

Splits, lumps and shuffles

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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: strong cases for splits in South American Snipe and Stripe-capped Sparrow; suggestions that splits also are due in Plain-brown Woodcreeper; a lump of Tawny Piculet; and three (!) new species of tapaculos, with an assessment of overall relationships within the genus Scytalopus (a genus additionally celebrated in Tom’s separate article on p31).

Splitting the South American Snipe

Snipe have famously cryptic plumage and are masters at remaining concealed within marshes and wet grasslands. Although museum ornithologists long have recognised geographic differences in size and pattern among the medium-sized snipes, they often found it to be easier to bundle together many of these populations into only a few species. This trend may have reached its apogee with the inclusion of

Eurasian *gallinago*, North American *delicata*, and South American *paraguaiae* and *magellanica* into a single species (Blake 1977). Well-documented differences in the sounds produced by the tail feathers in the flight display (‘winnowing’) eventually led to the recognition of Common *G. gallinago* and Wilson’s *G. delicata* as separate species (Miller 1996); and as for *paraguaiae* and *magellanica*, well, Blake clearly was an outlier, and pretty much everybody else already considered these to be yet a third species, South American Snipe *G. paraguaiae* (e.g., Hellmayr & Conover 1948, Fjeldså & Krabbe 1990).

New research provides justification for a split in South American Snipe *Gallinago paraguaiae*, differentiating between the nominate taxon and *magellanica*. Among other things the winnowing display flights of the taxa differ. **1** Display flight of South American Snipe *G. (p.) paraguaiae*, Rincón de Cobo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 2008 (James Lowen/jameslowen.com). **2** South American (Magellanic) Snipe *G. (paraguaiae) magellanica*, Isla Martillo, Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina, December 2006 (Dominic García-Hall/antbirds.com). **3** South American Snipe *G. (p.) paraguaiae*, Rincón de Cobo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, December 2008 (James Lowen/jameslowen.com).



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