

Celebrating *Scytalopus*

Thomas S. Schulenberg

The radical overhaul of the taxonomy of the Neotropical genus Scytalopus (tapaculos) has been one of the most remarkable ornithological achievements of recent decades – and it’s still ongoing. Who better to offer a personal perspective on developments that a man who has long been associated with tapaculos, and even has one named after him?

I saw a *Scytalopus* tapaculo for the first time on 7 June 1977 in treeline cloud forest at Abra Málaga in Cusco, southern Peru. This tapaculo wasn’t much to look at, just a small, grey, wren-like bird with a whitish ‘eyebrow’, but then, that’s typical of members of this genus. Almost

all of them are small and grey, variably mixed with brown, and with or without some paler markings on the face; truly distinctive *Scytalopus* are few and far between. I thought this bird was cute, and, as the first member of the family Rhinocryptidae that I had seen, I made a mental



1 Jalca Tapaculo *S. frankeae*, Runatullo, Junín, Peru, September 2013 (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding; antpitta.com). One of the three new species that have made 2020 “an epic year for *Scytalopus*”. This species inhabits grassy puna in central Peru’s High Andes, often perching openly on rocks.