported by the Rainforest Trust and then the creation of Parque Estadual de Botumirim give hope for its future.

Exceptional vagrancy

We have each been involved in encountering a species new to a country, sometimes several in one go (Tobias & Seddon 2007), so can testify to how thrilling it is. But in a litany of the exceptional such as this article, a mere first for a country does not pass muster as a remarkable discovery. Often such 'firsts' comprise not-entirely-unexpected range extensions from neighbouring nations. No, for an article of this ilk, we must set a higher barrier to entry – true vagrancy, and astonishing vagrancy at that. A species that is not even in the right continent or hemisphere, say. And even then, the list of potential candidates is mighty. Birds have wings – and boy, can they travel.

Many remarkably lost birds have featured in the pages of *Cotinga* and *Neotropical Birding*, including South America's first Audouin's Gull (Lallsingh 2018; Fig. 16) and Whiskered Tern (Clay 2016; Fig. 17). Both hail from the Old World – yet neither quite make the cut because gulls and terns are renowned for their cross-ocean movements. The same is true of shorebirds, which are typically long-distance migrants. Accordingly, the first records for South America of Lesser Sandplover *Charadrius mongolus* (Le Nevé & Manzione 2011) and Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* – at the very same site in Argentina, no less – are very impressive, as was a Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* in Brazil, but they too don't quite make it. Vagrant penguins don't quite 'cut the mustard' either, given that they drift freely on marine currents, resulting in extralimital records such as Little *Eudyptula minor* and Erect-crested penguins *Eudyptes sclateri* in Argentina (M. Pearman *in litt.* 2019) and Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus* in El Salvador (O. Komar *in litt.* 2019). Seabirds capable of flight, meanwhile, are quintessential nomads – so there's no place even for South America's first Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, seen off Chile in February 2017 (Marin *et al.* 2017).

Given such lofty 'standards', what acts of vagrancy actually make our list? First is the exceptional **14 Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*** from Ciego de Ávila province, Cuba, in April 2003 (Rodríguez *et al*. 2005). No birder got this particular species on his or her list, however, because "three boys killed the kingfisher with sling shots after a long pursuit through the local mangroves". This was the first record for the Western Hemisphere of a species widely distributed through the Palearctic and Oriental regions but hardly renowned for migratory prowess. "We do not know how it reached the Cuban coast," say the authors, "although we do not believe it was by human introduction".

Vagrant hunters have long visited the extremities of countries – or continents – in their quest to find literally outlandish species: think the Azores or the Aleutians, for a start. The Falkland Islands (Malvinas) lie right on the edge of the NBC region, and, despite limited coverage, the archipelago has an enviable track record in producing records of unexpected birds (Woods 2017). "Some Falklands vagrants," writes Woods, "have been remarkably far from their regular ranges". Three South American species (White-collared Swift *Streptoprocne zonaris*, Sick's

16 >> BIRDING AT THE CUTTING EDGE AUDOUIN'S GULL IN TRINIDAD

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 *Ichthyaetus audouinii*, another Old World species on the wrong side of the Atlantic.

17 >> BIRDING AT THE CUTTING EDGE A FIRST FOR SOUTH AMERICA

A first for South America— by a whisker

Rob Clay

Finding a rarity—a bird out of its normal geographical context—is always exciting. Discovering a bird new to a country is even more exhilarating. But what does it feel like to come across a bird hitherto unknown across an entire continent? We asked Neotropical Bird Club Council member Rob Clay to reflect upon his feelings when he encountered South America's first-ever Whiskered Tern, earlier this year.

16–17 How *Neotropical Birding* broke the news on two firsts for South America that narrowly missed inclusion in this 'top 25' of discoveries.

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18 Adult male American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*, Cape Dolphin, East Falkland, Falklands (Malvinas), December 2014 (Alan Henry).

19 Immature Corncrake *Crex crex*, Açude do Xaréu, Fernando de Noronha, Brazil, November 2012 (Kleber de Burgos/ burgos.com.br).

20 Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, Río Verde, Esmeraldas, Ecuador, March 2008 (Dušan Brinkhuizen/ sapayoa.com). **21** How *Cotinga* published the latter record.

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21 *Cotinga* 32

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*: a new species for South America

Dušan M. Brinkhuizen, Lazar Brinkhuizen, Andrew Keaveney and Sarah Jane

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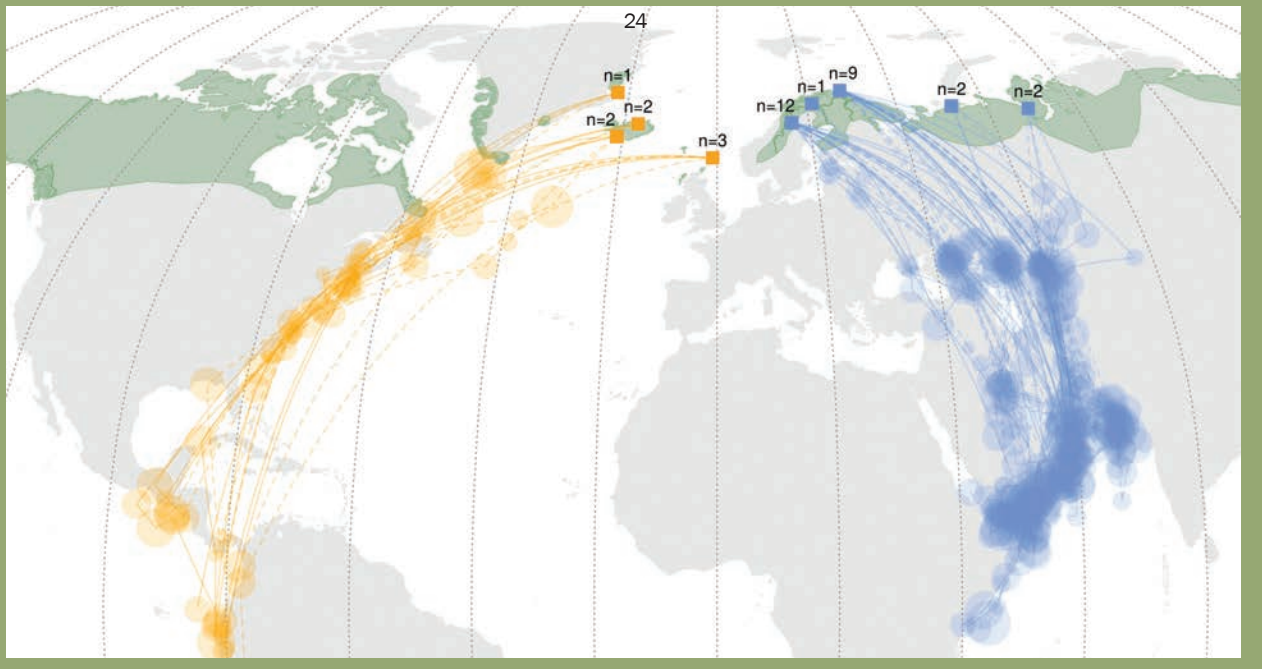
Swift *Chaetura meridionalis* and Tropical Parula *Setophaga pitiayumi*) were each "at least 1,700 km south of their normal range limit". But even these lost souls were eclipsed in December 2014, when not one but two adult male 15 **American Redstarts *Setophaga ruticilla*** were found on the islands (Fig. 18). Staying until February 2015 and at least June 2015, these individuals were an almost unbelievable 6,500 km south of the species's regular winter range (Woods 2017). Only the Falklands' Wood Thrush *Hylochila mustelina* (in 1970) beats the redstart in terms of gobsmacking vagrancy.

Northeasternmost Brazil also has an enviable position to receive vagrant birds. The rarely visited islets of the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Archipelago, just 1,600 km from Cape Verde, are visited only by scientists who recorded the first Black Kite *Milvus migrans* for the Neotropics there in April/May 2014 (Nunes *et al.* 2015). Previous 'megas' from this tiny speck in the Atlantic Ocean include Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* and Lesser Moorhen *Gallinula angulata* (Bencke *et al.* 2005).

More accessible to birders are the islands of Fernando de Noronha, which routinely produce national firsts (Silva e Silva & Olmos 2006). Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* is now suspected to breed there and was recently recorded on mainland Brazil for the first time, with full-blown colonisation even predicted (Davis 2010). Although this is impressive, our vote for Noronha's top vagrant goes to the first South American record of 16 **Corncrake *Crex crex***, found by Kleber de Burgos on 28 November 2012 (de Burgos & Olmos 2013; Fig. 19). Rails are notorious globetrotters (and this record was followed by an Allen's Gallinule *Porphyrula alleni*) but with Corncrake undergoing a global decline, contemporary records from the New World seemed less likely. That said, another subsequently made it to New York! Although the Corncrake currently takes pride of place, AL has seen as-yet unpublished images of multiple Eurasian firsts from the archipelago, including the first landbird – watch this space…

Our final spectacular – and also intriguing – example of vagrancy relates to South America's first 17 **Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus***. On 28 March 2008 Dušan Brinkhuizen and others visited the Ecuadorian coast near Río Verde in Esmeraldas, looking for roosting Lesser Nighthawks *Chordeiles acutipennis*. Having found



22–23 Male Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* being fitted with geolocator: **22** Shetland, UK, June 2012 (Adam Rowlands/RSPB); **23** Iceland, July 2014 (Denise Hermans). **24** Migration routes of the two populations of Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* (Rob van Bemmelen).

two, they then spotted a pipit *Anthus* foraging between flotsam at the high-water mark. Given that Ecuador's only *Anthus* (Paramo Pipit *A. bogotensis*) occurs mainly above 3,000 m altitude, the group knew they were onto something good – presumably a vagrant North American pipit. Once photographs were shared with the international community, it was realised that the find was even more astonishing than that – a Eurasian passerine, Red-throated Pipit, in South America.

The observers wrote up their record in *Cotinga* (Brinkhuizen *et al.* 2010; Figs. 20–21), conjecturing that "the increasing number of records along the Pacific coast of the USA and Mexico may indicate that this species occurs more regularly [in South America] than previously thought." The Ecuador record "supports the idea that some of these birds wander even further south to winter in the Neotropics". Lending further credence to this idea is the subsequent first record of Red-throated Pipit for Central America *sensu strictu*, in montane Guatemala in April 2018 (Matías & Eisermann 2018).

New distributional information

Not all distribution-based discoveries pertain to vagrancy. Some relate to leaps in our understanding of where birds routinely live. Typically, these follow intensive effort by dedicated ornithologists. Narrowly missing out

25 Mist-netted Ringed Storm-Petrel *Oceanodroma hornbyi*, Pampa de Indio Muerto, Atacama Region, Chile, April 2017, with **26** its nest cavity and **27** desert habitat (all Rodrigo Barros).

on inclusion are two globally threatened seabirds breeding in the Old World – Fea's (Desertas) Petrel *Pterodroma feae deserta* and Zino's Petrel *P. madeira* – for which dataloggers have revealed regular wintering areas off the Brazilian coast (Zino *et al.* 2011, Ramírez *et al.* 2013). AL went to sea to look for these species based on these discoveries and ended up finding multiple Trindade Petrels *Pterodroma arminjoniana* which were then equally unexpected (Lees *et al.* 2015).

It is secrets revealed by dataloggers attached to 18 **Red-necked Phalaropes *Phalaropus lobatus*** that have revolutionised the way we think about this shorebird. For years, conservationists had speculated about the migration route and wintering area of phalaropes breeding on North Atlantic islands, particularly those in Scotland (UK). A male tagged in August 2012 (the very individual in Fig. 22) was found to have crossed the North Atlantic to Canada, then headed south before crossing the Gulf of Mexico into the Pacific Ocean, where it spent more than six months at sea between the Galapagos Islands and the Ecuadorian mainland (Smith *et al.* 2014). This was the first evidence of a European breeding bird migrating to the Pacific Ocean.

Subsequent, more detailed research (Bemmelen *et al.* 2019; Figs. 23–24) revealed the existence of two populations with distinct migration routes and wintering areas. A longer-winged population breeds in the northeastern North Atlantic and migrates c.10,000 km over sea to the tropical eastern Pacific Ocean (i.e. to Neotropical waters). The other breeds in Fennoscandia and Russia then migrates c.6,000 km – largely over land – to the Arabian Sea (Indian Ocean). As long-time NBC member and world lister Jonathan Newman commented on the NBC Facebook page: "Never saw that one coming"…

In their 'lost and found' article, Tobias *et al.* (2006) encouraged intrepid birders to track down the unknown breeding grounds of 19 **Ringed Storm-Petrel *Oceanodroma hornbyi***, a Data Deficient Pacific seabird. On the basis of a few reports of mummified adults and fledglings found up to 50 km inland, up to 1,600 m above sea level prior to 1930, Tobias *et al.* restated earlier suggestions (e.g. Hellmayr 1932) that "colonies may lie inland

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>> PHOTOSPOT CINEREOUS MOURNERS

Do juvenile Cinereous Mourners *Laniocera hypopyrra* mimic large, hairy caterpillars?

Johan Ingels and Mathieu Entraygues

Most juvenile birds exhibit cryptic plumage to mislead predators relying on vision to find their prey. So why should juveniles of such an inconspicuous, dull greyish bird as the Cinereous Mourner *Laniocera hypopyrra* possess a dramatically conspicuous plumage? Are they mimicking a large unpalatable or toxic hairy caterpillar? We publish here the first photos of such a bizarre-looking juvenile in the wild...

28 Juvenile Cinereous Mourner *Laniocera hypopyrra*, Montagne de Kaw, French Guiana, October 2012 (Mathieu Entraygues).

29 The *Neotropical Birding* article featuring the idea that the species's juvenile mimics caterpillars.

in the Atacama Desert [of northern Chile]". The authors coupled this guidance with a stark warning: "The difficulty of working in this region must be emphasised: the Atacama Desert, the driest place on earth, is a land of featureless plains broken up by steep, loose-walled valleys".

Such conditions did not deter a team of Chilean birders led by Rodrigo Barros. From 2013–17, volunteers surveyed 780 linear km of the Atacama, mainly searching for breeding sites of Markham's Storm-Petrel *O. markhami*, a discovery that was written up in this magazine (Schmitt *et al.* 2016). In December 2016, in desert at Pampa de Indio Muerto, north of Diego del Amargo and 75km in a direct line from the sea, the team "found natural shallow cavities with petrel odour and white and grey feathers inside" (Barros *et al.* 2018). Returning in April 2017 and presumably following their nose, Barros's team found 25 cavities with the same smell and feathers – and on 2 April trapped an adult Ringed Storm-Petrel leaving a burrow at 06h00 (Figs. 25–27). Mystery solved.

Detective work using geolocators is gradually unveiling the wintering range of a suite of Nearctic migrants that leave North American or Caribbean breeding grounds, then seemingly vanish – presumably spending much of the non-breeding season somewhere in the Neotropics. Their number include Antillean Nighthawk *Chordeiles gundlachii*, Black Swift *Cypseloides niger*, Black-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus erythropthalmus*, Connecticut Warbler *Oporornis agilis* and **20 Caribbean Martin *Progne dominicensis***, which is the species that we celebrate here because facets of its basic ecology (e.g. wintering grounds and migration route) were basically unknown between September and January.

Noah Perlut *et al.* (2017) relate how they attached geolocators to seven hirundines on the Caribbean island of Dominica in 2012. Two years later, they recovered data from one device attached to a female Caribbean Martin and found that she had wintered around 3,350 km southeast of Dominica in western Bahia, Brazil. Intriguingly her southwards migration route in 2013 (heading south into Guyana and the Amazon before veering southeast) differed from that the previous year (tracking the South American coast before heading south). There's clearly lots more to discover about many species that may otherwise be relatively well known in the non-Neotropical part of their lives.

The discovery "of the most complex migratory pattern yet recorded for a tropical species", in no less a taxon than the one enshrined in the NBC logo, Three-wattled Bellbird *Procnias tricarunculata,* is only omitted here because it features elsewhere in this magazine. So check out Graeme Green's article on page 57.

Ecological revelations

In 2012, NBC founder and long-time *Cotinga* editor Guy Kirwan co-authored a paper floating the idea that the nestlings of two Brazilian cotingids might mimic a toxic caterpillar in order to avoid predation (D'Horta *et al.* 2012). In contrast to most juvenile plumages, which are cryptic to avoid detection by predators, the authors described **21 nestlings of Cinereous Mourner *Laniocera hypopyrra*** and Shrike-like

Cotinga *Laniisoma elegans* as being "dramatically conspicuous… predominantly covered by cinnamon-orange feathers with black terminal spots… colorful plumage [that] presumably makes them more at risk from predation". The two possible explanations for this, the authors strongly suggested, were either "chemical defence (toxic and/or unpalatable) or Batesian mimicry (e.g. of a large, hairy caterpillar)".

Three years later (and also after *Neotropical Birding* had also featured the proposition: see Ingels & Entraygues 2013; Figs. 28–29), a different set of researchers confirmed the caterpillar postulation for Cinereous Mourner nestlings (Londoño *et al.* 2015). In addition to the persuasive plumage, they presented evidence of the chicks' behaviour in the nest when disturbed – a slow, side-to-side movement of its head (If you have not seen this, have a look at tinyurl.com/cinereousmourner.) The combination of traits "gave it a resemblance to a hairy, aposematic caterpillar" of the family Magalopygidae – one to be avoided by would-be predators. Such Batesian mimicry is very unusual in vertebrates – and this combination of looks and behaviour is new for the avian world.

A close runner-up was the discovery (Marques *et al.* 2012) that **22 Golden Lancehead *Bothrops insularis***, a snake endemic to the tiny island of Queimada Grande (São Paulo, Brazil), is heavily dependent (indeed, perhaps entirely so) for food on just two species of seasonally abundant migrant birds (Fig. 30). Somehow, the most common resident bird on the island, House Wren *Troglodytes aedon*, avoids forming a significant part of the snake's diet. It seems that the viper feeds mostly during periods when migrant White-crested Elaenia *Elaenia chilensis* and Yellow-legged Thrush *Turdus flavipes* are abundant – effectively waiting all year for the feathered bonanza. We are only just discovering the extent and magnitude of altitudinal and austral migration in the Neotropics, so finding out how important these ornithological teleconnections are is amazing.

Unexpected taxonomy

Along with Tom Schulenberg, one of us (AL) has regaled *Neotropical Birding* readers with taxonomic changes covered in our 'Splits, lumps and shuffles' series (page 73 in this issue). We reckon that three gobsmacking findings on

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30 Golden Lancehead *Bothrops insularis* predating a White-crested Elaenia *Elaenia chilensis*, Queimada Grande, São Paulo, Brazil, undated (Marcio Martins).


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31 Helmeted Woodpecker *Celeus galeatus* (male, September 2013) transpires to be a *Celeus* woodpecker (**32** male Blond-crested Woodpecker *C. flavescens*, November 2017) that mimics a *Dryocopus* (**33** male Lineated Woodpecker *Dryocopus lineatus*, August 2018). Figs. 31–33 all taken at San Pedro, Misiones, Argentina, by Martjan Lammertink.


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evolutionary affinities among Neotropical birds merit inclusion in our 'top 25'.

While we have mimicry fresh in our minds, let's celebrate the discovery that the globally threatened Atlantic Forest endemic **23 Helmeted Woodpecker *Celeus galeatus* is not a *Dryocopus*, but a *Celeus* mimicking a *Dryocopus*** (Figs. 31–33). Helmeted Woodpecker has converged in (black, white and red) plumage with Lineated Woodpecker *D. lineatus* – but, phylogenetically, proves to be unequivocally nestled within *Celeus* (Benz *et al.* 2015). For those readers who have watched Helmeted Woodpecker in the field, this rather explains its small size, shyness and submissive behaviour, which Benz *et al.* argue are "consistent with predictions derived from evolutionary game-theory models and the hypothesis of interspecific social-dominance mimicry". Recent work by Miller *et al.* (2019) has shown that such patterns of mimicry are repeated in woodpeckers across the world.

A particularly intriguing case of mistaken identity seemingly relates to **24 Chapada Flycatcher**

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34 Pair of Chapada Flycatcher *Suiriri affinis*, Parque Nacional da Chapada dos Veadeiros, Cavalcante, Goiás, Brazil, August 2016 (Ciro Albano/NE Brazil Birding).

35 Sapayoa *Sapayoa aenigma*, Nusagandi, Comarca de Guna Yala, Panama, March 2014 (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding).

Suiriri affinis (Fig. 34). When the NBC was founded, and for several years afterwards, there was only one species of *Suiriri* tyrant-flycatcher, Suiriri Flycatcher *Suiriri suiriri*. But something was awry – for slightly different-looking birds uttered distinct vocalisations in the same cerrado habitats. Investigation culminated in the description of a cryptic species, Chapada Flycatcher (Zimmer *et al.* 2001). Then followed a period of nomenclatural confustication after Kirwan *et al.* (2014) determined that wrong names were attributed left, right and centre when people were writing about the genus *Suiriri*. If that were not enough to make your eyes bleed, along came Leonardo Lopes and crew to turn this particular world upside down. Using phylogenetic tools, Lopes *et al.* (2018) demonstrated that Suiriri and Chapada flycatchers were not even in the same genus, something that Bates *et al.* (2002) had suggested 16 years earlier. According to their molecular analyses, Suiriri lay within a clade of Elaeniini flycatchers include *Phyllomyias, Phaeomyias* and *Capsiempis* tyrannulets, whilst Chapada was a member of the Fluvicolini, sister to *Sublegatus* tyrannulets, where it may merit its own monospecific genus, *Guyramemua*.

'How on earth?' might be an understandable reaction to learning about our final taxonomic surprise. Jon Fjeldså's realisation that the mysterious **25** **Sapayoa *Sapayoa aenigma* is actually a New World representative of Old World suboscines** staggered the ornithological world in 2003 (Fjeldså *et al.* 2003). There had long been confusion about where best to house this Colombian bird (Fig. 35). An enigma indeed, it had been considered both a manakin (Pipridae) and a tyrant-flycatcher (Tyrannidae), although the fence-sitting *Incertae Sedis* had also been deployed by Sibley & Monroe (1990) – the latter on the basis that "preliminary DNA–DNA hybridisation comparisons" led to the outlandish suggestions that Sapayoa was "either a relative of ... broadbills, or a sister group of all other New World suboscines" (Sibley & Ahlquist 1990).

More than a decade later (and thus within our focal timeframe), the Danish guru and his team came to the rescue. They found that Sapayoa grouped unequivocally with Old World suboscine

passerines, being nested either with pittas (Pittidae) or with the broadbill genera *Smithornis* and *Calyptomena*. So how on earth did it reach Colombia? Fjeldså *et al.* suggest that "the peculiar distribution of this lineage may be best explained in terms of a Gondwanic and Late Cretaceous origin of the passerine birds, as this particular lineage dispersed from the Antarctic landmass, reaching the Old World tropics via the drifting Indian plate, and South America via the West Antarctic Peninsula". Well, that's that settled then.

The end… or still the beginning?

What then to make of this 'top 25' of discoveries? First, every single entry has involved pioneering ornithologists demonstrating dedication, insight and wisdom – and sometimes not a little good fortune to boot. We salute these individuals and celebrate their achievements. But foremost, that these discoveries show no sign of abating suggests just how much we have *yet* to learn. Let us hope that the bird-crazy pioneers of the present and future have the opportunity to chance upon further jaw-dropping revelations before the footprint of humankind obliterates life for good. There is currently world enough for ongoing discovery, but is there *time*?

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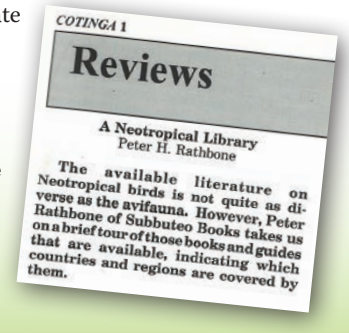
The 25 best Neotropical bird books from the last 25 years

Raymond Jeffers

When you think that only the second volume of Handbook of the birds of the world *was published in the same year that the NBC was established, 1994 seems a very long time ago. But of all those specifically Neotropical bird books proudly exhibited on our collective bookshelf, which have been the 25 'best' – however you describe that superlative – of the past quarter-century?* Neotropical Birding *invited a self-confessed bookworm to give his personal view...*

From inception the NBC publications have featured book reviews. In the very first *Cotinga*, Peter Rathbone (1994) concluded his *tour d'horizon* of the available literature on the birds of the Neotropical region with the comment that "there is a huge amount of in-print literature... [birders]... can draw on when planning a visit to this richly rewarding region". Rathbone should know: he was a bookseller who ran Subbuteo Natural History Books for many years.

Two-and-a-half decades later I am tempted to say *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* and yet this would be an inadequate summary of 'then'


COTINGA 1

Reviews

A Neotropical Library
Peter H. Rathbone

The available literature on Neotropical birds is not quite as diverse as the avifauna. However, Peter Rathbone of Subbuteo Books takes us on a brief tour of those books and guides that are available, indicating which countries and regions are covered by them.

Right: How Peter Rathbone introduces his suggested Neotropical bird library in the inaugural issue of *Cotinga*.

Below: A small part of the editor's Neotropical bookshelf. Which of these tomes will make it into Raymond Jeffers' 'top 25'?

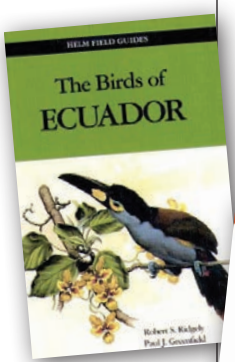
compared to 'now'. Not only has the quality of bird books been on an upward trajectory (generally) but also the coverage is deeper. Peter lamented the lack of a "fully satisfactory" field guide to the birds of Chile, a "modern" guide for Suriname and *any* guide for Ecuador or Peru! Today a month does not seem to pass by without another 'must-have' Neotropical bird book appearing. So, perhaps I should instead say: we have never had it so good!

If that is true, how can I possibly select only 25 'best' books? I need to define my 'book pool' and then apply some selection criteria. Inevitably this renders my list subjective – but then that's the nature of the thing. Book buyers disagree over binary choices such as pocket-size or rucksack-size, paintings or photos, bare-bones pointers on identification or all information known about a species, and so on. My stance is that some compromise is necessary: but where do you draw the line? Well, to update my political clichés, I have adopted the following 'redlines':

1. The book must have been reviewed in *Cotinga* or *Neotropical Birding*. This reduces the 'pool' to around 200! It also excludes pre-1994 'classics' such as *Birds of the high Andes* by Jon Fjeldså & Niels Krabbe which should be on your bookshelf: I know one Peruvian tour leader who takes the book's bird plates into the field because of their peerless portraits of subspecies.

2. The book must be devoted to Neotropical birds. Thus I omit 'global' books such as the incomparable 16-volume *Handbook of the birds of the world* (HBW) and its ancillary publications, the many high-quality monographs about bird families such as *Nightjars [etc] of the world* by Nigel Cleere, and such novel publications as *Birds new to science* by David Brewer.

3. Birds means birds. I exclude general wildlife books. While rarely seen in *Cotinga* or *Neotropical Birding* if one is reviewed you know it has to be good. For example, James Lowen's *Pantanal wildlife* furnishes you with an overview of the local biota of this 'must-visit' wetland. I also leave out general natural-history books. If you desire a non-academic primer on the complex ecology of the Neotropics, John Kricher's *The new Neotropical companion* is for you. It's a classic.



4. Book means book. So CDs and DVDs and even smartphone apps (as reviewed in one recent *Neotropical Birding*) are excluded.

5. The book must be innovative in some way. This is where my personal predilections surface. 'Innovative', to me, means something that 'breaks the mould' or is a 'first' in some way (for example, country or region). 'Innovative' does not mean faultless but the book must still have 'something' over the competition.

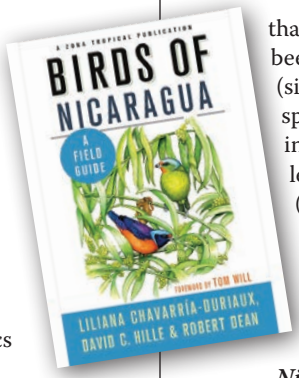
I 'road-tested' my list on a recent seabirding trip with a group of world birders – when the ocean was flat and the birds absent, clearly. There was consensus on a number of titles but disagreement on quite a few others. So, my final 25 will not suit all tastes. Please note that this is *not* a template for a 'Neotropical library' (as Peter Rathbone's article was entitled) but I do believe each title is worthy of gracing any birder's bookshelf. How many do you have? And how many of those you don't have do you want…? My 25 selections appear in bold and italic type – and details are provided on pages 39-40. I mention the edition reviewed in *Cotinga* or *Neotropical Birding* (other editions may exist). References to 'our' reviewer or 'our' review is to the corresponding article in those NBC publications and text in double quotation marks derives from such reviews (unless otherwise stated). For the avoidance of doubt, I have not *ranked* the books – this is merely a 'top 25' with no suggestion that there is an overall best, second-best, third-best etc book.

Filling the void

Happily, the four countries identified in *Cotinga* 1 as deficient in the field-guide stakes now bask in the glory of excellent books. First off the blocks, albeit not until the second Millennium, was 1 ***Birds of Ecuador* by Robert Ridgely and Paul Greenfield**. Rated by our reviewer as "A+" and labelled "monumental", this two-volume set weighs in with over 1,550 pages of text describing almost everything you need to know about Ecuador's 1,599 species. The text expounds on taxonomy, history, location and conservation status. Then there are 1,600 distribution maps and 96 colour plates for all but two of those species. The Galápagos Islands were not included… but do not despair, as relief will arrive shortly.

From time to time (but not often) a book comes along that makes you wonder why all national field guides are not like this. 2 **Alvaro Jaramillo's *Birds of Chile*** is one such – and is one of my favourite

South American identification books. The plates are terrific and uncluttered (four to six species per page). The layout is user friendly with usually a quarter-page of text set opposite the relevant painting. As there aren't too many species to cover in Chile (compared to countries further north in the Andes), the volume slips snuggly into a jacket pocket. Double the depth and equally indispensable is 3 ***Birds of Peru*** **by Tom Schulenberg *et al***. Its combination of text, maps and 307 bird plates will help readers identify most of the country's birds and, very importantly, motivate them to help conserve the avian paradise that is Peru. Completing the quartet is 4 ***Field guide to the birds of Suriname*** **by Arie Spaans and colleagues**. Showcasing that country's 33 Guianan Shield endemics and around another 700 species this "admirably concise and well-illustrated" book will encourage you to visit a country that really deserves a recognised spot on the Neotropical birding trail.



Carrying on

Contemporary authors and artists are the first to acknowledge that they owe a great debt to the field workers and researchers of yore. It's our good fortune that the 21st century has seen publications that provide fitting tributes to these pioneers and also raise the bar for those that will follow. Here are three examples.

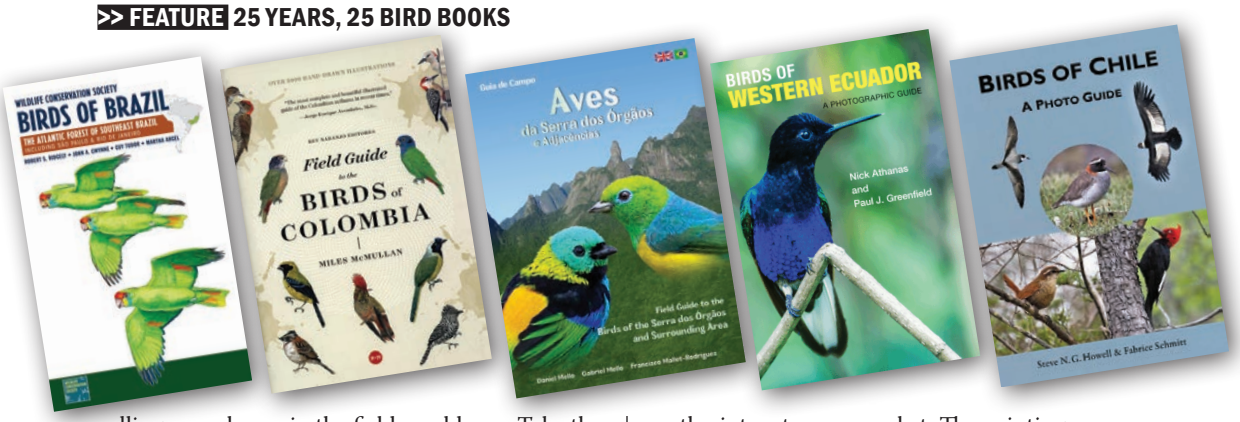
5 ***Birds of Bolivia: field guide*** **by Sebastian Herzog *et al.*** is the first comprehensive field guide since 1965 to cover the land-locked country with the most speciose bird list. A team of national and international collaborators have created a top book including first-rate artwork and innovative maps, and the profits from sales go to local conservation. My second example was eulogised by our reviewer as "a monumental work, unequalled in this hemisphere in its scope and accuracy".

This is 6 **Steve Hilty's *Birds of Venezuela*:** an identification guide with thoroughly researched text and superb paintings. More recent and easier to carry in the field is *Birds of Venezuela* by Messrs Ascanio, Rodriguez and Restall. It is also worth a look although with 280 fewer pages, it is naturally less detailed.

Back in 1994 our reviewer observed that "all Central American countries have been documented in various fieldguides (sic)". However, have you noticed the spate of new books for these nations in the last decade? It's admirable that less-visited countries such as Honduras (see *Guide to the birds of Honduras* by Robert Gallardo) now have modern field guides that will encourage bird tourism. My list recognises this welcome development by selecting the newest offering: 7 ***Birds of Nicaragua*** **by Liliana Chavarría-Duriaux, David Hille and Robert Dean**. This very good field guide will open your eyes to a country that has the largest continual block of tropical forest north of Amazonia and a bird list of 750+ species.

Going local

Sometimes no matter how good a national field guide might be it is better to have a more local book. An exemplar of this – and my benchmark for such works – is 8 **Barry Walker's *Field guide to the birds of Machu Picchu and the Cusco region, Peru***. Here we have a bird book for one of the greatest World Heritage Sites, written by a resident of more than 30 years, illustrated in part by the incomparable Jon Fjeldså and showing you the taxa you might see (rather than some nominate subspecies that's never been there). The pages overflow with vignettes that only a *habitué*,



calling upon hours in the field, could pen. Take the text on Slater's Tyrannulet *Phyllomyias sclateri*. We are told it "shivers and briefly lifts its wings", can be seen "quite easily along the lower part of the road climbing to Machu Picchu" and is named after "the founding editor of *The Ibis*". Priceless!

My other 'local' is something completely different – but the same rationale applies. When sojourning to Brazil do you *only* pack the groundbreaking *Birds of Brazil* by Ber van Perlo with its 400+ pages, 187 plates and distribution maps for around 1,800 species? Well, maybe not: another option exists for some trips. The Wildlife Conservation Society is on a mission to cover all of Brazil through five regional books, each of which will be portable for the field. So far, we have two from the accomplished team of **Robert Ridgely, John Gwynne, Guy Tudor and Martha Argel**: *The Pantanal and cerrado of central Brazil* and 9 ***The Atlantic Forest of southeast Brazil***. My pick is the latter because it's the more recent and is all you need for the birds of the top sites of Porto Seguro, Parque Estadual de Intervales (for birding tips to which, see *Neotropical Birding* 24: 9–16) and Parque Nacional Serra da Canastra – among many others.

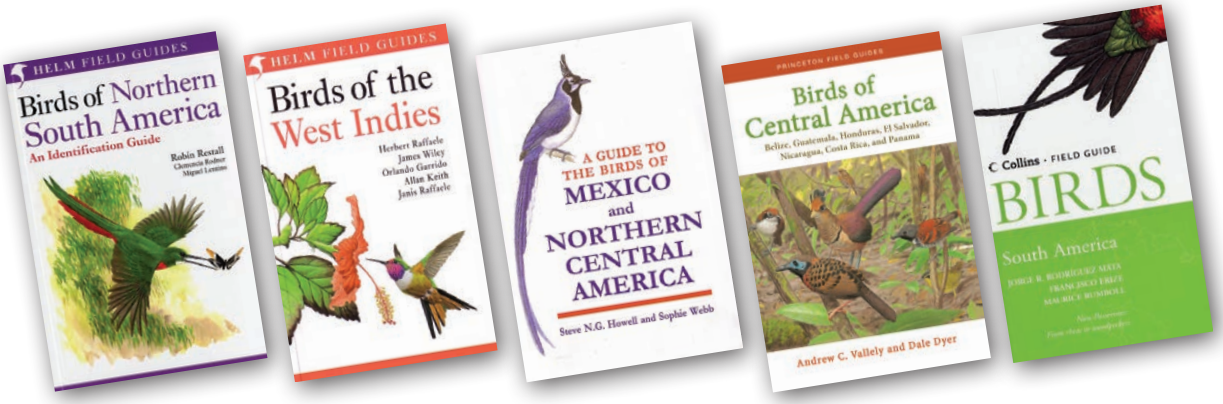
Pocket this

One creative feature of some modern field guides is their small size. Designed to slip into a pocket they offer competition to the standard-sized field guide (such as 14 x 20 x 2.75 cm): commonly by being less wide and thick. Of course, there is a trade-off to consider. Suppose you are visiting Colombia. For comprehensive coverage you cannot do better than *A guide to the birds of Colombia* by Steven Hilty and William Brown. Regrettably putting that monster (15 x 22.75 x 5 cm) into your pocket will tear it! However, no problem with 10 ***Field guide to the birds of Colombia*** **by Miles McMullan, Thomas Donegan and Alonso Quevedo** (12.5 x 21 x 1.5 cm). It's a kilo lighter, depicts 1,800-odd species over 244 pages and nestles into a trouser pocket. The paintings are bright, accurate and uncramped, and accompanied by concise text. And now Miles McMullan (with Leslis Navarrete) has authored the even slimmer *Fieldbook of the birds of Ecuador*.

Photo-capture!

Do you prefer paintings or photos? The points of contention here are well known: real life versus artist's impression, photos in poor light contrasted with crisp artwork, and so on. With advances in digital photography and many birders sporting a good camera, the quality and coverage of bird photos has improved. Certainly, there is a growing catalogue of popular photo-only books. Our reviewer hailed Andy Swash and Rob Still's *Birds, Mammals & Reptiles of the Galápagos Islands* as "a model for guides to other regions..." but with a caveat "...with relatively few species". I offer three titles that might make you think twice about photo books.

First up is 11 ***Field guide to the birds of the Serra dos Órgãos and surrounding areas*** **by Daniel Mello, Gabriel Mello and Francisco Malet-Rodrigues** with 104 plates each typically housing 8–10 images of 4–10 species. Our reviewer remarked, "this is the finest photographic field guide I have *ever* handled". It also merits a place on the list as an inspiring example of three birders not finding a guide to identify the birds on their local patch and so deciding to assemble their own book! Next 12 ***Birds of western Ecuador: a photographic guide*** **by Nick Athanas and Paul Greenfield** rebuffs the foregoing "relatively few species" point by exhibiting its photos of 946 species. It's a remarkable collection of 1,487 photos from 72 photographers. Game, set & match to photos then? Perhaps not, as our reviewer noted that although the book "might start to change … minds", it is not comprehensive, lacking a photo of Berlepsch's Tinamou *Crypturellus berlepschi*. The last of my trio is 13 ***Birds of Chile: a photo guide*** **by Steve Howell and Fabrice Schmitt**.



For our reviewer it is "an outstanding field guide" and "bold" in its suggested revisions to Chilean taxonomy. The "stand-out characteristic of the book" is the way many images are of "birds in habitats". I agree!

Having it all

Unfortunately, the Neotropics does not have a modern multi-volume handbook equivalent to the well-known *Birds of the Western Palearctic* or *Birds of Africa*. I can, however, recommend the two-volume 14 ***Birds of northern South America*** **by Robin Restall, Clemencia Rodner and Miguel Lentino**, which covers Ecuador, Colombia, Venezeula, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. One strength of 'BNSA', as it is affectionately known, is that it illustrates 6,388 different plumages (males, females, immatures of species and some subspecies). On the downside, obviously it omits much of the southern Neotropics.

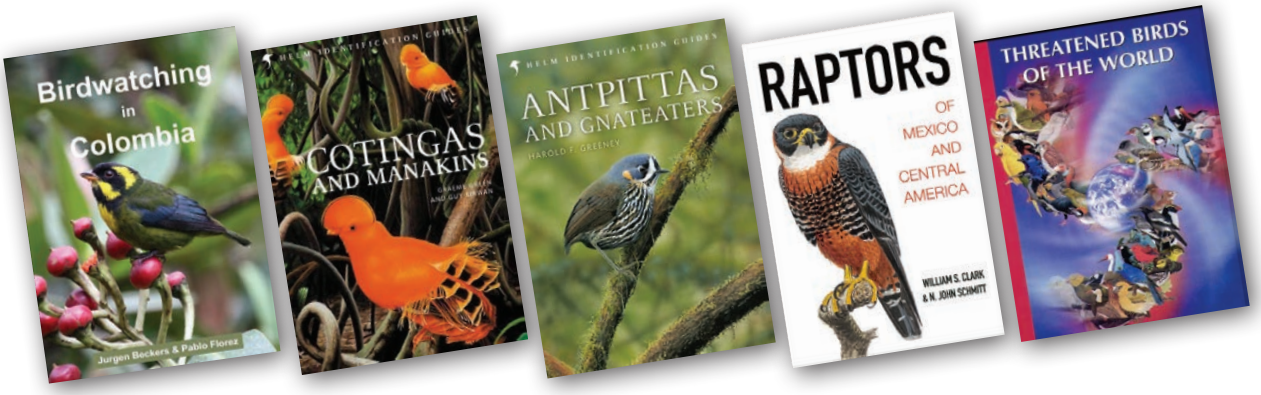
If you must have a 'field guide to the [whole] Neotropics' I offer the following idea: a DIY five-volume set where each book is a gem in its own way. There are drawbacks, of course: not all island endemics are covered and the books become out of date with every new discovery and taxonomic change. Yet for a reasonable financial outlay you will acquire a good overview of the Neotropics. Here goes…

15 ***Birds of the West Indies*** **by Herbert Raffaele *et al.*** is a field guide pared down from the 50%-bigger hardback guide of 1998. (If the budget stretches you might also buy the "highly recommended" *Birds of Cuba* by Orlando Garrido and Arturo Kirkconnell.) 16 ***A guide to the birds of Mexico and northern Central America*** **by Steve Howell and Sophie Webb** is "an extraordinary contribution to our knowledge of the regional avifauna". A 'golden oldie' that's still the best guide for Mexico. 17 ***Birds of Central America*** **by Andrew Vallely and Dale Dyer** was published in 2018 and comprises the modern format of double-page spreads with plates on the right and, on the left, a concise text on distribution, ID, habits and voice plus map for each illustrated species. 18 ***A field guide to the birds of South America*** **by an Argentine trio led by Jorge Rodriguez Mata** covers 1,273 species of non-passerine (only) in 156 (mostly excellent) colour plates. The page of ground-cuckoos is especially mouth-watering! The final member of this quintet is 19 **Birds of South America: passerines** by **Robert S. Ridgely** (writer) **and Guy Tudor** (artist), a dream team if ever there was one.

Where are the birds?

There was a time when if you wanted an up-to-date site guide for a country you were about to visit, your best bet was to track down an intrepid birder's trip report and pray a photocopy would arrive in the post before you left home! Today, we can surf the internet, flick through back copies of *Neotropical Birding* or buy a book. There are many publications worthy of residing on your bookshelf. I only have room for two in my 25.

The first is 20 ***A birdwatchers' guide to Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rica & The Caymans*** **by Guy Kirwan, Arturo Kirkconnell and Mike Flieg**. This is a model of how to compile such a work. It contains detailed pre-tour information (when to go, climate, clothing, health and the like), a plethora of accurate maps and a list of the 'target' birds with more detailed location information. As our reviewer concluded, this is "an essential purchase for any birder visiting the region".



The second is 21 ***Birdwatching in Colombia*** **by Jurgen Beckers and Pablo Florez**. I have a soft spot for Colombia – and who wouldn't for a country with a bird list of around 1,850 (depending on taxonomy etc) and growing. This work is particularly attractive because it is a gold mine of good information (some of it original) covering 127 sites with helpful maps and texts, and all condensed into a book to pop into your travel case.

Two 'near misses', suitable for those who 'want it all', I can recommend Nigel Wheatley's pair of *Where to watch birds* titles – one for *Central America & the Caribbean* (with David Brewer) and the other for *South America*. Both are a little out of date but remain a good starting point for planning purposes.

All in the family

The Neotropics are blessed with some showy endemic bird families which make for a number of wonderful monographs to pore over. 22 ***Cotingas and manakins*** **by Guy Kirwan and Graeme Green** (see the latter's article on Three-wattled Bellbird *Procnias tricarunculatus*, page 57) is a detailed guide for birders that is written, painted and photographed by birders. The combination of distinguished author, long-time Neotropical field birder, tour leader-artist Eustace Barnes and a stunning bird family was bound to be – and is – a winner.

Our reviewer of 23 ***Antpittas and gnateaters*** **by Harold Greeney** concludes that this "labour of love… [is]… one of the best-researched avian monographs ever published" (see the full review on page 86 as well as Harold's article on page 42). Particularly impressive is the author's Herculean task of reviewing many internet records – from the likes of xeno-canto, Internet Bird Collection and e-Bird – and then compiling maps that are a "model of clarity" with the innovative inclusion of marked type localities. The paintings by David Beadle are a joy to view with 156 taxa recognised including a remarkable plate featuring no less than seven currently recognised subspecies of Rufous Antpitta *Grallaria rufula*.

One last 'family' book is 24 ***Raptors of Mexico and Central America*** **by Bill Clark and John Schmitt**. Admittedly the raptors covered are not all endemic to the Neotropics and more than one family is involved. Nonetheless, this deserves to be on my list because it is a "superbly produced book that straddles the market for specialised field guides and sumptuous coffee-table reference books". Furthermore, I trust it will encourage publishers to commission works on more difficult groups to identify. Bring on the 'easy' guide to *Empidonax* flycatchers!

Conservation, conservation, conservation

We need works devoted to conservation as a reminder to do whatever we can to help to preserve our precious worldwide avifauna. Hence, for my last pick I am abandoning one of my 'redlines' by choosing a 'global' book: 25 ***Threatened birds of the world*****, edited by Alison Stattersfield and David Capper** and published under the auspices of BirdLife International and Lynx Edicions. Our reviewer (back in 2004) predicted that the book would "serve a critical role in orientating conservation efforts around the world" and it has. Today more up-to-date information can be found because BirdLife International reviews annually the avian dimension of the IUCN Red List (see also, e.g., Symes *et al.* 2017, Lowen *et al.* 2019). Just the same, as a snapshot in time of basic information on 1,186 globally threatened species (including population estimates, ecology threats and recommended conservation steps) this book remains in equal part a warning, inspiration and treasure trove. Keep reading!

TOP 25 NEOTROPICAL BIRD BOOKS, 1994–2019

These are my top 25 books, listed in alphabetical order by title together with details of the review (and reviewer) in one of the two NBC publications, *Cotinga* or *Neotropical Birding*.

A birdwatchers' guide to Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rica & The Caymans by Guy Kirwan, Arturo Kirkconnell and Mike Flieg. 2010. Cley-next-the-sea, UK: Prion Ltd. 198 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 33: 173 (Chris Bradshaw).

A field guide to the birds of South America by Jorge R. Rodriguez Mata, Francisco Erize and Maurice Rumboll. 2006. London, UK: HarperCollins. 384 pp. Hardback. Review: *Cotinga* 28: 95–96 (David Fisher).

Antpittas and gnateaters by Harold F. Greeney. 2018. London, UK: Helm. 496 pp. Hardback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 25: 86–87 (Christopher Sharpe).

Birds of Bolivia: field guide by S. K. Herzog, R. S. Terrill, A. E. Jahn, J. V. Remsen, Jr., O. Maillard Z., V. H. García-Solíz, R. MacLeod, A. MacCormick and J. Q. Vidoz. 2016. Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia: Asociación Armonía. 491 pp. Softback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 21: 63–66 (Raymond Jeffers).

Birds of Central America by Andrew C. Vallely and Dale Dyer. 2018. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 584 pp. Softback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 25: 92–93 (Christopher Sharpe).

Birds of Chile including the Antarctic Peninsula, the Falkland Islands and South Georgia by Alvaro Jaramillo and illustrated by Peter Burke and David Beadle. 2003. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 240 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 23: 93–95 (Manuel Marin).

Birds of Chile: a photo guide by Steve N. G. Howell and Fabrice Schmitt. 2018. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 240 pp. Softback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 25: 90–91 (James Lowen).

Birds of Ecuador by Robert S. Ridgely and Paul J. Greenfield. 2001. London, UK: Christopher Helm & Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Vol 1: status, distribution and taxonomy. 848 pp. Softback. Vol 2: a field guide. 741 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 18: 117–119 (John Moore).

Birds of Nicaragua by Liliana Chavarría-Duriaux, David C. Hille and Robert Dean. 2018. Ithaca, NY: Comstock (a Zona Tropical Publication). 480 pp. Softback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 25: 88–89 (Christopher Sharpe).

Birds of northern South America by Robin Restall, Clemencia Rodner and Miguel Lentino. 2006. London, UK: Christopher Helm. Vol 1: species accounts. 656 pp. Softback. Vol 2: plates and maps. 880 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 28: 93–95 (Thomas Donegan).

Birds of Peru by Thomas S. Schulenberg, Douglas F. Stotz, Daniel F. Lane, John P. O'Neill and Theodore A. Parker III. 2007. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press & London, UK: Christopher Helm. 664 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 31: 175–176 (Huw Lloyd).

Birds of South America: passerines by Robert S. Ridgely and Guy Tudor. 2009. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 750 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 32: 184–185 (Huw Lloyd).

Birds of Venezuela by Steven L. Hilty. 2003. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 878 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 20: 119–122 (Christopher Sharpe).

Birds of western Ecuador: a photographic guide by Nick Athanas & Paul J. Greenfield. 2016. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press. 448pp. Softback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 21: 62–63 (Rob Williams).

Birds of the West Indies by Herbert Raffaele, James Wiley, Orlando Garrido, Allan Keith and Janis Raffaele. 2003. London, UK: Christopher Helm & Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 216 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 23: 92–93 (Guy Kirwan).

Birdwatching in Colombia by Jurgen Beckers and Pablo Florez. 2013. Privately published by Jurgen Beckers. 274 pp. Softback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 15: 78–79 (Pete Morris).

Cotingas and manakins by Guy Kirwan and Graeme Green. 2011. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 624 pp. Hardback. Review: *Cotinga* 34: 195–197 (Raymond Jeffers).

Field guide to the birds of Colombia by Miles McMullan, Thomas M. Donegan and Alonso Quevedo. 2010. Bogotá, Colombia: Intergaficas SA. 244 pp. Softback Review: *Cotinga* 33: 166–167 (Jonathan Newman).

Field guide to the birds of Machu Picchu and the Cusco region, Peru by Barry Walker. 2015. Barcelona, Spain: Lynx Edicions & Arrington, VA: Buteo Books. 243 pp. Softback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 18: 53–54 (Christopher Sharpe).

Field guide to the birds of the Serra dos Órgãos and surrounding area by Daniel Mello, Gabriel Mello and Francisco Mallet-Rodrigues. 2015. Rio de Janeiro: Gabriel Jorge de Menezes Mello. 352 pp. Softback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 19: 85–86 (James Lowen).

Field guide to the birds of Suriname by Arie L. Spaans, Otte H. Ottema and Jan Hein J. M. Ribot with plates by Ber van Perlo. 2016. Leiden: Brill. 633 pp. Softback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 18: 54–56 (James Lowen).

A guide to the birds of Mexico and Northern Central America by Steve N. G. Howell and Sophie Webb. 1995. London & New York: Oxford University Press. 1,010 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 6: 40 (Andres Sada).

Raptors of Mexico and Central America by William S. Clark and N. John Schmitt. 2017. Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press. 304 pp. Hardback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 22: 65–67 (Joseph Taylor).

Threatened birds of the world edited by Alison J. Stattersfield and David R. Capper. 2000. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International & Barcelona, Spain: Lynx Edicions. 852 pp. Hardback. Review: *Cotinga* 21: 89–90 (A. T. Peterson).

Wildlife Conservation Society birds of Brazil: the Atlantic Forest of southeast Brazil by Robert S. Ridgely, John. A. Gwynne, Guy Tudor and Martha Argel. 2016. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 430 pp. Softback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 20: 64–66 (Guy Kirwan).

OTHER BOOKS MENTIONED

This box lists other books mentioned in this article, arranged in alphabetical order by title together with details of the review (and reviewer) in one of the two NBC publications, *Cotinga* or *Neotropical Birding*.

Birds, mammals & reptiles of the Galápagos Islands by Andy Swash & Rob Still. 2000. London, UK: WildGuides & Pica Press. 168 pp. Hardback. Review: *Cotinga* 17: 91–92 (Jon Hornbuckle).

Birds new to science: 50 years of avian discoveries by David Brewer. 2017. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 416 pp. Hardback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 22: 67–68 (James Lowen).

Birds of Cuba by Orlando H. Garrido and Arturo Kirkconnell. 2000. London, UK: Christopher Helm & Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 253 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 15: 74 (Allan Keith).

Birds of the high Andes by Jon Fjeldså and Niels Krabbe. 1990. Svenborg, Denmark: University of Copenhagen and Apollo books. 880 pp. Hardback.

Guide to birds of Honduras by Robert J. Gallardo. 2014. Privately published. 712 pp. Softback.

Birds of Venezuela by David Ascanio, Gustavo Rodriguez and Robin Restall. 2017. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 592 pp. Softback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 25: 87–88 (David Fisher).

Birds of the West Indies by Herbert Raffaele, James Wiley, Orlando Garrido, Allan Keith and Janis Raffaele. 1998. London UK: Christopher Helm. 511 pp. Hardback. Review: *Cotinga* 10: 111–113 (Andy Mitchell).

Fieldbook of the birds of Ecuador including the Galapagos Islands and common mammals by Miles McMullan and Leslis Navarrete. 2017. Ecuador: Ratty Ediciones. 240 pp. Softback.

A field guide to the birds of Brazil by Ber van Perlo. 2009. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. 465 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 32: 186–187 (Alexander Lees).

A guide to the birds of Colombia by Steven Hilty and William Brown. 1986. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 836 pp. Softback.

The new Neotropical companion by John Kricher. 2017. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 432 pp. Softback. Review: *Neotrop. Birding* 22: 65 (James Lowen).

Nightjars, potoos, frogmouths, oilbird and owlet-nightjars of the world by Nigel Cleere. 2010. Hampshire, UK: WildGuides. 464 pp. Hardback. Review: *Cotinga* 33: 170–171 (Thiago Costa).

Pantanal wildlife: a visitor's guide to Brazil's great wetland by James Lowen. 2010. Chalfont St. Peter, UK: Bradt Travel Guides Ltd. 172 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 32: 187–188 (Guy Kirwan).

Where to watch birds in Central America and the Caribbean by Nigel Wheatley and David Brewer. 2001. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 436 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 19: 89–90 (Mike Leven).

Where to watch birds in South America by Nigel Wheatley. 1994. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 431 pp. Hardback. Review: *Cotinga* 4: 69–70 (Jon Hornbuckle).

Wildlife Conservation Society Birds of Brazil: the Pantanal and cerrado of central Brazil by John A. Gwynne, Robert S. Ridgely, Guy Tudor and Martha Argel. 2010. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 322 pp. Softback. Review: *Cotinga* 33: 168–169 (Guy Kirwan).

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Then and now: a look at the ‘antpitta revolution’ of the past 25 years

Harold F. Greeney

A stand-out article from Cotinga *2 was Niels Krabbe’s synopsis of the state of knowledge about Giant Antpitta* Grallaria gigantea. *Including details of recent field records in Ecuador, this really got the juices flowing about a then-mythical beast. How times have changed!* Neotropical Birding *invited the modern-day guru of all things grallarid – and author of the 2018 book* Antpittas and gnateaters, *reviewed on page 86 – to give his perspective on 25 years of antpitta-related revelations.*

1 Giant Antpitta *Grallaria gigantea*, November 2016 (James Lowen/ jameslowen.com), the subject of the *Cotinga* 2 paper by Niels Krabbe *et al.* (1994).

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When invited to write this article, the stated premise was to illustrate how our knowledge of antpittas has changed since the publication of Niels Krabbe *et al.*'s (1994) article published in *Cotinga* 2 (Fig. 1), exactly a quarter of a century ago, concerning the Giant Antpitta *Grallaria gigantean* (Fig. 2). Although I count myself among those of us most aware of these changes, I confess I was still shocked to (re) read the first paragraph, wherein Krabbe and company reveal that, prior that date, the Giant Antpitta had gone virtually unrecorded for over 35 years! Indeed, recently summarised information on this species (Collar *et al.* 1992) substantiated this, mentioning that it was last seen in Colombia in 1959 and that, since 1958, it was known in Ecuador from only a handful of sight records and from one specimen of the nominate race collected in the upper Río Cosanga drainage (Napo province). Krabbe *et al.* went on to describe most or all of these recent Ecuadorian records in a way that, though rich with details and natural history, did little to boost the hopes of birdwatchers yearning to catch a glimpse of a Giant Antpitta on their next Andean foray. Certainly no one could have predicted what would happen 'next'.

In the early 2000s, just outside of the town of Mindo, Pichincha province, northwest Ecuador, a farmer named Ángel Paz joined many other residents of the region in responding to the growing avitourism industry by charging birdwatchers to visit the Andean Cock-of-the-rock *Rupicola peruviana* lek that was active on his property. As he grew to understand the mentality of birders and their (oft-unrequited!) passion for antpittas, Ángel realised that cock-of-the-rocks were not the only bird that twitchers would

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COTINGA 2 — Giant Antpitta

Giant Antpitta *Grallaria gigantea*

N. Krabbe, G. DeSmet, P. Greenfield, M. Jácome, J. C. Matheus and F. Sornoza M.

Introduction

The Giant Antpitta inhabits the Andean slopes in Ecuador and southernmost Colombia. It had only been found at a few sites where habitat destruction was known to be advanced, and the latest verified record of the species dated from 1958. All three subspecies, namely *gigantea*, *lehmanni* and *hybodoma* were therefore treated as globally threatened by Collar *et al.*, who published all available information on the species. Since then data on its voice, habitat and diet have been obtained. The new records, all from Ecuador, are detailed below:

North-western slope of Volcán Pichincha (hybridoma):

In early November 1991 Greenfield tape-recorded what he suspected to be Giant Antpittas at 1,750-1,750 m, 1 km south of Tandayapa (0°00'S 78°40'W, along the old road to Mindo. More tape recordings were obtained there on 6 November 1991 and on 6 and 15-20 January 1994. Natural songs were heard at dawn, dusk, and during a rainy afternoon. One male was collected after being tape-recorded (Krabbe). They were heard in a ravine, on the steep slopes that were covered with wet mossy forest, and were observed 1-3 m above the ground in patches of mossy understorey, including bamboo. The stomach contained an 0.8 cm long, strongly sclerotized, platyform, black- and-yellow-striped warabid beetle larva. On 2 December 1993 and 12 February 1994 Matheus observed a Giant Antpitta crossing a track at 1,220 m, 3.1 km south-west of Mindo (0°04'S 78°45'W), in the c.100 m wide plain of Río Mindo. Both slopes were covered by wet, mossy forest, but the plain had only patches of secondary, though still somewhat moss-covered, vegetation.

East slope of East Andes, Napo province - north slope of Cordillera de Guacamayos, Hacienda Aragón (hacienda 0°40'S 77°56'W) (*gigantea*):

In June 1992 Sornoza collected a male that was standing on open pasture, at an elevation of 2,200 m (erroneously given as 2,350 m by Collar *et al.*) in the middle of a flat, c.600 m wide, sandy to silty, waterlogged river plain. The wet mossy forest there had mostly been cleared; only small clumps or single trees were left standing in the overgrazed cow pasture, but it was adjacent to untouched forest to the south, where the plain narrowed. In this adjacent forest two more males were collected at 2,250 m at the entrance to Valle Hermoso, and at 2,300 m on the west side of Valle Dolorozo, 1.9 km south and 2.3 km south-south-west of the hacienda respectively; in bamboo and a developed understorey of palms, moss-covered branches and stems. The two birds were tape-recorded and observed singing from various perches 3-5 m above the ground, on 8 March (Robins) and on 13 October, 1993 (Krabbe). Only one of the three birds had stomach contents: a piece of a giant earthworm *Rhyndrolus* sp. and remains of a large, apparently scarabid beetle.

2 The article on Giant Antpitta *Grallaria gigantea* in *Cotinga* 2, by Niels Krabbe *et al.* (1994). As this article demonstrates, how times have changed...

Paz de las Aves, Pichincha, Ecuador, was the place that started it all. As well as Giant Antpitta *Grallaria gigantea* (Fig. 1, opposite), its stellar antpitta cast includes: **3** Immature Moustached Antpitta *G. alleni*, November 2009 (Nigel Voaden; flickr.com/photos/ nvoaden); and **4** Yellow-breasted Antpitta *G. flavotincta* (James Lowen/ jameslowen.com).

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Río Blanco, Caldas, Colombia has become a hotspot for birders keen to see antpittas. Its leggy stars include: **5** Chestnut-crowned Antpitta *Grallaria ruficapilla*, May 2017, and **6** Bicoloured Antpitta *G. rufocinerea*, February 2019 (both Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding); and **7** Brown-banded Antpitta *G. milleri*, May 2012 (Juan José Arango; flickr.com/photos/jjarango).

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Another protagonist at Río Blanco, Caldas, Colombia, is **8** Chestnut-naped Antpitta *G. nuchalis*, May 2012 (Juan José Arango; flickr.com/photos/jjarango).

9 Chestnut-naped Antpittas at Tapchalaca, Zamora-Chinchipe, Ecuador, look rather different to those in Colombia… (November 2017; Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding).

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In Peru, an exciting site is Fundo Alto Nieva, San Martín, where target species include: **10** Rusty-tinged Antpitta *Grallaria przewalskii*, May 2017 (Carlos Calle; flickr.com/photos/guiacalles) and **11** Ochre-fronted Antpitta *Grallaricula ochraceifrons*, September 2018 (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding).

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get up ridiculously early to see. In fact, some of the most prized species were those that had accompanied him for years on his early-morning treks out to his fields; the plump, feathered shadows bouncing ridiculously down the trails ahead of him.

By starting to feed worms to these spring-loaded companions, Ángel revolutionised, almost overnight, the way most birding tourists see their first antpitta. Only a few years after Ángel's worm-fed wonders (at the time, three species) were revealed to the world through an article in the first issue of *Neotropical Birding* (Collins 2006), no fewer than 15 species of antpittas were being regularly attracted to feeders in Colombia and Ecuador (Woods *et al.* 2011)! With the subsequent addition of feeding stations across the Neotropics the list of feeder-visiting species continues to grow, and now includes such rarities as Rufous-crowned Antpitta *Pittasoma rufopileatum*, now considered a member of the Conopophagidae, and Peruvian Antpitta *Grallaricula peruviana* (Greeney 2018, Solano-Ugalde 2019).

When NBC was established in 1994, it would have been unimaginable to get such good photos of this titchy pair: **12** Crescent-faced Antpitta *Grallaricula lineifrons*, El Bosque, Caldas, Colombia, October 2018 (Juan José Arango; flickr.com/photos/jjarango); and **13** Hooded Antpitta *G. cucullata*, Otún Quimbaya, Risaralda, Colombia, August 2016 (Juan José Arango; flickr.com/photos/jjarango).

Antpittas have long been highly-prized by birdwatchers, and their shy nature and seemingly supernatural ability to vocalise from the undergrowth only metres away while remaining unseen is legendary. So why do they so quickly adapt to receiving meals from humans? The reasons why antpittas appear to be particularly easy to 'train' in this way remain unclear, but it has been hypothesised that one of their natural foraging practices may be to follow large Andean mammals such as Spectacled Bear *Tremarctos ornatus* and Mountain Tapir *Tapirus pinchaque*, grabbing up worms and other food exposed by the passage of these animals as they disturb the litter, overturn logs, and tear apart bromeliads in their own search for food (Greeney 2012). The parallels between a foraging Mountain Tapir and groups of humans lumbering through the forest with a clatter of camera gear and squishing boots are clear, but perhaps best left unelaborated.

On the science side of things, the growth in available information on the natural history and breeding biology of antpittas over the past 25 years has mirrored the increasing ease with which they are added to birders' checklists. Like the birds themselves, the nests and nesting behaviour of antpittas have long evaded the attentions of ornithologists. Although the first species of antpitta was described over 235 years ago (Thrush-

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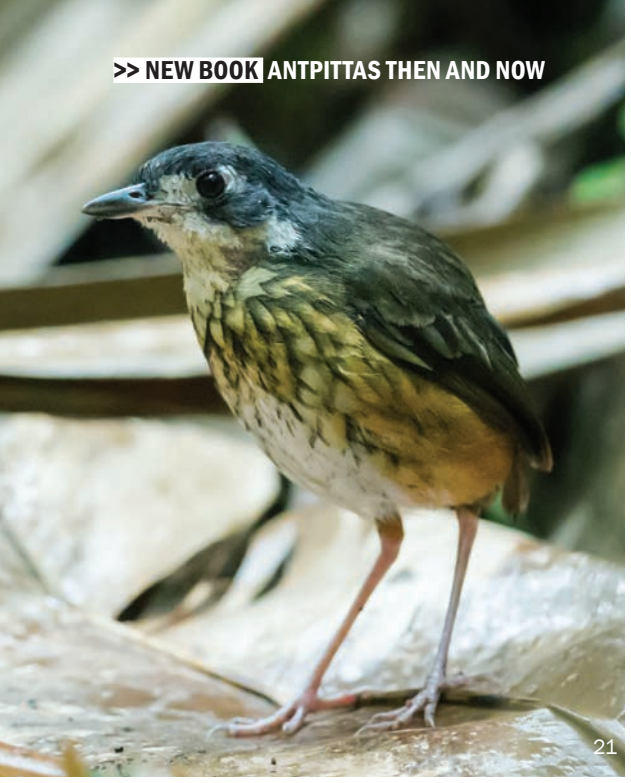
At the time of NBC's formation, these two species had yet to be described: **14** Jocotoco Antpitta *Grallaria ridgelyi* (immature, Tapichalaca, Zamora–Chinchipe, Ecuador, December 2008; Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding); and **15–16** Urrao Antpitta *G. urraoensis* (or *fenwickorum*), Colibri del Sol, Colombia, January 2010 (Nigel Voaden; flickr.com/photos/nvoaden). Controversially, the latter has already been assigned two scientific and at least three common names. The South American Classification Committee – followed by *Neotropical Birding* – uses *urraoensis* although, as Greeney (2018) notes, "strict adherence to International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN) regulations requires the use of *fenwickorum* until such time as, and if, ICZN issues a contrary ruling".

The mountains of the Andes are 'antpitta central' for good reason. Here are four more: **17** Immature Scaled Antpitta *Grallaria guatimalensis*, Tandayapa Bird Lodge, Pichincha, June 2013 (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding); **18** White-bellied Antpitta *G. hypoleuca*, San Isidro Lodge, province, November 2009 (Nigel Voaden; flickr.com/photos/nvoaden); **19** Slate-crowned Antpitta *Grallaricula nana*, Reserva Río Blanco, Manizales, Caldas, Colombia, January 2014 (Steve Huggins; pbase.com/sjhuggins); and the notably high-altitude **20** Stripe-headed Antpitta *Grallaria andicolus*, Cruz Conga, Cajamarca, Peru, August 2017 (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding).



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Antpitta diversity is less rich in the lowlands, but this does not mean that there aren't goodies to find (Figs. 21–22 by Nick Athanas/ Tropical Birding): **21** White-lored Antpitta *Hylopezus fulviventris*, Sani Lodge, Sucumbíos, May 2015; **22** Alta Floresta Antpitta *H. whittakeri*, Cristalino Jungle Lodge, Mato Grosso, Brazil, July 2012, which was split from Spotted Antpitta *Hylopezus macularius* a few years ago (see *Neotropical Birding* 11: 36–38 for details); **23** Variegated Antpitta *Grallaria varia*, Brazil, June 2016 (Ciro Albano/NE Brazil Birding).

like Antpitta *Myrmothera campanisona*, in 1783), the first mention of their reproductive habits did not appear in the literature for almost 50 years (zu Weid 1831), despite the avid enthusiasm with which bird nests were searched for by egg collectors of that time.

This initial information involved only the cursory mention of nest of the Variegated Antpitta *Grallaria varia*; moreover, this was (probably) partially incorrect, as it was said to be on the ground (zu Weid 1831). It took until the early 20th century for a fairly well-documented description of an antpitta nest to be published (Todd & Carriker 1922), in this case, Rusty-breasted Antpitta *Grallaricula ferrugineipectus*. In fact, the first detailed description of an antpitta nest was not on record until the middle of the century (Edwards & Lea 1955); for Scaled Antpitta *Grallaria guatimalensis* (Fig. 17), some 170 years after the description of the first antpitta.

Like the scarcity of Giant Antpitta sightings reported by Krabbe *et al.* (1994), by the 1980s the nests of only six species of antpittas had been described (Wiedenfeld 1982), one of which had been described erroneously (Martin & Greeney 2006) and one of which was known only from captivity (Bell & Bruning 1976). Our knowledge of antpitta nests, however, changed dramatically at the turn of the 20th century.

By 2008 the number of antpittas with described nests had more than doubled, with several species studied in detail for the first time (Greeney *et al.* 2008). Enthusiasm for the study of antpitta reproductive biology continued, and according to the most recent summary of all things antpitta (Greeney 2018), the nests are now known for more than half of all described species of Grallariidae. Rather aptly, and to bring us full circle, one of the newly described nests is that of the Giant Antpitta (Solano-Ugalde *et al.* 2009), based on a nest built by the very antpittas habituated by Ángel Paz, where the antpitta revolution has its roots.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the following photographers for granting use of their antpitta images to illustrate this article: Juan José Arango (flickr.com/photos/jjarango), Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding (who also runs the brilliant photographic website antpitta.com), Carlos Calle (flickr.com/photos/guiacalles), Steve Huggins (pbase.com/sjhuggins), James Lowen (jameslowen.com) and Nigel Voaden (flickr.com/photos/nvoaden).

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Junin Grebe: the survivor of Peru's high Andean wetlands

Alan Chamorro and Constantino Aucca

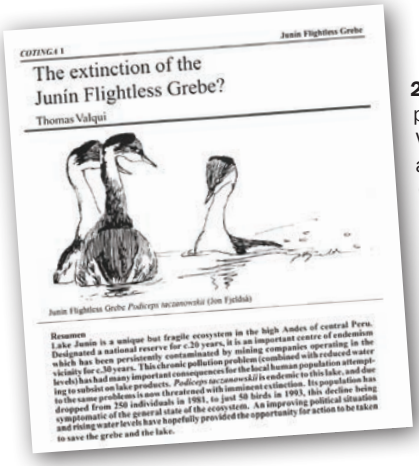
In Cotinga *1, Peruvian ornithologist Thomas Valqui penned an article alerting readers to the critical plight of the Junin Grebe* Podiceps taczanowskii. *Twenty-five years on, here is an update from those most closely involved in its conservation.*

Junin Grebe *Podiceps taczanowskii* is a flightless waterbird that occurs only on Lago Junín (aka Chinchaycocha). The existence of this Critically Endangered species – plus that of many birds, amphibians, plants and around 11 local communities – depends fundamentally on the quality of the lake's waters. This article summarises developments since the article by Thomas Valqui (1994) in the very first *Cotinga*. Valqui explained that the grebe's population had crashed by 80% in just 12 years to a terrifying low of 50 birds in 1993, which he ascribed to "chronic pollution combined with reduced water levels". Although the article mooted the prospect of the species's extinction, Valqui hoped that "an improving political situation and rising water levels" might provide "the opportunity for action… to save the grebe and the lake".

Lago Junín: importance

Lago Junín is located c.150 km northeast of Lima in Junín and Pasco provinces. It lies in the Bombón plateau at 4,080 m altitude, in Peru's central Andes. Surrounded by high peaks, the lake serves as an oasis for a great diversity of local birds and a seasonal home for around 18 boreal migratory species. Three avian taxa are endemic: Junin Grebe,

1 Junín Grebe *Podiceps taczanowskii*, Lago Junín, Junín, Peru, August 2018 (E. Zevallos).



COTINGA 1 Junín Flightless Grebe

The extinction of the Junín Flightless Grebe?

Thomas Valqui

Junín Flightless Grebe *Podiceps taczanowskii* (Jon Fjeldså)

Resumen

Lake Junín is a unique but fragile ecosystem in the high Andes of central Peru. Designated a national reserve for c.20 years, it is an important centre of endemism which has been persistently contaminated by mining companies operating in the vicinity for c.30 years. This chronic pollution problem (combined with reduced water levels) has had many important consequences for the local human population attempting to subsist on lake products. *Podiceps taczanowskii* is endemic to this lake, and due to the same problems is now threatened with imminent extinction. Its population has dropped from 350 individuals in 1981, to just 50 birds in 1993, this decline being symptomatic of the general state of the ecosystem. An improving political situation and rising water levels have hopefully provided the opportunity for action to be taken to save the grebe and the lake.

2 The opening page of Thomas Valqui's (1994) article on Junín Grebe *Podiceps taczanowskii* in *Cotinga* 1.

White-tufted Grebe *Rollandia rolland morrisoni* and Black (Junin) Rail *Laterallus (jamaicensis) tuerosi* (split by BirdLife International and considered globally Endangered). There is also an important population of Silvery Grebe *Podiceps occipitalis*, which is here represented by the taxon *juninensis*, split by BirdLife International as Northern Silvery Grebe *P. juninensis* and classified as Near Threatened.

In 1974, the Peruvian government declared Lago Junín and its surroundings to be a National Reserve and adopted an objective of protecting its unique ecosystem and the services it provides. Other international designations have followed, notably Ramsar Site (i.e. a wetland of international importance) in 1996 (RIS 1996), and Important Bird Area in 2008 (Devenish *et al.* 2009, BirdLife International 2019).

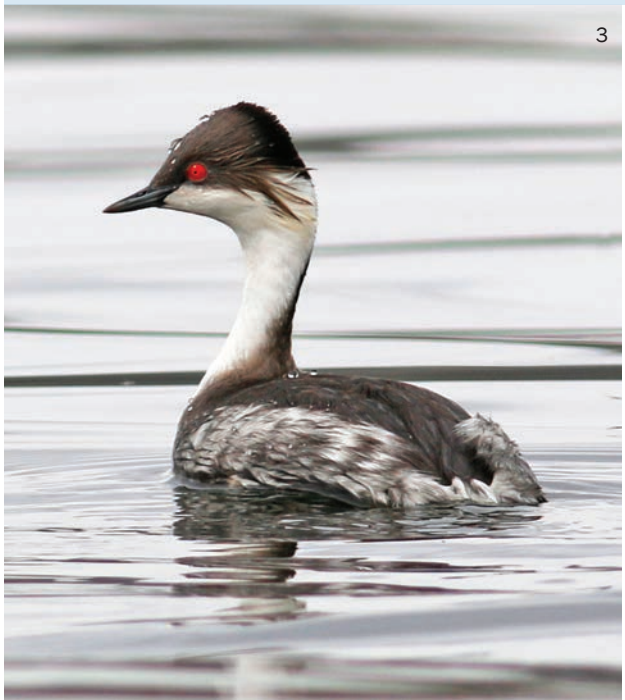
Lago Junín: threats

The problem with being flightless is that you can't escape from problems. The problem with being a waterbird is that you can't fundamentally shift habitat. So imagine being a flightless waterbird…

In the year before Thomas Valqui's *Cotinga* article was published, just 50 Junin Grebes were counted: the population's nadir. Pollution, poor water management and the El Niño Southern Oscillation have long had terrible consequences for wildlife at Lago Junín. In 1997/1998 there was a mass die-off of endemic amphibians (Lake Junin Frog *Telmatobius macrostomus* and Junin Riparian Frog *T. brachydactylus*) and native fish (*Orestia* sp.). Currently, during periods of high water, dead Junin Grebes are regularly found. Populations of other waterbirds such as Slate-coloured Coot *Fulica ardesiaca*, Puna Teal *Spatula puna*, Yellow-billed Teal *Anas flavirostris* and Common Gallinule *Gallinula galeata* are also decreasing (Dinesen *et al.* 2018). Birth rates for species such as Chilean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus chilensis* are declining (SERNANP 2017).

Regrettably then, the national and international recognition outlined above has not precluded environmental damage. Lago Junín has a long history of continuous contamination by mining waste and sewage from nearby towns, a problem increased by the presence of the Upamayo dam, constructed in 1936 on the lake's sole tributary, in the north of the waterbody. There is much evidence of ongoing water pollution, particularly

3–4 Junín Grebe *Podiceps taczanowskii*, Lago Junín, Junín, Peru (David Fisher): **3** February 2017; **4** May 2014.



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5 Lago Junín, Junín, Peru – as seen from the viewpoint at Conoc (Alan Chamorro).

6 Cleaning rivers – here being undertaken by members of Conoc community – helps restore water quality (Arias W. Conoc).

7 Sasicucho community residents cleaning and restoring a channel to improve water distribution into Lake Junín (Zevallos B. Sasicucho/ECOAN).

via Río San Juan, with high concentrations of heavy metals recorded (Walsh Peru 2002, Water Management Consultants 2008, Tinkuy EIRL 2009, ECOAN 2010, Rodbell *et al*. 2014, CENERGIA in press).

Counting and conservation

In 2000, the Servicio Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (SERNANP, formerly INRENA: National Service of Natural Protected Areas) commissioned a species recovery plan. A species action plan for Junin Grebe (Walsh Perú 2002) initially recommended a comprehensive population survey to replace previous estimates based on extrapolation. The first three such censuses took place in 2001: 113 individual Junin Grebes were found in May, 160 in August and 304 in December. In 2007, a repeat survey using the same methodology recorded 217 birds. Putting these and earlier findings together, we reckon that they show that the population was actually relatively stable from the 1970s through to the noughties, at around 250–300 individuals. This, though, is on the context of a major decline since the 1930s, when the species was considered extremely abundant (Dinesen *et al.* 2018).

Since 2008, the NGO Asociación Ecosistemas Andinos (ECOAN) has worked intensively with SERNANP to develop actions that improve the quality of the grebe's habitat. We have made evidence-based conservation decisions and initiated a monitoring program that evaluates the impact of conservation actions on the grebe population (ECOAN 2009, 2010; Chamorro & Aucca 2015, 2017). An early action was to build capacity among SERNANP employees to carry out the various conservation actions and censuses. Since 2008 a dedicated team of professionals from both institutions have worked assiduously to protect and evaluate the species (ECOAN 2009).

Censuses conducted from 2010–18 reveal population fluctuations between 300–400 individuals (i.e. higher numbers than previously counted). We have also collated data to describe the spatial and temporal distribution of the species. We now know that adults use the deepest parts of the lake mainly during courtship (Aug–Dec), and waters between clumps of vegetation dominated by Southern Bulrush *Schoenoplectus californicus* and Baltic Rush *Juncus balticus* for nesting (Jan–Mar) and parental care (Apr–May). Mixed groups of Junin and Silvery grebes, including juveniles and chicks, favour these vegetated areas, leaving adults to frequent open water. Interestingly, two groups of Junin Grebe

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8–10 ECOAN deploys a variety of tools to assist environmental education. These include an environmental education manual (**8**), posters (**9**) and colouring pictures for children (**10**).

frequent the central part of the lake year-round, an association that is probably diet related.

This fieldwork has enabled us to identify breeding areas. These are now strictly protected within the National Reserve: human access and hunting are now prohibited. Hunting of Junin Grebe is of course already illegal, but it may be disturbed (or its survival impacted) by the hunting of other species that share the habitat. However, Rolando Tito Uribe (pers. comm. 2019) suggests that hunting is no longer a major problem, given the overall reduction in hunting levels (because urban migration means that fewer local hunters remain and birds no longer form part of their diet) coupled with rigorous enforcement. Instead, Uribe believes that burning tracts of bulrush is a great threat as it destroys nests and breeding habitat.

Droughts and floods, accentuated by the Upamayo dam, have influenced the number of grebes. Low water reduces access to the breeding area, whereas excess water can flood nests and force fish deeper (beyond easy reach for juveniles). A new problem associated with higher water is that non-native Rainbow Trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss* (already a known threat to the Critically Endangered Hooded Grebe *Podiceps gallardoi* of Argentina; see Roesler *et al.* 2018) can reach nesting areas and aggressively compete with juveniles for food. With no natural predators, this fish's population is increasing exponentially.

Environmental education and beyond

In co-operation with public and private institutions, ECOAN has established an environmental-education programme. We are targeting local authorities and schools, covering topics such as caring for the grebe's habitat and water protection. Every year small areas (particularly those used for feeding and breeding) are 'cleaned' with less contaminated water. Together with local stakeholders, we run awareness-raising campaigns about waste management and species conservation. In 2008, Junin Grebe became the official bird of the region (as designated by Junín's regional government). We are now implementing a formally approved management plan (ECOAN 2010) for three of Lago Junín's key birds: Junin Grebe, Black (Junin) Rail and Chilean Flamingo.

Concluding thoughts

The challenges we face in conserving Junin Grebes are great. Yet political, institutional and financial support is neither continuous nor sustainable. This translates into insufficient resources to carry out large-scale actions. Current threats are likely to be exacerbated by El Niño events and by climate change. The current stability of the Junin Grebe's population is fragile – and likely to be temporary.

Twenty-five years after Thomas Valqui alerted Neotropical Bird Club members to the parlous situation of Junin Grebe, its overall situation has not changed much. The population is marginally larger, for sure, but environmental problems remain broadly the same. Without clear policies to improve conditions at Lago Junín, the future does not look promising. Change is needed urgently. We cannot wait until the ecosystem has collapsed. For

a start, we need a regional management tool on how to treat pollutants and how to sanction those responsible for their discharge. At a minimum, we need the continuation of actions led by institutions such as SERNANP and ECOAN, and by local actors. It is thanks to their efforts that the Junin Grebe's population is stable at all, and that the situation in 2018, when 294 birds were counted, is more promising than that outlined by Valqui, when just 50 birds were feared to remain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the institutions that have collaborated throughout the long years of this tough battle: American Bird Conservancy (ABC), BirdLife International, The Mohamed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund and Wetlands International Latinoamerica y el Caribe / Fundación Humedales. We thank the following for their photographs: Arias W. Conoc, David Fisher, E. Zevallos, and Zevallos B. Sasicucho/ECOAN.

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Three-wattled Bellbird: celebrating the bird behind the Neotropical Bird Club logo

Graeme Green

At the invitation of Neotropical Birding*, Graeme Green – member of the NBC launch committee and co-author (with NBC co-instigator and long-time* Cotinga *editor Guy Kirwan) of the family monograph* Cotingas and manakins *– offers a personal perspective on the bird that features in the NBC logo.*

The offer could not have been more timely or appropriate. When the *Neotropical Birding* editor suggested that I contribute an article about Three-wattled Bellbird *Procnias tricarunculatus* to the issue celebrating the Neotropical Bird Club's 25th anniversary, I had just returned from Costa Rica where I had finally managed some field time with this charismatic

All photos are of Three-wattled Bellbird *Procnias tricarunculatus*.

1 Adult male, Angeles Norte, San Ramón, Alajuela, Costa Rica, April 2016 (Jorge Chinchilla A.).

2–3 Adult male(s), Angeles Norte, San Ramón, Alajuela, Costa Rica, April 2016 (Jorge Chinchilla A.).
4 Adult males, Costa Rica, February 2019 (Alex Vargas/birdphotoworld.com).

5 Vocalising adult male, Los Angeles Norte, San Ramón, Alajuela, Costa Rica, March 2017 (Eduardo Mena/emena Photography; flickr.com/photos/eduardomena).

and globally threatened species. This success came after failing to see the species in 1989, nearly 30 years earlier! The following is a personal account of this long-desired experience, rather than an in-depth study of the species; for this Snow (1982) and Kirwan & Green (2011) are the essential references. That said, a few titbits are always worthwhile as context!

Bellbirds *Procnias* comprise a genus of four easily recognisable and fairly large cotingas. They are best known for their remarkable (loud and far-carrying) vocalisations, as well as their incredible plumage and adornments. Given the male's trio of long and flexible worm-like wattles, perhaps the most extravagant in appearance is Three-wattled Bellbird. It is also the sole representative of the genus in Central America, ranging from Honduras to Panama; all the others occur east of the Andes.

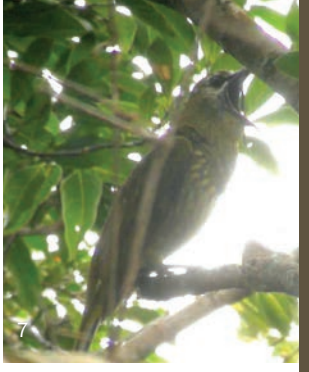
Three-wattled Bellbird was also the subject of groundbreaking research using radiotelemetry (news 'broken' in *Cotinga* 2: 11, but formally published in Powell & Bjork 2004). This revealed "the most complex migratory pattern recorded for a tropical species". The annual migration cycle was found to include stopovers of 2–5 months "in four distinct life zones: two middle-elevation and two lowland sites separated by as much as 200km". Powell and Bjork's findings had significance way beyond the family Cotingidae: "Our findings," they wrote, "demonstrate the complicated ecological integration of geographically dispersed tropical ecosystems and the need for comprehensive conservation strategies that include representation of the full array of regional habitats and a greater emphasis on maintaining connectivity". This was important stuff from a glorious and widely sought-after bird. Talking of which…

My first attempt

In 1989 I travelled to the Neotropics for the first time. I visited Venezuela and then, three weeks later, flew to San José (Costa Rica) to spend a further two weeks taking in many of the sites frequented by birders at that time. I was aware that late January/early February was not the ideal time of year to see Three-wattled Bellbird at the regular birding stomping ground of Monteverde, although I had hoped to see an individual in the lowlands at La Selva. Indeed, there were birds present and vocalising at the latter locality. The problem was that they were just not viewable from any of the trails. Monteverde, meanwhile, was cool and windy and there were no bellbirds present. Fail.

The return quest

Nearly three decades later, in late 2018, I organised a 12-night trip for a group of friends which followed an itinerary adopted by many tour companies: Tortuguero, Arenal, Monteverde



6 Unaged immature male, Volcancito Arriba, Boquete, Panama, June 2013 (Kay Wade).

7 Immature male thought to be in its fourth calendar-year, Santa Elena, Puntarenas, Costa Rica, December 2018 (Berni Picado).

8 Presumed juvenile, unsexed, Santa Elena, Puntarenas, Costa Rica, December 2018 (Berni Picado).

and then Manuel Antonio. My wife and I were then going to travel to the south for an extra seven nights to search for other cotingas such as Yellow-billed *Carpodectes antoniae* and Turquoise *Cotinga ridgwayi*. Unfortunately, this trip had to be timed to coincide with the UK's long school holidays (August), which I suspected would not be ideal for bellbirds at Monteverde.

Our party duly arrived at Monteverde Lodge Hotel from Arenal mid-morning on a Saturday. Whilst waiting for our rooms to be ready, a hotel guest came into reception with what was obviously a local birding guide, enabling me to ascertain that there were neither bellbirds nor quetzals in the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve (which lies at 1,600–1,800 m). Although no surprise, this was still a massive disappointment. Foiled again!

The following morning, our party was picked up by a local guide, Berni Picado, who drove us to the reserve entrance. Here I was surprised to find at least 15 tour groups waiting for the gates to open. This was a great contrast to 1989, when Phil Whittington and I had the reserve to ourselves at times! However, the morning was excellent and we saw most of our target species, including the first Resplendent Quetzal *Pharomachrus mocinno* to be seen here for a fortnight. I was particularly pleased to find Spangle-cheeked Tanager *Tangara dowii*, which I had missed all those years ago.

I spent some time chatting to Berni and mentioned my frustration at the lack of bellbirds. To my delight, he stated with great confidence that he could show me bellbirds "just down the mountain". Of course, I jumped at this. Once Berni had rearranged an afternoon appointment, he picked me up from the hotel at 13h30.

The first surprise was that "just down the mountain" was exactly that. I had presumed we would need to drive at least 30–60 minutes but the area we searched was just outside Santa Elena, on the road southbound opposite the petrol station at c.1,300 m altitude. Berni turned off the main road onto a wide dirt road and said, simply: "there they are". I must admit I was somewhat nonplussed as the area was what would be termed suburbia in the UK; scattered houses within relatively extensive wooded areas.

Upon alighting from the vehicle, however, the very first bird we saw was a full adult male Three-wattled Bellbird! The individual was flying at head height away from us following the track (or so it appeared). For the following two hours we moved no more than 400 m from where we started and saw at least six different birds, ranging from immatures to definitive-plumaged adult males. It was simply joyous!

There were males vocalising all round us from every scrap of woodland. The first bird that we watched properly was an immature male (Fig. 7). Berni referred to this as a fourth calendar-year bird. This precision was a surprise. Although 'delayed' plumage maturation is well known for manakins and cotingas (see below), Berni's assertion regarding the exact age of this bird suggested a keen understanding of the process involved, as this individual showed few signs of maturity other than some white on the head and

9 Vocalising adult male (left) and female (right), Horqueta, Boquete, Panama, April 2010 (Lloyd Cripe/ lloydcripephotos.com).

fully-developed wattles. It was also obvious that this immature's vocalisations were not as proficient as the full adult male we could hear in the distance.

Speaking of which… I was really keen to see the plumage that is depicted on the NBC logo. The adult male was calling from an area of woodland in Finca Los Americas that, to my untrained eye, looked in better condition with more mature trees and a sparser understorey. This individual was very difficult to see – frustratingly so. Eventually we managed good views through the 'scope as the bird perched in a fruiting wild avocado *Ocotea* sp. The bird was vocalising constantly which prompted me to speculate that it was 'defending' an excellent food source.

In fact, as time went on and we saw more bellbirds, it was clear that each individual was closely associated with wild avocado trees. We saw immature males and noted variation in both the length of their wattles and extent of white feathering around the head. All vocalising birds were located in the sub-canopy and remained largely concealed. The only bird perched in the open was a bird of indeterminate sex in juvenile plumage (Fig. 8). The fresh feather fringes would suggest that this individual had probably recently fledged. This was a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon – and within sight (and sound) of the town of Santa Elena!

Of ageing and avocados

It was clear that these individuals are closely associated with wild avocados (as noted by Moermond & Denslow 1985, and Kirwan & Green 2011), at least at this time of year, during which the birds are leaving the Monteverde area and commencing their migrations either northwest to the Gulf of Nicoya or northeast to Nicaragua via Arenal and Cano Negro. Corredor Biológico Pájaro Campana, a local NGO, is very actively identifying areas containing wild avocados. It is also reforesting these areas and native species and leading educational activities designed to help conservation of this flagship species.

As regards the ageing of the individuals we observed, the development of plumage in Three-wattled Bellbird is described in Snow (1973) and subsequently in Kirwan & Green (2011), but the earliest reference I have located is in Skutch (1969), who writes that "the young males evidently take more than one year, and possibly several years, to acquire their full adult regalia". Delayed plumage maturation has been recorded in 33 bird families (including widely in Cotingidae, the cotingas, and Pipridae, the manakins), with at least 15 potential explanations suggested but no single one-size-fits-all answer agreed (e.g. Cucco & Malacarne 2000). In bellbirds, delayed plumage maturation is presumably connected with the time taken for an individual male to reach its full vocal potential as highlighted with Bare-throated Bellbird *Procnias nudicollis* (Kirwan & Green 2011). Complicating the situation is that individual Three-wattled Bellbirds from different populations have different 'dialects'. Nevertheless, to my ear, it did seem that the 4th calendar-year male lacked the vocal prowess of the nearby full adult male.

Final thoughts

Finally spending time with Three-wattled Bellbirds was a clear birding highlight for me. But the experience of seeing any rare species is always tinged with concern. Three-wattled Bellbird has been officially classified as globally Vulnerable since 1994, when the NBC was born. Forest loss across its range has been extensive and, coupled with the species's altitudinal migrations which entails it finding forest with the desirable

10 Adult male and presumed juvenile male, location to be confirmed, Costa Rica, February 2019 (Alex Vargas/ birdphotoworld.com).

fruiting trees at many different altitudes, serves to create a difficult environment in which to manage the species's survival. As the logo for the Neotropical Bird Club it is to be hoped that all NGOs and individuals working for the Three-wattled Bellbird's future are successful. I am sure that readers will agree with me that this amazing species deserves to be appreciated by many more generations of birdwatchers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I was pleased to be invited to write this article for one main reason. I was on the original 'launch committee' of the Neotropical Bird Club (and subsequently joined Council for a short time). As I type this I can look at my bookshelf and see the result of a quarter century of endeavour; *Cotinga* and *Neotropical Birding* are publications of which the NBC and its members and supporters should be justifiably proud. I would like to thank Berni Picado of Ocotea Tours for providing photographs and altitudinal information, for discussing ageing and avocados with me, and for alerting me to work on bellbirds by the NGO Corredor Biologico Pajaro Campana (cbpc.org). This article would not have been possible without Berni's considerable input. I also thank the following for offering images, whether or not they were used: Lloyd Cripe (lloydcripephotos.com), Eduardo Mena/emena Photography (flickr.com/photos/eduardomena), David Rodríguez Arias (thebirdingexperience.com), Alex Vargas (birdphotoworld.com) and Kay Wade. I also thank Bill Adsett for furnishing contacts. Finally, best wishes to the Neotropical Bird Club and here's to the next 25 years!

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A blue throat out of the blue

Juan Freile

At Neotropical Birding *we have always taken pride in celebrating those who go off the beaten track in search of the novel. The managing editor of our sister journal* Cotinga *explains what it meant to him to be involved in unveiling a bird new to science – a stunning Ecuadorian hummingbird, no less.*

In my early years in ornithology, while studying the impossible antpittas, I fantasised about discovering a new species in the classical way: seeing, capturing, photographing and tape-recording something undeniably unknown. Once, I even sketched one while listening to an

All photographs of Blue-throated Hillstar *Oreotrochilus cyanolaemus* were taken at Cerro de Arcos, Loja/El Oro, Ecuador.

1 Male Blue-throated Hillstar *Oreotrochilus cyanolaemus* showing its unique and very distinctive throat patch. March 2019 (Roger Ahlman; pbase.com/ahlman).

'inspiring' lecture on plant physiology. It was meant to have a black mask, chestnut crown and dull greyish underparts with faint barring. I was going to name it Black-masked Antpitta *Grallaria nigrocincta*. Afterwards, the dream expanded into leaftossers, piculets, spinetails, antwrens, pygmy-owls and other 'little brown jobs' that may have gone undetected due to their skulking nature and cryptic plumage.

I never did much to make this fantasy come true, I have to confess. Not many expeditions to remote areas in my country, Ecuador; no protracted field seasons at poorly known sites. I did not join any international expedition to unexplored places abroad. Admittedly, my fantasy was that of a youngster. Soon it vanished – along with other rather superfluous elements of my ornithological personality. Not long ago, however, it was resuscitated while I was revising and updating the list of birds of Ecuador (Freile *et al.* 2018a). The resurgence started with the controversial and still-unresolved case of the 'San Isidro' Owl *Ciccaba* sp., when Mitch Lysinger found a freshly dead individual and invited me to lead a study to 'resolve' its taxonomic status. We are still strolling inside that black-and-white maze…

Meanwhile, regular information exchange and discussions with top experts such as Niels Krabbe, the late Paul Coopmans, Robert Ridgely, Tom Schulenberg, Elisa Bonaccorso, Paul Greenfield, Jonas Nilsson, Alejandro Solano, Mark Robbins, Dušan Brinkhuizen and José María Loaiza, along with a thorough study of volume 1 of the *Birds of Ecuador* (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001), plus Chapman's (1926) monograph on the birds of Ecuador and the superb *Birds of the high Andes* (Fjeldså & Krabbe 1991), resulted in a list of

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Male Blue-throated Hillstar *Oreotrochilus cyanolaemus*, **2** October 2018 (Dušan M. Brinkhuizen/ sapayoa.com).

Habitat at the type locality (Cerro de Arcos/El Oro, Loja, Ecuador) faces many threats, including overgrazing and exotic conifer plantations (**3** May 2017, Francisco Sornoza-Molina; **4** October 2018, Dušan M. Brinkhuizen/ sapayoa.com).

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unsolved taxonomic cases. In a well-explored country like Ecuador, brand new discoveries like those recently made in neighbouring Colombia or Peru (e.g. O'Neill *et al*. 2000, Lara *et al*. 2012) seemed to have ended with Jocotoco Antpitta *Grallaria ridgelyi* (Krabbe *et al*. 1999) and Foothill Elaenia *Myiopagis olallai* (Coopmans & Krabbe 2001). Following up taxa on the list of unsolved cases was likely the only way to put a name onto a new bird.

Our first attempt 'failed'. We made a brief expedition to Puná Island, off Guayas province, seeking Streaked Saltator *Saltator striatipectus*, which had been suggested as a potentially unnamed taxon (Chapman 1926, Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). We discovered, as expected, that saltators on this island belong to the same subspecies that occurs in the nearby mainland (Freile *et al*. 2018b). With one case solved, it was on to the next…

By mid-April 2017, Elisa Bonaccorso and I had planned a field expedition to a 'secret' spot where at least three controversial cases overlap (along with a fourth one that is already being handled bravely by Manuel Sánchez-Nivicela and Elisa). The budget was ready, research permits were arranged, dates were roughly defined and the field team was set. Nonetheless, a single WhatsApp message challenged these best-laid plans.

What on earth is that?

In late April, Francisco ('Pancho') Sornoza shared a photo of an immature male hillstar that he had taken in *páramo* at the summit of Cerro de Arcos (3,680 m elevation) in El Oro province (albeit adjacent to the Loja border), southwest Ecuador. Pancho tentatively identified the bird as Ecuadorian Hillstar *Oreotrochilus chimborazo*, which is understandable given that the nearest population (subspecies *jamesoni*) occurs only 40 km north in the Cajas massif. However, its plumage did not fit this near-endemic hummingbird, at least not in the view of several of us.

Pancho was strong-willed enough to go back to the chilly and distant *páramo* to try and relocate the bird. And he succeeded! A week later, images of a stunning adult male agitated our Ecuador Birders' chat. It certainly wasn't Ecuadorian Hillstar. But what on earth was it? Perhaps it was an isolated population of Andean (Green-headed) Hillstar *O. (estella) stolzmanni*, which occurs just c.115 km south of Cerro de Arcos? A hybrid or an intermediate between Ecuadorian and Andean (Green-headed) hillstars? No… this was a new, undescribed and utterly beautiful hummingbird. Our plans simply had to change.

Believe it or not, the stars gathered in alignment for us. We already had logistics, budget and research permits arranged for an expedition. Second, our planned destination was only about 40 km west of Cerro de Arcos, in the Andean foothills. It wouldn't take much to shift direction. Third, we had relevant expertise as Elisa had been studying *Oreotrochilus* hillstars for a while (see, e.g., Rodríguez-Saltos & Bonaccorso 2016). Fourth, the field team for the foothill expedition already included Pancho, Elisa, a couple of others and me. So, it was straightforward to switch tack. Those foothill novelties would have to be postponed. By 20 May, Pancho, Jonas Nilsson and I were heading to Cerro de Arcos after the purported new hummingbird.

Realising the dream

Can there have been an easier way to discover a new species? On 22 May, barely one hour after arriving at Cerro de Arcos, Pancho and I were gazing at a superb male – possibly the same

individual that he had photographed earlier. Next day, we set up mist-nets and wandered around trying to observe as much of the hummingbird's behaviour as possible.

Jonas was feeling sick, but was not going to give up, at least not without a glimpse of the new hummingbird. Nets were up, the wind was light and the temperature mild (unusual in the chilly Andean *páramo*). Pancho descended to a creek where he saw the first female. Jonas was stubbornly lying down, stomach aching, in front of a *Chuquiraga* shrub – a genus of aster, with spindly stems culminating in a fiery orange inflorescence, known to be the favourite plant of existing *Oreotrochilus*. His audio recorder was on, his sharp eyes were inspecting the *Chuquiraga* and surroundings, and he was gathering the first behavioural data for the hummingbird.

About 10h00, I checked our six mist-nets. They contained six birds: two Streak-backed Canastero *Asthenes wyatti*, and single Black Flowerpiercer *Diglossa humeralis*, Plumbeous Sierra-Finch *Phrygilus unicolor*, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant *Ochthoeca fumicolor* and Viridian Metaltail *Metallura williami*. So far, so good. Jonas peered at me inquisitively. Pancho was out of sight. I was heading back to our ringing station when a male hillstar dashed a few metres in front of me, hit the net once, bounced back, hit it again and, this time, got tangled. I carefully extracted it. I was staring at a new species for science – in my hand!

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5 *Chuquiraga* scrub favoured by Blue-throated Hillstar *Oreotrochilus cyanolaemus* (Dušan M. Brinkhuizen/sapayoa.com).

6 Male Blue-throated Hillstar *Oreotrochilus cyanolaemus*, May 2017 (Francisco Sornoza-Molina). The upperparts are bluer-green than other *Oreotrochilus* taxa.

A couple more days in the field enabled us to gather much information on the putative new species's natural history, habitat, feeding plants and ecological interactions, and to get the first recordings of its voice. We knew nearly nothing about the hillstar's population size, detailed habitat requirements and current status, so exploring the area further was essential. Pancho and Jonas went back to the field in June and July 2017. They found four new localities for the hillstar and made further natural-history observations. Two months after our initial exploration, we had learned as much as we could about the new hummingbird and had collected the species so it could be described in accordance with scientific protocol (Collar 2000).

Making it real

By October 2017, we had placed the new hummingbird into a phylogenetic tree with most *Oreotrochilus* taxa and had drafted the type description. To the honour of our team, Niels Krabbe joined our efforts, obtained a good audio recording in April 2018, and compared the new hummingbird's voice with that of other hillstars. It took us a few additional months to analyse all the information, write a proper description, and manage the publication process. But 15 months after the first photographs were taken – not long compared to many type descriptions! – the Blue-throated Hillstar *O. cyanolaemus* was formally described (Sornoza-Molina *et al.* 2018).

So what of this lovely new species? Blue-throated Hillstar occurs along a very narrow and short Andean ridge, namely the Chilla–Tioloma–Fierro Urcu range, which lies directly south and west of the Jubones drainage basin and north of the Catamayo equivalent. This isolated mountain range lies just a few kilometres north of the North Peru Low, the lowest depression of the Andes, which is a well-known distribution/speciation barrier for Andean birds (Winger & Bates 2015).

To date, Blue-throated Hillstar has been recorded from five localities at 3,325–3,680 m elevation. Ecologically, it is apparently very similar

7 **7** Male Blue-throated Hillstar *Oreotrochilus cyanolaemus*, May 2017 (Francisco Sornoza-Molina) – at its favourite feeding plant, *Chuquiraga jussieui*.

VISITING CERRO DE ARCOS

Cerro de Arcos is about four hours' drive from Cuenca, and three from Loja and Santa Rosa (the three nearest airports). From Saraguro (84.5 km south of Cuenca, 45 km north of Loja), take the road west that passes through Celén after 29 km. From Celén, drive 39 km further west; a signpost on the right indicates the dirt road (accessible by 4WD only) to Cerro de Arcos. Alternatively, if travelling from Santa Rosa and Piñas, take the road east to Saracay and Sabadel. The same signpost, but on the left side, is located 1 km beyond (east of) Sabadel. Three km along the dirt track, you reach a small cottage. Park here.

From the cottage, the best site for Blue-throated Hillstar is only a 15-minute walk uphill. Either walk 200 m uphill from a signpost marked 'Refugio Cerro de Arcos' or take the road that climbs up to the summit of Cerro de Arcos for 100–200 m. This road runs parallel to a small ridge; walk five minutes up to the ridge and continue down the next valley to a shrubby patch and small pockets of *Chuquiraga*. Another good spot is right at the entrance to the summit – locally known as the 'geological area'. There is little *Chuquiraga* here, but the hillstar might be seen flying up and down to *Macleania* shrubs adjacent to rocky outcrops.

As an alternative to day-tripping Cerro de Arcos, one option is to stay at the cottage, which can house up to 12 guests ($15–20 per day, including food). The cottage is owned by Asociación Matto Grosso (contact Franzo Teruzzi ✆ +593 980701679 or Bernardino Loja ✆ +593 980349678; ✉ refugiodearcos@gmail.com).

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For comparison with male Blue-throated Hillstar *Oreotrochilus cyanolaemus*: **8** Male Andean (Green-headed) Hillstar *O. (estella) stolzmanni*, Parque Nacional Yacuri, Loja, Ecuador, June 2018 (Roger Ahlman; pbase.com/ahlman); and **9** male Ecuadorian Hillstar *O. chimborazo jamesoni*, Antisanilla, Napo, Ecuador, March 2016 (Francisco Sornoza-Molina). The latter subspecies's range approaches to within 40 km of Cerro de Arcos.

to most *Oreotrochilus* hillstars, being highly associated with stands and pockets of *Chuquiraga* shrubs. Even though we observed the species feeding on two additional plants – indeed, the initial immature male was clinging to a cluster of *Macleania rupestris* flowers – most feeding visits were to *Chuquiraga*. The close link between *Oreotrochilus* hillstars and the fiery orange flowers of this aster has long intrigued ornithologists (e.g. Corley-Smith 1969, Carpenter 1976, Ortiz-Crespo & Bleiweiss 1982), who have failed to provide conclusive explanations.

Similarly intriguing is the fact that Blue-throated Hillstar remained undetected in a broad area that was visited by both early expeditioners (e.g. to neighbouring localities like Chilla or Taraguacocha; Chapman 1926, Paynter 1993) and recent researchers (Garzón *et al.* 2015). Our best guesstimate puts the species's total population in the range of 250–750 mature individuals, though we might be underestimating it (Collar 2000). A small population with a very limited distributional range might partially explain its late discovery, but the overall paucity of ornithological attention given to this general area plays a role too.

Conservation

As expected, and to everyone's regret, such a tiny and wholly unprotected population in an area of increasingly degraded habitat, is likely approaching the edge of extinction. As suggested in the species description (Sornoza-Molina *et al.* 2018), it might be regarded as Critically Endangered. Intentional burning of *páramo* vegetation is a major threat, along with agricultural expansion, cattle raising, conifer plantations, and prospective mining for metals (mostly gold). Given the size of the species's range, the small amount of suitable habitat left – which is likely fragmented as well – any major transformation to its preferred habitat is a major threat. A single strong fire might obliterate an entire population. Overexploitation of *Chuquiraga*

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EDITOR'S NOTE

For South American birds, *Neotropical Birding* follows the taxonomy and nomenclature of the South American Classification Committee (SACC). As we go to press, SACC has not reached a decision on whether to afford Blue-throated Hillstar *Oreotrochilus cyanolaemus* the status of a full species – but that in no way detracts from the thrill of the encounter, as related by Juan Freile.

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It's not just the males that look different. **10** Female Blue-throated Hillstar *Oreotrochilus cyanolaemus*, Cerro de Arcos, Loja/El Oro, Ecuador, May 2017 (Francisco Sornoza-Molina). **11** Female Andean (Green-headed) Hillstar *O. (estella) stolzmanni*, Parque Nacional Yacuri, Loja, Ecuador, October 2018 (Francisco Sornoza-Molina). Note Blue-throated's dusky chin compared to the whitish chin of Andean (Green-headed).

might deplete the species's major food source in any of the five currently known localities, which could result in local extinctions in the short term at least. If proposals for open-pit mining in Chilla–Tioloma–Fierro Urcu are enacted, this might erase more than one locality in the 'blink of an eye'.

Fortunately, conservation efforts are starting to emerge to resist the frontier of extinction. A local organisation bearing the curious name of Asociación Matto Grosso and associated to Catholic Church was already doing some conservation work at Cerro de Arcos at the time of our discovery, without even knowing that Blue-throated Hillstar existed. The Asociación has built a comfy cottage where we rested after getting our first glimpses of the hummingbird. It has a small-scale restoration project and a nature-oriented, community-based tourism offering.

Subsequently, some national and local conservation agencies and local government authorities have started to address the urgent conservation needs of Blue-throated Hillstar, its habitat and, indeed, the entire mountain range. Currently, a proposal to create a 28,300 ha Water Protection Area is underway, with the World Land Trust having raised £70,000 ($93,000) in just two weeks to help Ecuadorian charity Naturaleza y Cultura Internacional in this initiative. Happily, this proposal has been well received by local authorities, landholders and communities, who favour such protection because water is the region's most valued resource.

One-and-a-half years after discovering a new hummingbird, things have settled down a bit. Even media attention has faded away. Conservation initiatives are emerging: birders, conservationists and the like are increasingly visiting Cerro de Arcos; a nest has been discovered by Ecuadorian birders Agustín Carrasco and Paúl Molina (and is currently being studied); and further research on the species's ecology is planned.

Meanwhile, we are getting things sorted to go back into the field. This year we will turn our attention to the expedition we were about to undertake until Pancho's face-to-face encounter changed our plans so comprehensively. So please stay in the loop. We might have some more exciting news soon…

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12 Illustration of Blue-throated Hillstar *Oreotrochilus cyanolaemus* that accompanied the type description on page 1152 of Sornoza-Molina *et al*. (2018) in the *The Auk: Ornithological Advance*s 135: 1146–71 (by Paul Greenfield, reproduced with kind permission of the American Ornithological Society and Oxford Academic).

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Splits, lumps and shuffles

Thomas S. Schulenberg

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: the possible lumps of Scale-breasted Woodpecker and South Georgia Pipit; a split in Red-billed Woodcreeper; a split in Highland Elaenia, and yet another possible lump in White-crested Elaenia; and a too-early-to-call-for-a-split-but-keep-an-eye-on-it study of Correndera Pipit.

Sayonara, Scale-breasted Woodpecker?

Scale-breasted Woodpecker *Celeus grammicus* and Waved Woodpecker *C. undatus* are two similar species that replace each other geographically, occupying respectively the western and eastern portions of Amazonia. There has been some grumbling over the years that a subspecies of Waved (*amacurensis*, of northeastern Venezuela) perhaps belongs instead with Scale-breasted (Short 1982), and reports that not only were their vocalisations indistinguishable (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001), but even that each responded to playback of calls of the other (Restall *et al.* 2006). Nonetheless the species status of the

Just lookalikes or the same species? **1** Scale-breasted Woodpecker *Celeus grammicus*, Iranduba, Amazonas, Brazil, September 2013 (Anselmo d'Affonseca); **2–3** Waved Woodpecker *C. undatus*, both Manaus, Amazonas, Brazil: **2** November 2011 (Anselmo d'Affonseca), **3** May 2017 (Tomaz Nascimento de Melo; lattes.cnpq.br/0736734315806511). The absence of diagnostic vocal, plumage, or genetic differences between the two all seems to lead to the conclusion that there is one fewer species of woodpecker in the world.

two had not been questioned openly. Not, that is, until the publication of further documentation of the close similarity in vocalisations of these woodpeckers, and, more importantly, evidence that the genetic differences between them also were quite minimal (Benz & Robbins 2011), leading those authors to broach the suggestion that Scaly-breasted and Waved represented only a single species.

Now Sampaio and colleagues (2018) have undertaken a more comprehensive genetic survey of Scale-breasted and Waved Woodpeckers, and went on to review the plumage differences between them. As before, Sampaio *et al*. found no genetic differentiation between the two woodpeckers. This is not necessarily the death knell, as species in the very early stages of divergence from one another are expected to share many genes; but it's not a good sign for recognising two species either. Even worse, Sampaio *et al*. also found that the plumage of Scale-breasted and Waved woodpeckers is variable; it's not so much that they find evidence of a hybrid zone between them as that any given trait supposedly typical of one species can show up in the other, even at sites far removed from any contact between them. Overall, the absence of diagnostic vocal, plumage, or genetic differences between the two all seems to point to a single, dire conclusion: one fewer species of woodpecker in the world.

But how many *Hylexetastes* are there?

Members of the genus *Hylexetastes* are very large, poorly known woodcreepers with low population densities. Most authorities recognise only two species, Bar-bellied Woodcreeper *H. stresemanni* (western Amazonia: weak barring on the belly) and Red-billed Woodcreeper *H. perrotii* (eastern Amazonia: belly unmarked). The easternmost subspecies, *brigidai* of southeastern Amazonia, originally also was described as a species (Silva *et al*. 1995); but this population now is universally recognised as only a subspecies (typically of Red-billed). Azuaje-Rodríguez and colleages (2019) have stepped up and conducted a thorough genetic survey of these woodcreepers, across the entire range of the genus.

The most important result (important, at least, for the twitching community) is that Red-billed Woodcreeper is split into two major lineages: nominate *perrotii*, of eastern Amazonia north of the Amazon, is more closely related to Bar-bellied Woodcreeper than it is to *uniformis* and *brigidai*, the two subspecies of Red-bellied Woodcreeper found south of the Amazon. This is a very nifty confirmation of the taxonomy adopted by Ridgely & Tudor (2009), who recognised Uniform Woodcreeper *H. uniformis* (including *brigidai* as a subspecies) as separate from 'true'

Under the most liberal concepts of a species, there may be not two species of *Hylexetastes* woodcreeper, but five. **4** Bar-bellied Woodcreeper *Hylexetastes stresemanni*, Manacapuru, Amazonas, Brazil, September 2012. **5** Red-billed Woodcreeper *Hylexetastes p. perrotii*, Manaus, Amazonas, Brazil, June 2014. (Both photos by Anselmo d'Affonseca.)


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Genetic and vocal differences suggest a straightforward split between the Andean population of Highland Elaenia *Elaenia o. obscura* (**6** Parque Provincial Potrero de Yala, Jujuy, Argentina, October 2014) and the Brazilian population, taxon *sordida* (**7** Chapada de Diamantina, Bahia, Brazil, September 2007). (Both photos by Nick Athanas/ Tropical Birding.)

Red-billed Woodcreeper. That could be the end of the story, although Azuaje-Rodríguez *et al.* also noticed that subspecies *uniformis* further consists of two genetic lineages (clades), separated by the lower Tapajós River, and that the easternmost lineage is more closely related to *brigidai* than to populations of *uniformis* west of the Tapajós. Under the most liberal concepts of a species, then, there are not two species of *Hylexetastes*, nor three, but five: Bar-bellied Woodcreeper; Red-billed Woodcreeper; Uniform Woodcreeper (the western group of *uniformis*); 'eastern *uniformis*' (which may not have a formal scientific name?); and Brigida's Woodcreeper *H. brigidai*. That's likely to be farther than most taxonomists are willing to go, at least for now; but for sure, take the two-way split of Red-billed and make the most of it!

Elucidating relationships in the elaenias

It usually is a straightforward enough exercise to tell whether a small flycatcher is a species of *Elaenia* – but distinguishing *which* species of *Elaenia* is where one might run into problems. Unraveling the relationships between the different species also has been a challenge. Frank Rheindt and colleagues have spent years chipping away at a molecular phylogeny for the genus. The latest contribution in this series (Tang *et al.* 2018) reinforces patterns that emerged a decade ago (Rheindt *et al.* 2008, 2009). Evidence continues to mount, for example, that White-crested Elaenia *Elaenia albiceps* is a composite of two different species: the southern subspecies, *chilensis*, is most closely related to Sierran Elaenia *E. pallatangae*, whereas the five northern subspecies of White-crested Elaenia are related to Mountain Elaenia *E. frantzii*.

This is somewhat surprising in a way, as there are earlier reports of suspected hybridisation in Bolivia between *chilensis* and Small-billed Elaenia *E. parvirostris*, but not with Sierran (Traylor 1982); on the other hand hybridisation was suspected in Ecuador and northern Peru between Sierran and the northern ('true') White-crested Elaenia (Zimmer 1941). Anyway, there is not necessarily good news here for twitchers: not only are the genetic similarities between *chilensis* and Sierran Elaenia so great that this alone would suggest that they should be merged (Tang *et al.* 2018), but bioacoustic analysis also showed that the calls of *chilensis* and Sierran Elaenia are overlapping with each other, but that both are distinct from calls of 'true' White-crested Elaenia (Chattopadhyay *et al.* 2017). Oh, and one further note: to date Rheindt and colleagues have not explicitly addressed the status of *modesta*, a subspecies of White-crested Elaenia (ranging from northwest Peru to northwest Chile) that also has been treated by some authors as a separate species (Zimmer 1941).

Elsewhere in the genus, earlier authors (e.g. Hellmayr 1927) considered the Andean and Brazilian populations of Highland Elaenia *E. obscura* to be identical; it was not until as late as 1941, when Zimmer (1941) proposed the name *sordida* for the Brazilian subspecies, that these two were acknowledged as different at all. The genetic evidence consistently shows a deep divergence between the two, however, and there even are

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Evidence continues to mount that White-crested Elaenia *Elaenia albiceps* comprises two different species: the southern subspecies, *chilensis* (**8** Garibaldi Pass, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina, January 2015; Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding) is most closely related to Sierran Elaenia *E. pallatangae* (**9** near Pojo Cruce, Cochabamba, Bolivia, February 2018; Tini & Jacob Wijpkema/ wijpkema.org) whereas the five northern subspecies of White-crested Elaenia, the *albiceps* group (**10** Ecoruta, Pichincha, Ecuador, April 2013; Nick Athanas/ Tropical Birding) are related to Mountain Elaenia *E. frantzii*.

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hints that *sordida* may be more closely related to Great Elaenia *E. dayi* than it is to Andean *obscura* (Rheindt *et al.* 2008, Tang *et al.* 2018). Coupled with vocal differences between the two subspecies (del Hoyo & Collar 2016), this now is an easy split.

The convoluted case of Correndera Pipit

Earlier (Schulenberg 2018) I reported on genetic and vocal evidence that South Georgia Pipit *Anthus antarcticus* is indistinguishable from Correndera Pipit *A. correndera*, and so is a likely candidate for a lump. Lumps of course are the exception to the rule these days, when the more common trend is to discover differences, rather than similarities, when analysing patterns of geographic variation. Now a team of researchers, including some of those who tried to demote South Georgia Pipit, are back with a more comprehensive genetic survey of Correndera Pipit, from across its range (Norambuena *et al.* 2018). As they had reported earlier, South Georgia Pipit genetically is deep in the mix among the Correndera Pipit samples; there is nothing to distinguish South Georgia Pipit genetically (at least, among the genes that were sampled). The twist to the story is that Correndera Pipit itself breaks down into two very discrete lineages, one on the Andean plateau and one in the lowlands; not surprisingly, South Georgia Pipit clusters with the lowland Correndera clade.

There are a few complications to this story, however. For example, the divergence between lowland and highland lineages does not map neatly onto subspecies boundaries: birds that are identified as *catamarcae* are represented in both lowland and highland clades. Furthermore, the genetic divergence between the lowland and highland clades is relatively shallow, and there is no similar comprehensive analysis of vocalisations for comparison. Geographically, the transition from highland to lowland genetic clades seems to be very abrupt, but that is based on very few samples from the region of interest. It remains

Genetic analysis suggests that Correndera Pipit *Anthus correndera* breaks down into two very discrete lineages. one on the Andean plateau (**11** Antofagasta de la Sierra, Catamarca, Argentina, January 2018; Pablo Eguia/ aves-pe.blogspot.com.ar) and one in the lowlands (**12** Campos del Tuyu, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 2007; James Lowen/ jameslowen.com). Not surprisingly, South Georgia Pipit *Anthus antarcticus* (**13** Salisbury Plain, South Georgia, February 2015; Andrew Spencer), which has already been proposed for lumping with Correndera, clusters with the latter's lowland clade. There are, however, a few complications to the story...

to be seen, then, whether the Correndera Pipit story is one of an overlooked cryptic species, or is just a matter of catching a very recent, and still incipient, genetic divergence within a species. That said, the parallels are obvious to the highland/lowland divide within Short-billed Pipit *A. furcatus* (Schulenberg 2018) – birders, take note!

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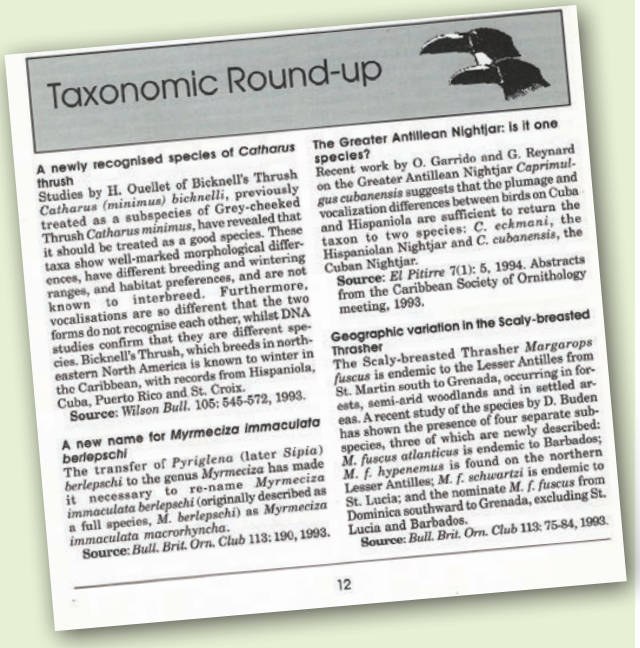
TAXONOMY AND THE PASSAGE OF TIME

The series 'Splits lumps and shuffles' started out life in *Cotinga* 2, where it was called 'Taxonomic round-up'. The first instalment, compiled by David Wege (the original *Cotinga* editor) and Frank Lambert, contained a number of intriguing taxonomic changes. But which have lasted the ravages of time, at least according to those authorities whose taxonomy is followed by the NBC?

Bicknell's Thrush *Catharus bicknelli* certainly has. Scaly-breasted Thrasher *'Margarops' fuscus* still exists, although it is now housed in a new monotypic genus, *Allenia*. 'Spot-breasted' Antwren *'Myrmeciza stictothorax'* remains subsumed within the highly variable Black-throated Antwren *'M.' atrothorax*, although also now in a new monotypic genus, *Myrmophylax*. The split of Cobb's Wren *Troglodytes cobbi* from House Wren *T. aedon* is in favour again following brief relumping (see, e.g., *Neotropical Birding* 6: 23).

However, the split of Greater Antillean Nightjar *Caprimulgus* (now *Antrostomus*) *cubanensis* into Hispaniolan (*eckmanii*) and Cuban (*cubanensis*) nightjars is not followed by the American Ornithologists' Society. The proposal that Andean Swallow *'Petrochelidon' andecola* join an expanded *Stelgidopteryx* genus has also not lasted. Andean Swallow is now one of three *Oreochelidon* (none of the other two of which were brigaded in *Stelgidopteryx*), and the only *Stelgidopteryx* is now Southern Rough-winged Swallow *S. ruficollis*. Little wonder we still need Tom Schulenberg's regular updates on splits, lumps and shuffles... *Ed.*



Taxonomic Round-up

A newly recognised species of *Catharus* thrush

Studies by H. Ouellet of Bicknell's Thrush *Catharus (minimus) bicknelli*, previously treated as a subspecies of Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus*, have revealed that it should be treated as a good species. These taxa show well-marked morphological differences, have different breeding and wintering ranges, and habitat preferences, and are not known to interbreed. Furthermore, vocalisations are so different that the two forms do not recognise each other, whilst DNA studies confirm that they are different species. Bicknell's Thrush, which breeds in northeastern North America is known to winter in the Caribbean, with records from Hispaniola, Cuba, Puerto Rico and St. Croix.

Source: *Wilson Bull.* 105: 565-572, 1993.

A new name for *Myrmeciza immaculata berlepschi*

The transfer of *Pyriglena* (later *Sipia*) *berlepschi* to the genus *Myrmeciza* has made it necessary to re-name *Myrmeciza immaculata berlepschi* (originally described as a full species, *M. berlepschi*) as *Myrmeciza immaculata macrorhyncha*.

Source: *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 113: 190, 1993.

The Greater Antillean Nightjar: is it one species?

Recent work by O. Garrido and G. Reynard on the Greater Antillean Nightjar *Caprimulgus cubanensis* suggests that the plumage and vocalization differences between birds on Cuba and Hispaniola are sufficient to return the taxon to two species: *C. eckmani*, the Hispaniolan Nightjar and *C. cubanensis*, the Cuban Nightjar.

Source: *El Pitirre* 7(1): 5, 1994. Abstracts from the Caribbean Society of Ornithology meeting, 1993.

Geographic variation in the Scaly-breasted Thrasher

The Scaly-breasted Thrasher *Margarops fuscus* is endemic to the Lesser Antilles from St. Martin south to Grenada, occurring in forests, semi-arid woodlands and in settled areas. A recent study of the species by D. Buden has shown the presence of four separate subspecies, three of which are newly described: *M. fuscus atlanticus* is endemic to Barbados; *M. f. hypenemus* is found on the northern Lesser Antilles; *M. f. schwartzi* is endemic to St. Lucia; and the nominate *M. f. fuscus* from Dominica southward to Grenada, excluding St. Lucia and Barbados.

Source: *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 113: 75-84, 1993.

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a widely distributed Neotropical grassland bird (Motacillidae: *Anthus correndera*). *PeerJ* 6: e5886.

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The South American Bird Fair

James Lowen

There cannot be a Neotropical Birding *reader of that does not know of the British Birdwatching Fair and most have probably been to it. But how many are acquainted with its equivalents across the world, such as the South American Bird Fair? On the basis that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, your diligent magazine editor attended the most recent such Neotropical event – a now-annual event that was not even a glimmer in someone's eye when the Neotropical Bird Club was established in 1994.*

The first British Birdwatching Fair was held at Rutland Water, UK, in 1989. I wasn't there but, by all accounts, it wasn't much more than a couple of marquees in a field. Nevertheless, it attracted 3,000 visitors and raised £3,000. By the 30th 'Birdfair' in 2018, the event had become dubbed 'the Glastonbury [festival] of birdwatching', was typically receiving up to 20,000 visitors over its three days, showcases products and services from 450 exhibitors, and routinely raises more than £300,000 a time for international conservation projects.

Given such success, little wonder that Birdfair has inspired events across the world. The American Birding Expo (americanbirdingexpo.com) is an unabashed trade fair – albeit one that also funds small conservation projects – that will next take place in Philadelphia (USA) in September 2019. The Indian Birding Fair, held annually in Jaipur, turned 21 in February 2018. November the same year marked the ninth Asian Bird Fair (asianbirdfair.org) whose explicit mission is to 'celebrate birds across borders'. Founding organisations from across the region take it in turns to host the events; the 2018 fair took place in Taiwan. In the selfsame month, the Colombian city of Manizales hosted the eighth South American Bird Fair (feriadeaves.com.ar).

As part of a group organised by BirdLife International, I attended this event at the invitation of ProColombia (the country's tourist board), which was a driving force behind what was formally known as 'VIII Feria de Aves de Sudamérica' (birdfair.net). This article seeks to

1 The official photo of participants at the VIII Feria de Aves de Sudamérica, Manizales, Colombia, November 2018 (Germán Montoya).

2–6 Participants at VIII Feria de Aves de Sudamérica, Manizales, Colombia, November 2018 (James Lowen/ jameslowen.com). Can you spot *Neotropical Birding* stalwart Tom Schulenberg in Fig. 5?


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Birds seen in forest at the conference venue of Recinto del Pensamiento (Manizales, Colombia, November 2018; all James Lowen/ jameslowen.com) included **7** Andean Motmot *Momotus aequatorialis*, **8** Sparkling Violetear *Colibri coruscans*, **9** Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher *Poecilotriccus ruficeps* and **10** White-sided Flowerpiercer *Diglossa albilatera*.

On morning excursions away from the conference site, participants enjoyed seeing birds such as **11** the globally threatened Buffy Helmetcrest *Oxypogon stubelii* (Termales del Ruiz, Manizales, Colombia, November 2018; Jim Lawrence).

explain a little of the history of and motivation for the 'South American Bird Fair', seasoning the account with personal reflections on the Manizales event. That such an annual event exists at all speaks volumes for how the world of Neotropical birdwatching has changed during the lifetime of the Neotropical Bird Club.

The South American Bird Fair ('the Feria') was conceived by Argentine birder Horacio Matarasso. According to Paula Webster, a member of the ten-member organising committee, its objective was and remains "to raise the profile of birdwatching in South America". For the event's organisers, the Feria is intended to "provide a space where birdwatchers can be among friends, swapping experiences, sharing knowledge, learning about birds and conservation, presenting research findings and, above all, watching hundreds of birds during field trips".

The Feria's scope was local at first – the first four events (2010–13) taking place in the same Argentine city (San Martín de los Andes), but nevertheless attracting participation from elsewhere in the continent. The Feria first ventured 'abroad' (and thus arguably started properly justifying its South American moniker) in 2015, when it was held in Paraty, Brazil.

Then it was back to Argentina in 2016, with an event in Buenos Aires. This was the first Feria that Paula Webster and husband Michael. Swiftly hooked, the couple joined the 2017 event in Puerto Varas, Chile. "The 2017 Feria was a big step up from Buenos Aires," Michael says. "It was held in a conference centre with simultaneous talks in adjacent rooms." The Manizales event, however, blew the Websters' minds. "Thanks to sponsorship from the Colombian Government, this Feria is much bigger and professionally organised," says Paula. "The venue is amazing, even to the point of simultaneous translation for talks."

Paula was not wrong about the venue. Recinto El Pensamiento is a plush, city-edge hotel set in expansive private grounds that include small wetlands, trails through a decent area of secondary forest, an orchidarium, a butterfly garden and hummingbird feeders. The British Birdwatching Fair similarly sits alongside a great piece of habitat – the reserves of Rutland Water. Yet birding there is more of an adjunct enjoyed by relatively few attendees.

The vibe of the Manizales event was entirely different, in large part because of its setting. Birding was an integral part of the Feria – emphatically and explicitly the reason for its existence. Participants were actively encouraged to explore the hotel grounds. We did so for a full morning, enjoying good views of birds such as Short-tailed Hawk *Buteo brachyurus*,

12 The banner for the VIII Feria de Aves Sudaméricana in Manizales, Colombia, November 2018.

13 The 2019 Fair will take place in Uruguay.

Andean Motmot *Momotus aequatorialis*, Striped Treehunter *Thripadectes holostictus*, Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher *Poecilotriccus ruficeps* and White-sided Flowerpiercer *Diglossa albilatera*. A variety of North American wood-warblers included Canada Warbler *Cardellina canadensis*, for which ProColombia has become a Species Champion in the BirdLife International Preventing Extinctions Programme. A riot of thraupids included the spectacular Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager *Anisognathus somptuosus*, and hummingbirds zipping around the feeders included Long-tailed Sylph *Aglaiocercus kingii* and Booted Racket-tail *Ocreatus underwoodii*. For the grounds of a conference centre, this was hardly shabby.

Coinciding with the launch by Audubon of the Central Colombia Birding Route (tinyurl.com/central-Colombia), each morning of the five-day event also saw participants indulge in birding trips to exciting locations around Manizales. Some birded the páramo of Termales del Ruiz, gawping at a remarkably confiding (and globally Vulnerable) Buffy Helmetcrest *Oxypogon stubelii*. Others were enchanted by Río Blanco, particularly its speciality antpittas. This was an event at which birding took precedence. The Feria's formal business only got going once participants had returned from excursions at lunchtime.

And what a lunch it was! Rather than grabbing a quick sandwich from a trailer, the thousand or so participants at the Feria all sat down together for a buffet of local delights. This was not just a celebration of birds, but a real community experience. A genuine sense of togetherness enriched the whole event. "I reckon 90% of the thousand or so participants are Colombian. Isn't that evidence of the strength of local feeling for birds and birding?" Paula Webster said. "And look around you… everyone is young, keen and trendy." Again, Paula's words struck a chord. Quite unlike Rutland, for example, the vast majority of attendees were in their thirties at best. The gender ratio was not far off even. The Manizales Feria was a vibrant, forward-looking event packed with keen birders, bird researchers and conservationists. It was inspirational.

Of course, not everyone was Colombian; 25 nationalities were represented. Well-known faces – several featuring among the 30-odd guest speakers – included Tim Appleton, *Neotropical Birding* stalwart and all-round Neotropical guru Tom Schulenberg, Brazilian author Martha Angel,

BirdLife International's Jim Lawrence, and a team from Audubon. Lectures aside, the Manizales Feria included an education symposium and other workshop-type sessions (on photography, nature reserves and communicating nature through art), and a small trade fair.

The latter, in particular, provided a striking contrast to the British Birdwatching Fair. Although the conservation heart of the Rutland event beats stridently, visitors experience something that is far more akin to a trade fair than a cultural extravaganza (whatever the Glastonbury parallel might suggest). Pretty much everyone exhibiting, presenting or participating at Rutland wants to sell you something – whether it is optics or organisational membership, a speaker's latest book or a travel company's most exciting tour. (I mean no disrespect here; I myself fall into three of those categories!) In contrast, the Feria's commercial dimension comprised a couple of dozen trestle tables selling local art, crafts and coffee or promoting Colombian lodges. Again, the focus of this event is unashamedly about sharing a love of birds.

To reflect the Feria's continent-wide name, objectives and aspirations – and arguably demonstrating that the concept has now come of age – responsibility for hosting now moves between South American countries each year. Uruguay will hold the ninth Feria (Punta del Este, 31 October to 5 November 2019). "We are really excited to run it," says Adrián Stagi Nedelcoff of Aves Uruguay (Birdlife in Uruguay). The timing is propitious. "Punta del Este is best known as a high-summer beach resort and party town. City authorities now want to demonstrate that there are great reasons to visit off-season as well – and we are delighted that wildlife-related tourism, including new birding routes, is part of that."

As with Manizales, the Punta del Este event will see morning excursions plus longer pre- and post-fair trips. "We want to show off the special birds we have got and are focusing on six in particular," Adrián explains. The sextet are Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger*, Mottled Piculet *Picumnus nebulosus*, Straight-billed Reedhaunter *Limnoctites rectirostris*, Crested Black-Tyrant *Knipolegus lophotes*, and the globally threatened pair of Saffron-cowled Blackbird *Xanthopsar flavus* and Yellow Cardinal *Gubernatrix cristata*. Fancy it…?

And what about 2020? "Every year," said Horatio Matarasso in the concluding session at Manizales, "Feria attendees agree which country will host the next-but-one event". The Manizales audience endorsed an offer from Cuzco, Peru, to host the Fair in 2020. Candidates for 2021 are Suriname (which was on the shortlist for 2020) and a town well known to Neotropical birders – Mindo in Ecuador. But that's the future. Back in the present, Matarasso signs off the VIII Feria de Aves de Sudamérica: "This has been a fantastic *feria* with incredible participants. *Viva Colombia y viva Sudamérica*!"

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Reviews

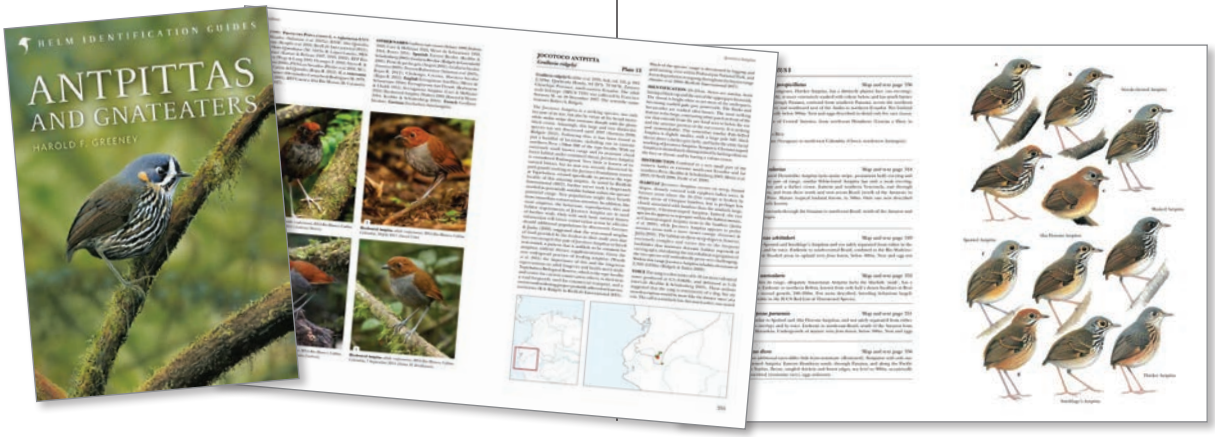
Antpittas and gnateaters *by Harold F. Greeney, illustrated by David Beadle. 2018. London: Helm. 496pp, 24 colour plates, 250 colour photographs. Hardback. ISBN 978-1-472919649. £50/$65/c.€58.*

This book is quite obviously a labour of love and, for anyone familiar with the author's huge body of published work, it could never be anything but thorough. Harold Greeney is unashamedly a natural historian, a term that has regrettably become unfashionable in our modern world. This book does indeed read in places like a work of the Victorian era, with all the positive connotations that this implies, and venerable 19th and early 20th century names like Sclater, Godman, Salvin, Hartert and Hellmayr crop up repeatedly. The feel is maintained by the extensive excerpts from original descriptions that preface some of the species accounts, setting a tone of wonder and discovery that befits a group about which so much remains to be unearthed.

Distributional information forms a major part of this work. Maps are a model of clarity, with base cartography showing national borders and major rivers upon which known ranges are carefully mapped. A very useful innovation is the inclusion of marked type localities. As Greeney is at pains to point out in the introduction, researching distribution "was one of the most time-consuming aspects of this work". The maps are based on a vast compilation of records, comprising specimen data, publications, and voucher records held at archives such as xeno-canto (xeno-canto.org/) and the Internet Bird Collection (hbw.com/ibc). The half-a-billion records in the increasingly popular (and powerful) eBird system (ebird.org/) have also been evaluated, with sight records employed cautiously, emphasising to eBird users the utility of supporting unusual records with voucher audio or visual material. In painstaking detail, sight records have routinely been verified by correspondence with the observers. The source of all records is provided; as the author admits, he did not want to condemn future revisers to repeat the process by obscuring the primary data beneath interpretative accounts. These data will be passed over by many readers, but for perhaps as many others they will be a gold mine to be exploited again and again. They are the sort of feature that sets this monograph apart from so many other similar titles covering other bird families, and their inclusion can only be applauded.

We have established that the library and museum research has been extraordinarily thorough. But Greeney's credentials as a field ornithologist are second to none. Texts are thoroughly underpinned by hard scientific data, but Greeney contributes much original observation of his own. For example, referring to Plain-backed Antpitta *Grallaria haplonota*, he relates "*A pair that I observed in the foothills of Ecuador (*chaplinae*) appeared to increase song rates in response to darkening skies...*", a trait that will be familiar to anyone who has spent time with the species, for example, in Rancho Grande Biological Station, Venezuela, where its haunting song is a feature of the soundscape during misty hours. Indeed, much life-history information, such as nesting data, seasonality, plumage and moult, is here published for the first time. Some of this is recounted in a way that captures the naturalist's joy at observing the events, such as Greeney's personal account of a Tawny Antpitta *Grallaria quitensis* adult relieving its incubating mate on a snow-bound nest.

Taxonomy follows the American Ornithological Society, with one minor departure in the recognition of *Grallaria fenwickorum* rather than *G. urraoensis*



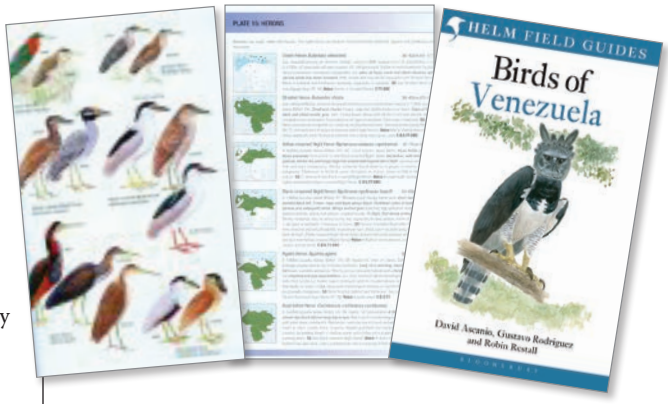
for Urrao Antpitta, in adherence to International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature regulations. The author recognises that some of the 'species' treated are therefore obvious species complexes, the component subspecies of which will in all likelihood, once the evidence is formally marshalled, be elevated to species level. Obvious examples are the Rufous *Grallaria rufula* and Tawny Antpitta *G. quitensis* complexes, which potentially comprise seven and three species respectively; the Sierra de Perijá taxon *saltuensis* of northeast Colombia and northwest Venezuela is perhaps the clearest case in point, originally assigned to *G. rufula* when described more than 70 years ago, with the remark that it "it seems possible that it may be a distinct species". All seven current subspecies of Rufous Antpitta are illustrated and, since all 156 taxa recognised in the book are treated separately and in detail, disentangling the taxa in future will not prove too much of a challenge.

With the sheer volume of information included here, it is no surprise that the odd minor error has crept in. The text states (p. 436) that the range of Slate-crowned *Grallaricula nana* "does overlap with Sucre Antipitta [*G. cumanensis*] in the east [of Venezuela]", from which the crucial word "not" is missing. More seriously, subspecies labels have been incorrectly placed on the map for Plain-backed Antpitta *Grallaria haplonota*, surely a slip-up at the layout stage. But such things should not trouble us.

Plates are of the high quality we have come to expect from David Beadle, and are a pleasure to peruse. In this case one definitely can judge the book by its (stunning Crescent-faced Antpitta *Grallaricula lineifrons*) cover. Photographs of live birds are provided for all currently recognised species, except for Elusive *Grallaria eludens* and Grey-naped Antpittas *G. griseonucha*, where specimens are substituted. Not surprisingly, given the author's track record of publishing nest descriptions, many of the photos are of nests, nestlings or fledglings – all of which will be excitingly unfamiliar to many readers.

The is one of the best-researched avian monographs ever published, and leaves little to desire in the coverage of its subject. In fact, it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that everything we currently know about this group is contained within this book, so the only factor in deciding whether or not to acquire it is whether antpittas and gnateaters are of interest to the potential purchaser. Given the almost cult interest in these enigmatic cryptic birds, which to judge by the growing number of feeding stations is on the increase, I am confident that the book will sell itself.

Christopher J. Sharpe



Birds of Venezuela *by David Ascanio, Gustavo A. Rodriguez and Robin Restall. 2017. 592pp, 248 colour plates and numerous maps. London: Christopher Helm. Softback. ISBN 978-1-408105351. £39.99/c.€45/c.$51.*

As the authors explain in their introduction, *Birds of Venezuela* started out as a spin-off from *Birds of Northern South America* (BNSA), the two-volume 2006 guide by Robin Restall *et al*. Many illustrations therefore are the same as in that earlier guide. As work on the current volume progressed and with all the taxonomic research involved it became apparent that extra artwork would be required, so many new illustrations have been painted and some earlier ones digitally retouched. The layout of a standard modern field guide has been used with maps and text opposite each plate – a user-friendly practice, though one that sometimes limits the amount of text included for each species, especially on more crowded plates (where there may be as many as eight per plate).

The first 55 pages cover the usual topics including geography, climate, habitats, maps, bird topography and six pages on 'How to use this book'. In the latter, the section on voice is particularly helpful in describing how vocalisations have been transcribed in an attempt to help people to interpret them more easily. Twelve pages are also given over to describing each family covered, giving helpful information that would be especially useful to visitors new to the Neotropics. Taxonomy and nomenclature follow the South American Checklist Committee (SACC), though the authors have chosen to keep to a more traditional order for the families, making the guide more user-friendly in terms of being able to quickly flick through the pages and find the family for which you are looking. In addition, they include two species which had not been formally described at the time of writing and elevate another eight subspecies to full species on the basis that they expect them to merit that rank in the near future. Some of these have subsequently been split by some of the world authorities, others have not (as yet!).

As was the case with BNSA, the plates contain illustrations of many subspecies – far more than is

usually the case with field guides. The accompanying text explains where each subspecies occurs within Venezuela by listing the names of the states (in code form). This level of detail is extremely useful, especially when the subspecies vary significantly (e.g. the three races of Silvered Antbird *Sclateria naevia*). In other cases, however, I wondered whether there were perhaps too many illustrations (e.g. six paintings of Stripe-breasted Spinetail *Synallaxis cinnamomea* for five subspecies and one variant, at least three of which look extremely similar). The wealth of illustrations for some species also contrasts with insufficient artwork for others. An example is nightjars (Caprimulgidae), where it is perhaps fine to provide only one illustration (of a bird in flight) for species that are seldom seen at rest (e.g. Short-tailed Nighthawk *Lurocalis semitorquatus*) – but for Sand-coloured Nighthawk *Chordeilis rupestris*, flocks of which are often seen roosting on sandbars, a perched illustration might be useful.

As with most artists some families are better illustrated than others. I was especially taken with the woodcreepers. This lookalike group is not easy to capture well, but members are finely portrayed, with each looking not only different from all the other species but also very like the bird – at least in the case of the species with which I am familiar. In a few illustrations, the posture struck me as wrong: Sword-billed Hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera* is depicted with the perched bird holding its bill horizontally, which contradicts the text ('when perched, bill held upwards'). A curiosity, behind which there must be a story, is the perched Oilbird *Steatornis caripensis* shown roosting on wires next to a pylon, rather than on a rocky ledge in a cave. Presumably the artist must have seen this on at least one occasion. Overall, however, the wealth of illustrations (particularly of subspecies) is commendable: they serve their purpose extremely well, allowing not only the species to be identified but also the race.

The accompanying texts are filled with useful information, including a succinct description with important identification features italicised, and mention of how to separate from similar species. Given space constraints these are extremely well designed and written, containing a wealth of detail crucial for correct identification of the 1,384 species included in the guide. The distribution maps have been very carefully drawn to only include the areas where the species definitely occurs; doubts are indicated by a question mark. For vagrants, individual records are marked. Although subspecies distribution is not shown, the adjacent text describes this in sufficient detail for readers to easily interpret.

Prior to the publication of this field guide most birdwatchers visiting Venezuela would have used another field guide with exactly the same title and publisher (Hilty 2003). As that book is still in print and readily available some comparisons may perhaps be useful.

Hilty's guide is significantly larger and much heavier, so it was always a challenge to use it in the field. This is not to say that the new guide is light – it is not and is too big to fit into a pocket – so a bag would be required to carry it into the field. The plates in Hilty were painted by a variety of artists and the quality and style varied significantly. Some were by Guy Tudor, and fans of his might well regard them as difficult if not impossible to better. His plates of small flycatchers, for example, probably remain unbeatable. Being a much larger book, Hilty's text is also far more detailed than that in the new guide, often with half a page or more of small print for each species, much of which remains extremely helpful and accurate. The taxonomy is now somewhat out of date of course, and the distribution of some species may have changed, and new discoveries made for the rarer species.

Being more up-to-date taxonomically, more portable and with far more illustrations, I would say that the new guide is undoubtedly the book to take on a trip to Venezuela, but it would also be useful to have a copy of Hilty available for reference too. Taking both would be almost impossible given the combined weight, but there is now a solution. The Hilty guide is available in a Kindle edition (admittedly at quite a high price) and so for those who travel with a tablet it is possible to take Hilty in electronic form for easy reference if needed.

Sadly, at present this is all rather academic due to the current political and economic problems within Venezuela. Most bird tours to the country have now been suspended, and independent travellers are warned against visiting. We can only hope that things improve before too long so that we can once again visit this wonderful country and experience its fantastic birdlife – and put this excellent new field guide to good use.

David Fisher

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Birds of Nicaragua: a field guide *by Liliana Chavarría-Duriaux, David C. Hille & Robert Dean, 2018. Ithaca, NY: Comstock Publishing Associates (a Zona Tropical Publication). 480pp, 1332 colour illustrations, 9 colour photographs, 810 maps. Softback. ISBN 978-1-501701580. £32/$39.95/c.€36.*

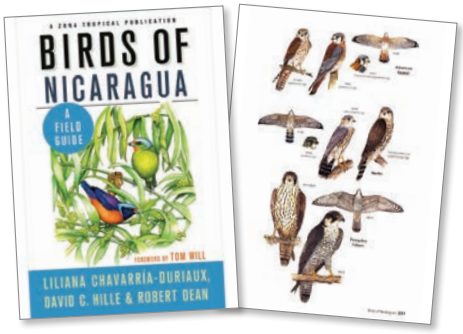
Nicaragua has long been in the shadow of its neighbour, Costa Rica, partly due to decades of

political instability fuelled by proxy war. During the last century, grouped with El Salvador and Honduras, it was often overlooked by travellers and birders, or given a wide berth. It still slips under the world-listers' radar simply because it has no endemic species. This is a terrible shame since the country has so much to offer, arguably more than any other in the region. It holds the largest continuous block of tropical forest north of Amazonia, habitats that are better preserved than those in neighbouring countries, a respectable 750+ species of bird (vs 925 for Costa Rica) and is the Central American country where exciting new discoveries can most realistically be expected. Without a doubt, the lack of a modern field guide has not helped the country promote its avian riches. Now that has been remedied, first by a pioneering 2014 bilingual guide (Martínez-Sánchez *et al.* 2014; on which Liliana Chavarría-Duriaux was a co-author), and now by this Zona Tropical offering.

The guide covers 763 species, with full accounts accorded to every species that is known to have occurred, including vagrants such as Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata* and Tawny-collared Nightjar *Antrostomus salvini*. An appendix provides shorter text and thumbnail illustrations of 43 species that are likely to be found in future, or whose claim to form part of the avifauna rests on a single sight record, thus helping future-proof the book to some extent. Some sight records have apparently been rejected on available evidence, as with a March 2014 sight record of Sinaloa Martin *Progne sinaloae*, although for this species whose winter range is unknown (quite possibly Amazonia), it would seem at least plausible that it might migrate through Nicaragua. Taxonomy follows the American Ornithological Society; differences with the increasingly popular Clements and International Ornithological Congress lists – much favoured by eBirders and world-listers respectively – are not mentioned, but neither are they difficult to determine.

All information pertinent to a species is provided on a single page spread, making the guide quick to use in the field. The book itself is slightly larger (about 2 cm taller) than Zona Tropical's popular Costa Rica predecessor (Garrigues & Dean 2007), which puts it on the borderline of what might be called a 'pocket guide', but it is otherwise fairly similar in style and layout, all wrapped in the identical type of standard soft cover.

Text is concise, albeit a little longer than that of its Costa Rican counterpart, and clearly emphasises characters for field identification. Care has been taken to describe distribution, status and seasonality in sufficient detail for critical use. Descriptions of voice



are always idiosyncratic, and in some cases I am not sure my ears are quite attuned to those of the authors. For example, I have trouble matching the description of a "rhythmic 4-phrase song" for Pale-vented Pigeon *Patagioenas cayennensis* with the classic 'Santa Cruz' mnemonic that my brain ascribes.

The 2014 Nicaragua guide lacked maps, relying instead on range descriptions. This Zona Tropical guide breaks new ground, with large, colour-coded maps that permit the instant narrowing-down of possibilities. Despite their size, the maps are rather broad-brush, doubtless reflecting the resolution of the information the authors had at their disposal, especially the paucity of museum collections made in Nicaragua; their source is not specified beyond "years of field research".

Robert Dean's plates originally appeared in Garrigues and Dean (2007), but there are many new illustrations depicting females, birds in flight, tail patterns and so on. All boreal migrants are illustrated, cutting down on the need to carry a North America field guide. As users of previous guides featuring Dean's work will know, the paintings are well-suited to the purpose of practical identification, showing diagnostic field marks.

Zona Tropical publications have made a niche for themselves with a series of well-produced field guides to Central American biota, and this latest addition will occupy a prominent place in their portfolio. I very much hope that birders will be persuaded to visit Nicaragua, and tour companies will eventually welcome it into the suite of orthodox tour destinations. With the appearance of this handy guide, crafted with love as well as expertise, there should be no excuse.

Christopher J. Sharpe

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Birds of Chile: a photo guide *by Steve N. G. Howell & Fabrice Schmitt. 2018. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 240pp. 1,300+ colour photographs. Softback. ISBN 978-0-691167398. $29.95/c.£23.*

This addition to the marketplace of tools for identifying Chile's birds comes from two well-known tour guides who are no strangers to the Neotropical Bird Club, having co-led our fundraising tour in 2016 (Jeffers & Schmitt 2016) and publishing regularly in *Neotropical Birding* and *Cotinga*. Nor are field guides to Chile's birds absent from the collective Latin American bookshelf: *Birds of Chile* (Jaramillo *et al.* 2003) is, personally speaking, one of the best bird guides ever; more recently, Couve & Vidal's *Aves de Chile, sus islas oceánicas y Península Antártica* was reviewed in *Neotrop. Birding* 22: 68–69.

This book immediately differs from the other two by illustrating birds through photographs rather than artwork. The authors suggest that their guide is simply 'another steppingstone [sic]' on the journey of understanding Chile's birds, and that it 'builds on the work of many others'. The latter claim may be true, but the first statement is overly modest. This is an outstanding field guide.

Species are arranged in 'field-friendly groupings' rather than seeking to keep up with the 'seemingly ever-changing landscape of higher-level taxonomy'. It is heartening to see proposals made by Howell *et al.* (2012) in this magazine being adopted in print.

The book squeezes a vast amount into its jacket-pocket size. Typically two species feature on each page, each illustrated by three or four images covering different poses and plumages. Images bleed to the page edge; no space is wasted. Many photographs (e.g. for seabirds, raptors and hirundines) are integrated into the design, creating a pleasing, plate-like effect against a plain background of sea or sky. Others are constrained in somewhat ugly rectangles.

The authors state that 'most' of the 1,300 images are theirs. The quality is good, if not likely to win awards. There are neat touches, such as tail-feather detail of Chilean Woodstar *Eulidia yarrellii*. There are images of 'birds in habitat', where the subject is smaller in the frame and sometimes imperfectly lit. This is brave – but inspired. It gives a real insight into how you see the birds in the field. For me, it's the stand-out characteristic of the book – and the one that sets it apart from the burgeoning morass of photographic guides.

Images fill roughly three-quarters of each page, which leaves little room for text. The authors have turned such a constraint into a virtue, penning six pithy lines that focus on vocalisations, confusion species, distribution, status and behaviour. (There is no feather-by-feather description here; this guide complements books with traditional artwork, rather than replaces it.) Key identification features are more succinct still, 'starring' in small boxes superimposed on dead space in photographs. These include fascinating little nuggets: I have seen many White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi*, but never noticed that males have longer legs than females.

The authors believe that 'taxonomic studies in South America lag well behind the curve of actual species diversity'. Accordingly, and as trailed in Jeffers & Schmitt (2016), the book contains some bold taxonomic changes. The authors openly admit to tending 'in a liberal (=realistic) direction when recognising species'. Thus Chilean Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis* is split from Cayenne *V. cayennensis*, Austral Turkey Vulture *Cathartes jota* from two(!) other turkey vultures and so on. The authors slightly hedge their bets on complex cases such as Band-winged Nightjar *Caprimulgus longirostris* and Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail *Leptasthenura aegithaloides*, which the authors suggest may comprise three and four species-level taxa, respectively. Nevertheless, the boldness is welcome – and increases the attractiveness of an already-brilliant country yet further.

As with any book, I have the odd grumble or niggle. Even with space at a premium, scientific names would have been useful in the introduction. So too species distribution maps – perhaps in discrete section to avoid overcrowding the plates. But these are minor points that in no way distract from an excellent, exciting and invigorating addition to the library on Chile's avifauna.

James Lowen

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Birds of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao: a site and field guide *by Jeffrey V. Wells & Allison Childs Wells; illustrated by Robert Dean. 2017. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 474pp, 59 colour plates. Softback. ISBN 978-1-501701078. £31.99/c.$41/c.€36.*

For many years, birders visiting the beautiful Leeward Islands of the Dutch Caribbean – Aruba, Bonaire & Curaçao, collectively and affectionately known as the 'ABC islands' – had little choice when it came to field guides. We had *Birds of the Netherlands Antilles*, first published in 1955 with the second edition in 1983 (Voous 1983). In 1993, this was complemented by a small photo guide intended for the local market, *Nos paranan* ('Our birds'; de Boer 1993). But mainly we made do with guides whose reach covered adjacent areas as northern South America or the Caribbean overall.

In tandem with the growing interest in birds and bird conservation in the islands, itself accompanied by burgeoning ecotourism, the field-guide vacuum has been filling up rapidly over the last few years. First up, in 2012 the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance produced a series of bird-identification cards for ecotourists and locals alike, repurposing images provided by publishers Helm and Lynx Edicions. The same year saw publication of the first 'serious' field guide to these islands in decades (de Boer *et al.* 2012). *Birds of Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire* packs a lot into its highly portable 176 pages: 1,000 illustrations (covering various plumages) and succinct accounts to aid identification of 286 species. It also throws in a short section on special birding sites alongside the usual geographical overview of the region covered. It is a smashing little field guide.

This is the context in which *Birds of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao* by Jeff and Allison Wells was published five years later. The book's subtitle differentiates it explicitly from de Boer *et al.* (2012): this guide is as much about *place* as it is a tool for bird identification. A great benefit of Wells and Wells is its coverage of where to go birding: each island gets its own chapter, while each site is treated to a description of its habitat, a summary of what birds can be found there when and a short but very helpful paragraph on access. This approach contributes much to the book's value.

In terms of a field guide, Wells and Wells contains more information (and so it should, given that it weighs 0.8kg!) yet provides fewer illustrations. A full paragraph (rather than the usual word or two, e.g. 'rare visitor') is allocated to status in each species account, summarising historical and recent records alike. Whilst this provides evidence of Jeff Wells's pedigree as an ornithologist, I personally feel that it is not clear what value this adds to a *field* guide. Given the still limited and incomplete knowledge on the distribution of birds in the Dutch Caribbean, I feel that the additional benefit of (re)publishing these data does not justify the extra page count (and weight…). For birders interested in the best-available information on records of birds on the three islands, checklists are available (e.g. Prins *et al.* 2009) as well as, of course, eBird.

Birdwatching on the 'ABC islands' has become much easier in recent years, thanks to the publication of both Wells and Wells (2017) and de Boer *et al.* (2012). The former is a great guide, particularly because of its site-based information. I can recommend it for planning visits or keeping in your hotel during a trip. That said, its weight and relatively low number of bird illustrations make it less comfortable and practical as a guide for use in the field. Accordingly, when actually out and about, optics around neck, I prefer to take with me de Boer *et al.*

Bert Denneman

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Les oiseaux de Guyane *by Tanguy Deville. 2018. Mèze: Biotope Éditions. 324pp. Numerous colour photographs. Hardback. ISBN 978-2-366622041. €46/c.£41/c.$52.*

Ever fancied birding French Guiana – perhaps inspired by the late Alex Renaudier's article in an early *Neotropical Birding* (5: 39–47) – but not yet made it? This new coffee-table book by celebrated bird photographer Tanguy Deville makes a decent substitute… although it may end up encouraging you to book a flight to one of South America's least-visited countries. Deville's photographic work is well known to *Neotropical Birding* readers (e.g. Deville *et al.* 2010, Deville & Ingels 2016), and some images published in this sumptuous book will ring bells with the magazine's readers. The visuals offered here are varied – from birds in their environmental context to luxuriant close-ups – and of very high quality. Indeed, it is the former – a silhouetted Swallow-tailed Kite *Elanoides forficatus* soaring high above the rainforest, a Pompadour Cotinga *Xipholena punicea* in a gap between the canopy leaves – that sneakily steal the show. For those who read French, the imagery is complemented with both detailed essays covering themes as diverse as ecology, behaviour and evolution, and a suite of extracts from Deville's notebook-cum-diary. In sum this is a rich book and a veritable treat for the eyes. Most enjoyable.

James Lowen

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Birds of Central America: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama *by Andrew C. Vallely & Dale Dyer, 2018. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 584pp, 260 colour plates, 1,261 maps. Softback. ISBN 978-0-691-13802-2. £40/$49.50/c.€45.*

Until recently, field guides for Central America were getting rather long in the tooth, although such masterworks as Howell & Webb (1995), Stiles & Skutch (1989), and Ridgely & Gwynne (1989) never become obsolete. The situation was remedied by the first field guides to Belize (Jones 2003) and Honduras (Gallardo 2014), followed by pocket guides to Costa Rica (Garrigues & Dean 2007), Panama (Angehr & Dean 2010) and Nicaragua (Chavarría-Duriaux *et al.* 2018; see review, page 88) published by Zona Tropical/Comstock Publishing Associates (latterly imprints of Cornell University Press), and by the Peterson guide to Northern Central America (Fagan & Komar 2016). The present volume, as the first field guide to the entire Central American avifauna, fills the gaps left by El Salvador and Guatemala and brings the identification literature for the remaining countries up to date.

A decade in production, the book covers the 1,261 bird species that had been documented in the political region of Central America as of August 2017, an avifauna comparable in size with that of a typical South American country – quite a daunting undertaking. Each of the 1,194 bird species of what the authors define as the 'core avifauna' is accorded a main species account, while a further 67 'marginal, dubious and hypothetical species' are relegated to an annotated appendix.

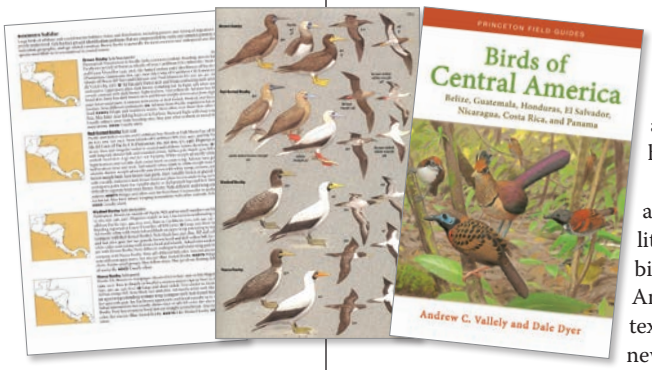
The region is delimited politically rather than biogeographically, so Vitelline Warbler *Setophaga vitellina*, a West Indian species found only on the Swan Islands and (extralimitally) on the Cayman Islands, is included. Taxonomy and order broadly follow American Ornithological Society (AOS). There are some logical departures, such as treating Audubon's *Setophaga auduboni* and Goldman's Warblers *S. goldmani* as separate from Yellow-rumped Warbler *S. coronata*, or recognising Azuero Parakeet *Pyrrhura eisenmanni* as distinct from South American Painted Parakeet *P. picta*.

The main accounts comprise carefully distilled, concise identification texts and good-sized distribution maps (29 x 36 mm) on the left, with plates on facing spreads. Layout is intuitive, facilitating cross-referencing to the facing page. For species that exhibit geographic variation northern/western subspecies appear on the left-hand side of the plate and eastern/southern subspecies on the right. Plates are the most realistic of any guide to this region, accurately capturing the jizz and plumage of all groups. Birds are usually shown in profile to facilitate comparison, but the illustrations have a pleasing three-dimensional quality and the plates themselves are works of art. The antbirds and furnariids are spectacular. The figures are large and fill each plate, leaving minimal blank plate.

Critical groups such as shorebirds, tyrant flycatchers and warblers are very nicely illustrated, the latter with both breeding and non-breeding plumages. There should be no need to carry an additional guide to the birds of North America. It is no surprise to learn that both artist and author spent a great deal of

time in museum collections, especially the American Museum of Natural History, checking and comparing specimens. The depth of their research is apparent in the quality of the entire book. It may take a while for the eye to adapt to the lack of colour saturation of the plates, particularly for some groups like vireos and thrushes. However, I find the artwork very pleasing.

In the introduction, the authors set out their reasons for not labelling figures with subspecies names; having examined the full range of geographic variation they felt that a more general description of geographic variation was more appropriate. Given the diligence with which the authors examined museum specimens, I would have liked to have seen scientific names of subspecies specified, which I think would have added clarity to accounts of, for example, Willet *Tringa semipalmata*, Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*, Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Dusky-capped Flycatcher *Myiarchus tuberculifer* and Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripiennis*.



Text focuses squarely on the task of identification. In the interest of brevity, it omits information on aspects of life history except where they aid identification. An introductory line on regional and global status precedes the main identification text, which is followed by a short section covering geographic variation where appropriate. Notes on habits indicate habitat preference, the favoured habitat stratum (canopy vs understorey, etc.), and distinctive features of behaviour. The final section describes vocalisations. The compilation of accurate distribution maps across seven nations must have consumed an inordinate amount of time. I could find no obvious oversights, although unfortunately Turquoise-browed *Eumomota superciliosa* and Blue-throated Motmot *Aspatha gularis* maps have been transposed during layout. The authors have wisely treated records on popular online platforms with caution, which will ensure that the distributional data provides a solid baseline for future work.

Compressing practical information on the identification of 1,200 species into one volume demands a good-sized book. This one is about the size of old guides such as Stiles & Skutch or Ridgely & Gwynne, and weighs 1.3 kg. Yes, for those who want to carry a pocket guide, it is bulky, and also heavy. And it is likely that many visitors will be inclined to pass it over in favour of a lighter guide. In my opinion that would be a mistake. I much prefer to carry a dependable, authoritative reference and will gladly have this in a backpack in preference to a smaller guide. At the very least, for those who will not be taking it in the field, it should be an essential reference for consultation back at camp or at the hotel.

So, an excellent addition to the literature on the birds of Central America with strong text and plates. This new guide becomes the benchmark for the region and acts as a worthy geographical complement to Howell & Webb (1995), with a slight geographic overlap. The authors deserve the highest praise for a magnificent achievement.

Christopher J. Sharpe

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NBC Noticeboard

Compiled by Chris Balchin, NBC Secretary

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The Neotropical Bird Club is active on social media. The Neotropical Bird Club Facebook group (facebook.com/groups/31491408108/) has more than 5,200 members, and new threads and images meeting the group's guidelines are posted daily. NBC's Twitter handle is @NeoBirdClub. We tweet NBC news and all things to do with birding, ornithology and bird conservation in the NBC region. Join us!

Members' e-mail addresses

With ever increasing postage costs NBC 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 NBC if you could please send it to us at ✉ membership@neotropicalbirdclub.org

NBC 25th anniversary celebrations

The NBC turns 25 in 2019. Along with this issue of *Neotropical Birding* and a dinner held in August 2019, we are celebrating this milestone in several 25th-anniversary-themed ways.

- The NBC has made available 25 online 2019 memberships – free for deserving Neotropical ornithologists (terms apply). Is there someone you know that would benefit from NBC membership? Either e-mail their details to the Secretary (✉ secretary@neotropicalbirdclub.org) or ask them to make direct contact.
- The NBC will be holding a one-day joint conference with the British Ornithologists' Club on 26 October 2019 in the Flett Theatre of the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, London, UK. Attendance is open to all and entrance is free. The conference will include a range of talks on Neotropical ornithology. See flyer with this publication or our website for further details.
- We have a revamped anniversary logo, kindly designed by Anahi Plenge Pardo.

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)? From time to time we need volunteers to take on roles for the Club. These are not trustee positions so do not involve joining 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 e-mail ✉ secretary@neotropicalbirdclub.org

Donations – and making them regularly

We are grateful to Juan Díaz Alván, Leen Baker, Andrew Benbow, P. W. Boyd, Jon J. Duerr, Graham Ekins, Jacques Erard, Robert Hardcastle, Bryce Harrison, David G. Henderson, Sue Johns, the March Conservation Fund of Tides Foundation, Jeremy Croft Minns, Bill and Jack Moorhead, Peter Nickless, Atle Ivar Olsen, Frank S. Smith, Rosemary Sargent, Håkan Thorstensson, Carlos Mario Wagner, Barry Wright and Jeannie B. Wright for their recent donations to the NBC. We have made it easy for members to make donations on a regular basis. If you wish to help the NBC in this way, please e-mail ✉ secretary@neotropicalbirdclub.org for details.

Data protection

You can read about how we collect, use and share your personal data in the NBC's 'Privacy and Cookies Notice'. The latest version is available on our website 🖱 neotropicalbirdclub.org/privacy-cookies. Alternatively, we can send you a copy. Please e-mail ✉ secretary@neotropicalbirdclub.org or write to us at the NBC address on the inside front cover. We review and update our Privacy and Cookies Notice from time to time.

25 YEARS 1994–2019 Neotropical Bird Club

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 NBC 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 e-mail ✉ 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 NBC 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.

Corrections to *Neotropical Birding* 24

In the article by Sam Woods *et al.* on Amazon lodges in Ecuador (pages 19–30), there were a few errors in primate taxonomy and nomenclature: the relevant taxon of 'Pygmy Marmoset' *Cebuella pygmaea* is now Western Pygmy Marmoset; 'Dusky Titi Monkey *Callicebus moloch*' is now Red-crowned Titi *Plecturocebus discolor*; 'Poeppig's Woolly Monkey *Lagothrix poeppigii*' has been lumped into Humboldt's Woolly Monkey *Lagothrix lagotricha*; Golden-mantled Tamarin *Saguinus tripartitus* is now generally known as Golden-mantled Saddle-back Tamarin *Leontocebus tripartitus*; and Monk Saki *Pithecia monachus* is now Geoffroy's Monk Saki. On page 31, Chaco 'Tinamou' should read Chaco 'Nothura'. On page 46, Fig. 13 was photographed by Carl Giometti, not Glometti. The editor apologises for these oversights and thanks Nick Athanas and Richard Webb for their eagle eyes.

Editorial Guidelines

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@yahoo.co.uk

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 Ornithology Society (1998 and subsequent updates; for Middle American and Caribbean birds). 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. 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 Senior Editor/ Editorial Committee reserve the right to make changes that they deem 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 Senior Editor.

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White-eared Puffbird.
Photo: David Fisher

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