Neotropical Birding

THE BIRDING MAGAZINE OF NEOTROPICAL BIRDING AND CONSERVATION

Number 35 • Summer 2024

Neotropical Birding and Conservation aims to:

- foster an interest in the birds of the Neotropics amongst birders throughout the world
- increase awareness of the importance of support for conservation in the region
- mobilise the increasing number of enthusiastic birders 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 birders

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

ISSN 1353-985X

UK Registered Charity no. 1196505. A charitable incorporated organisation.

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Neotropical Birding and Conservation ('NBC')

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Neotropical Birding

BIRDING MAGAZINE OF NEOTROPICAL BIRDING AND CONSERVATION • NUMBER 35 • SUMMER 2024

FRONT COVER AND INSET

'Atlantic Royal Flycatcher' *Onychorhynchus swainsoni*, Tapiraí–Trilha dos Tucanos Lodge, São Paulo, Brazil, September 2021 (Pablo Andrés Ortega: birdingpablo.com).
This taxon is deeply genetically divergent, geographically disjunct and vocally distinct from other taxa in the Royal Flycatcher complex *O. coronatus*, which–as Tom Schulenberg explains on p49–is now proposed to comprise six distinct species.

Welcome to *Neotropical Birding* 35!

This feels like a milestone issue of *Neotropical Birding* magazine. It is now 30 years since NBC (originally known as the Neotropical Bird Club) was founded – and thus five years since NBC published its special 25th anniversary issue, which remains available for free download from neotropicalbirdclub.org. In those five years, we have all been through the COVID-19 pandemic, and NBC has changed both its legal status and name, evolving into the organization now called Neotropical Birding and Conservation. This issue also feels like a *personal* milestone. When I returned to edit *Neotropical Birding* in early 2016, NBC had published 17 issues of the magazine. This issue is the 18th since then, so we have now more than doubled that total.

Appropriately, then, *Neotropical Birding* 35 is a cracking issue. Let's start with the jaw-dropping front cover whose star, the globally Vulnerable 'Atlantic Royal Flycatcher' *Onychorhynchus swainsoni*, now has firm evidence to support its claim to species status—as Tom Schulenberg explains in his ever-fascinating column on recent taxonomic insights (p49).

The magazine commences with two articles by birders doing intrepid things; Dušan Brinkhuizen tracks down his dream bird in Ecuador (and ventures that its conservation status needs reconsideration; p3), while Ryan Irvine heads off-piste in the Falklands (Malvinas), encountering a mouth-watering list of vagrant birds (p11).

We also celebrate two figures important to Neotropical ornithology, albeit in very different era: Nigel Redman writes about Robin Restall (p24) and Conor Mark Jameson about W. H. Hudson (p61). It is too long since we covered Guyana, something that Lynn Houghton rectifies (p31), while Vladimir Mirabal rethinks Cuba's approach to birdwatching (p39) and Oliver Metcalf *et al.* offer initial thoughts on using thermal imagers in Amazonia (p49). Finally, Rob Jansen uses photography to showcase a genus endemic to Peru, the Inca-finches *Incaspiza* (p70). Happy Neotropical birding, everybody!

James Lowen, Senior Editor

A dream come true: seeing Andean Laniisoma in Ecuador

Dušan M. Brinkhuizen

¡Qué bestia! It took well-known tour leader Dušan Brinkhuizen nearly two decades of birding in Ecuador to finally come face-to-face with the elusive Andean Laniisoma. Here he presents a detailed account of his quest to find one of the rarest birds of the East Andean foothills.

The Andean Laniisoma *Laniisoma buckleyi*, sometimes referred to as Buckley's Mourner, has long held a mythical status in my mind. Many birders may be more familiar with names like Shrike-like Cotinga or Elegant Mourner, which suggest that this passerine's taxonomy is almost as mysterious as the bird itself. For instance, the name Shrike-like Cotinga has been considered misleading by some (e.g., Snow 1982, Ridgely & Greenfield 2001, Kirwan & Green 2011)—a view with which I concur as the bird neither possesses evident shrike-like features nor belongs to the Cotingidae. In the past it has even been considered a member of the manakin family (Pipridae) but currently *Laniisoma* is placed in the family Tityridae, with its closest relatives thought to be *Laniocera* mourners and the *Schiffornis* assemblage.

Figs 1–5 and 9 were taken near the Cavernas de la Anaconda, east of Wakami in the Cordillera de Cutucú, Morona–Santiago, Ecuador.

1 Andean Laniisoma *Laniisoma buckleyi*, August 2023 (Dušan M. Brinkhuizen: sapayoa.com rockjumperbirding.com @dusan.brinkhuizen).

There also seems to be a growing consensus among taxonomic authorities (e.g., Clements *et al.* 2023, Gill *et al*. 2024) to treat the Andean and Atlantic taxa—*buckleyi* and *elegans*, respectively—as separate species. Although the South American Classification Committee, whose taxonomy NBC follows, still lumps the taxa, it explicitly acknowledges that a proposal for potential splitting is needed. While undoubtedly very closely related, splitting makes sense as the two geographically isolated populations also differ in morphology, plumage and vocalizations. Notably, Andean Laniisoma is characterized by its smaller size, with less black scaling on its yellow underparts, and a slightly slower song, with less upswept and more drawn-out notes compared to its Atlantic counterpart.

Status and distribution

Despite Andean Laniisoma having a wider distribution than Brazilian Laniisoma (aka Elegant Mourner) *Laniisoma elegans*, it is notably rarer, with significantly fewer field sightings reported. Until July 2023, there were just three documented records of Andean on eBird (ebird.org, whose landing page for the species terms it "one of the Holy Grails of Andean birding"), compared to 54 documented records of Brazilian. Its distribution extends from eastern Venezuela south to northern Bolivia, primarily along the east base of the Andean chain. In Venezuela, the species is solely known from historical specimens (Hilty 2003). In Colombia, it remains almost as mythical, documented by a single historical specimen and, more recently, a sound-recorded individual in Nariño near the Ecuador border (xeno-canto.org/523944; Kirwan & Green 2011). Records from Peru are relatively few, with a patchy distribution along the eastern Andes and outlying ridges (Kirwan & Green 2011). In Bolivia, it is also very rare, known from one historical specimen and a couple of recent reports (Herzog *et al*. 2016), further emphasizing that this species is highly elusive and sparsely documented throughout its range. Andean Laniisoma is perhaps best known in Ecuador, particularly from WildSumaco Lodge (Napo), with a number of relatively recent reports (J. Nilsson pers. comm.). However, based on my own experience, the species has remained inexplicably rare, and connecting with it felt like mission impossible.

The build-up and preparations

Ever since I set foot in Ecuador, Andean Laniisoma has intrigued me. Depicted among fruiteaters and cotingas on plate 76 of *The birds of Ecuador*

2–4 Andean Laniisoma *Laniisoma buckleyi*, August 2023 (**2–3** Dušan M. Brinkhuizen: sapayoa.com rockjumperbirding.com @dusan.brinkhuizen; **4** André-Willem Faber).

(Ridgely & Greenfield 2001), with a caption assessing it as "very rare and inconspicuous," I quickly learned that this bird was a true trophy. Records mentioned in the literature were very few, and over the years, they became deeply engraved in my mind. Notably, the 1992 sighting of the late Paul Coopmans at Río Bombuscaro (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001), the type locality of Foothill Elaenia *Myiopagis olallai*, a well-known birding site in Zamora–Chinchipe that I had visited many times. In 1993, shortly before he tragically died in a plane crash, Ted Parker III also saw the Laniisoma in Ecuador during a Conservation International RAP (Rapid Assessment Program) expedition at Miazi (in Zamora–Chinchipe) in the Ecuadorian part of the Cordillera del Cóndor—a record probably known to very few (Schulenberg & Awbrey 1997).

Engaging in conversations with Niels Krabbe and Jonas Nilsson about their expedition to the remote Cordillera de Cutucú (in Morona–Santiago) in 2002, during which they collected several individuals at a presumed lek site, fascinated me for many years. In more recent times, Teus Luijendijk was the first to observe the species at WildSumaco in 2008. I met him at the reserve an hour after he had seen it, and the bird felt so close, almost within reach. A few months later, Jonas discovered a singing bird on territory at WildSumaco that was briefly available, with the first-ever field photograph of the species taken by Bonnie Olson. At the time, I thought I would eventually find it myself at WildSumaco, but for many years that followed, I regretted not having twitched that particular bird. The territory seemingly disappeared, yet the new trail got signposted as the Laniisoma trail. A volunteer biologist was invited to carefully survey the territory and its habitat, but failed to find the bird itself during weeks of fieldwork. Occasional sightings at WildSumaco continued for a bit, with a couple of reports per year until the last documented record in 2013—a juvenile male photographed by Andrew Spencer at the start of the FACE trail, ironically also on a day that I was there!

Understandably, I became fixated on finding and better comprehending this elusive creature. I was well aware of the reports in Ecuador, encompassing both confirmed and unconfirmed sightings, including likely instances of misidentification. One classic aural pitfall was Black-streaked Puffbird *Malacoptila fulvogularis*, which frequently responded to playback of

5 The traditional team selfie: four happy birders after locating the Andean Laniisoma *Laniisoma buckleyi*, August 2023 (Dušan M. Brinkhuizen: sapayoa.com rockjumperbirding.com @dusan.brinkhuizen). From left to right: the author, Alwin van Lubeck, André-Willem Faber, Lazar Brinkhuizen.

Laniisoma vocalizations during my searches, often calling back instantly. Recognizing the absence of recent Laniisoma sightings at WildSumaco, I knew I had to shift my focus to explore different areas. Based on other records in Ecuador and Peru, I believed my chances were likely greater by searching remote outlying ridges with extensive forest. Napo Galeras (Napo), Cordillera de Cutucú and Cordillera del Condor became my primary areas to search, although I also continued efforts in the foothills and subtropics along the main Andean chain.

My explorations into the Cordillera de Cutucú soon proved exciting, producing many nationally rare species, including Sharpbill *Oxyruncus cristatus* and Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo *Neomorphus geoffroyi*, both observed on the ridge above Estación Biológica Sunka in the far north of this isolated mountain range. A dirt road east of Patuca allowed easier access by vehicle into the south-western side of the cordillera, but good forests were still a long walk away, and I only managed to reach the forest edge. I also made it up into the subtropics above San Luis de Inimkis, which was the approximate locality of Niels' and Jonas' expedition camp. A strenuous hike on a muddy mule trail led to fantastic forest with Buff-throated Tody-Tyrant *Hemitriccus rufigularis*, among others, but for the Laniisoma, I definitely needed more time, effort and luck.

6 Northernmost slopes of the Cordillera de Cutucú, Morona–Santiago, Ecuador, September 2022 (Dušan M. Brinkhuizen sapayoa.com rockjumperbirding.com dusan.brinkhuizen). Scenery and habitat near the site where Andean Laniisoma *Laniisoma buckleyi* was discovered.

The encounter

In August 2023, my brother Lazar and two friends, Alwin van Lubeck and André-Willem Faber, joined me for a birding trip. The Cutucú was once again on our schedule, and the team was not only keen but also fit enough for some remote exploring. Although I was excited about the upcoming search, the prospect of extensive mud and steep terrain, as in my previous hikes, was less appealing. Therefore, in the weeks leading up to their arrival, I meticulously studied various satellite images to identify more accessible routes into the cordillera. Discovering over a dozen potential access tracks that seemed promising, we set off with the GPS points uploaded to our smartphones.

On 14 August, at the northern tip of the Cutucú, east of the small settlement of Wakami, we explored a track leading to a site named Cavernas de la Anaconda ('Caves of the Anaconda'). Along this track, there was a short yet promising stretch of mature forest at approximately 1,100 m elevation (-2.0478, -77.9034). Upon exiting the car, we were greeted by a substantial mixed-species flock, featuring Slaty-capped Shrike-Vireo *Vireolanius leucotis*, Wing-barred Piprites *Piprites chloris*, and Foothill Elaenia, among many others. It was our initial afternoon in the region, and little did we anticipate what was about to unfold.

Suddenly, I heard Andean Laniisoma song. It was very brief—a few notes only—but unmistakable: the distinctive high-pitched sound to which I had been attuned for years. I turned to André-Willem, looking him straight in the eyes: "You are pranking me with playback, aren't you?" He immediately replied that he had no clue about the bird nor the sound I was talking about and that he had nothing to do with it. I quickly double-checked my speaker, which was turned off, and the reality of the moment sank in.

Surging with adrenaline, I called Lazar and Alwin over, sharing with them what I had just heard. We lined up and waited for the bird to sing again. Nothing happened, so we decided to play a recording. A bird shot through, and Alwin caught a glimpse of bright yellow underparts. That must have been it, although I mistakenly got onto a Yellow-throated Chlorospingus *Chlorospingus flavigularis*. Subsequent playback seemed counterproductive, so we waited until

dusk to see if it would vocalize again. After about twenty minutes, the bird suddenly started singing softly. Equipped with my shotgun microphone, I started recording it. The pressure was somewhat alleviated; I was not hallucinating, and I had sufficient evidence to convince myself that it had indeed happened.

The next morning, we returned to the exact same spot before dawn. Despite the light rain, a sense of relief washed over us as the very first bird that sang was the Andean Laniisoma! It sang almost continuously, allowing us to narrow down its location. We patiently waited for the light to improve before venturing into the forest. Following a muddy trail that led directly towards the source of the sound, my heart raced with anticipation. The bird, however, proved to be exceedingly shy, falling silent as we approached. Nevertheless, one by one, we managed to catch glimpses of the Andean Laniisoma perched motionless in the mid-storey. Through a small opening, we were able to observe and photograph this beast (Figs. 1–4) as it serenaded us for an extended period—a dream come true!

Observational data

The Andean Laniisoma was unmistakable once I observed it clearly through binoculars. It closely matched my expectations in terms of appearance, perhaps being slightly smaller and less stocky than I had expected. Its overall proportions, shape and prominent large eyes bore a resemblance to a short-tailed version of *Laniocera* or *Schiffornis*, if fancier and more colourful, plumage-wise. Furthermore, when it sang, it would open its beak widely, briefly sticking out its tongue, echoing the behaviour seen in *Schiffornis*. The movements of its head as it surveyed its surroundings with its large eyes were also reminiscent of *Schiffornis*—and were even almost *Trogon*-like, albeit not as slow. Additionally, it would occasionally puff up its yellow throat feathers to resemble a gorget, as seen in hummingbirds.

The bird was among the first singers in the dawn chorus. The intensity of its song was notably high on the second morning, persisting for at least two hours almost non-stop. The elevated song activity might have been influenced, in part, by playback the previous afternoon. Interestingly, the use of playback appeared to cause the bird to halt singing; other than our initial encounter, the bird was not detected flying in, so it seemed counterproductive to use playback to attract it closer. Instead, after a pause, the bird would resume singing from a greater distance. This behaviour differed from my experiences with *Schiffornis* spp., which typically respond by flying straight towards the observer using playback.

7 For birders seeking Andean Laniisoma *Laniisoma buckleyi*, Black-streaked Puffbird *Malacoptila fulvogularis* (Macas, Morona–Santiago, Ecuador, August 2021: Dušan M. Brinkhuizen sapayoa.com rockjumperbirding.com @dusan.brinkhuizen.) is a potential pitfall, as the species responds frequently (and quickly) to playback of Laniisoma recordings.

The Andean Laniisoma preferred to sing from a perch in the lower midstorey, akin to *Laniocera* mourners, rather than from the understorey, as commonly observed in *Schiffornis*. It circled around, singing from different perches, and seemed to be clearly on territory. Notably, there were no other birds in the immediate vicinity, although Alwin very likely heard a second individual vocalizing briefly further down the track. The sharp introductory note of each song series was typically shorter than the subsequent notes, and there were frequent pauses of *c.*15 minutes between songs (for a recording, visit xeno-canto.org/827078).

The habitat at Wakami consisted of lush, wet, mature foothill forest, featuring an abundance of moss-covered branches, tall canopy and a dense understory, particularly along the edges of the track. Kirwan & Green (2011) mention a possible preference for streamside areas, but there were no significant large streams in the immediate vicinity. Although the species has been reported by other observers to move with mixed-species flocks, we did not observe it participating in the large flocks present. However, we did notice its ability to easily ascend to the canopy, and I have little doubt that the species joins mixed-species flocks, perhaps regularly, especially when not defending a territory.


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While searching the Cordillera de Cutucú, other quality birds found included: **8** Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo *Neomorphus geoffroyi*, for which the subspecies *aequatorialis* is poorly known in Ecuador, and a pair was observed at c.900 m, a remarkable elevation for Ecuador (although the taxon *australis* ranges up to 1,650 m in Bolivia: Healy *et al.* 2020); and **9** Sharpbill *Oxyruncus cristatus*, which is Ecuador's northernmost record to date. (Both photographed above Estación Biológica Sunka, Morona–Santiago, Ecuador, September 2022: Dušan M. Brinkhuizen sapayoa.com rockjumperbirding.com @dusan.brinkhuizen.)

Follow-up sightings and conclusions

After our discovery of the Andean Laniisoma at Wakami, several birders attempted to find it, and in September 2023, most of them succeeded in locating the species here. Interestingly, reports indicated the presence of up to four or five individuals. While there was no clear indication of a lek, observers witnessed two singing males interacting, suggesting that this particular site might serve as a display area for the species, with males congregating to some extent, reminiscent of the lek that was reported back in 2002. Birds were not vocal in November 2023, and a search did not detect the species (J. Freile, pers. comm.). In general, song activity of Andean Laniisoma seems highly seasonal, peaking in August–September, as indicated by records in both Ecuador and Peru (Kirwan & Green 2011).

Altitudinal movements have been reported in Brazilian Laniisoma (Kirwan & Green 2011), and I strongly suspect that Andean Laniisoma undergoes similar altitudinal movements. Although there are a handful of sight records in the Amazonian lowlands from both Ecuador and Peru, records of singing birds on territory have consistently been from the foothills and lower subtropics. The highest-altitude record known to me involved an unseen bird sound-recorded above Paquisha (Zamora–Chinchipe), at *c.*1,700 m elevation in January 2020 (xeno-canto.org/532304). Due to the general paucity of records, it has been challenging to confirm that the species occurs year-round at Andean localities. Undoubtedly, individuals occasionally wander into adjacent lowlands, and these altitudinal movements could actually be part of a more fixed migration pattern, contributing to the species' overall elusiveness.

Globally, Andean Laniisoma is currently categorized as Least Concern, primarily due to its large range, while Brazilian Laniisoma is classified as Near Threatened. In Ecuador, Andean Laniisoma is considered nationally Vulnerable (Freile *et al*. 2019), a classification that aligns with my own perspective. For breeding, the species surely relies on primary forest in the foothills and lower subtropics, or, at a minimum, on tall and mature forest with extensive pristine habitat nearby. The presence of healthy tracts of primary forest in the adjacent Amazonian lowlands could

9 Andean Laniisoma *Laniisoma buckleyi*, September 2023 (Alex Boas: Toucan Photo Tours/ toucanphototours.com; @Alexboasphoto). Sharing details of the location of the original sighting prompted several birders to twitch the species: subsequent reports suggested up to four or five individuals were present.

also be crucial for its survival. Additionally, considering the ongoing impact of climate change, subtropical habitats higher up in the Andes may also become increasingly important for the species.

In terms of distribution and habitat requirements, Andean Laniisoma has similarities with the globally Vulnerable Red-billed Tyrannulet *Zimmerius cinereicapilla*, but the Laniisoma is significantly rarer (with a tenth of the documented eBird records of Red-billed Tyrannulet, as of January 2024) and more closely associated with primary forest. Unfortunately, forests along the eastern base of the Andes are currently recognized as a significant deforestation hotspot, primarily driven by agriculture (Kleemann *et al*. 2022).

Andean Laniisoma has always been an exceptionally rare species to encounter. Nevertheless, recent observations, or rather the lack thereof, at various known localities—both historical and modern birding sites—suggests a potential decline in its already limited population. This trend is significant, especially in light of the increased number of observers in recent years (*per* eBird). Given the ongoing pressure of habitat loss, its apparent decline, the species' rarity and occurrence at extremely low density, a reassessment of its IUCN status is strongly warranted. I advocate, at the very least, that it be considered globally Vulnerable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'm grateful for the generous support from many friends who aided my expeditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alex Boas (Toucan Photo Tours/ toucanphototours.com; @Alexboasphoto) and André-Willem Faber kindly provided images for use in this article.

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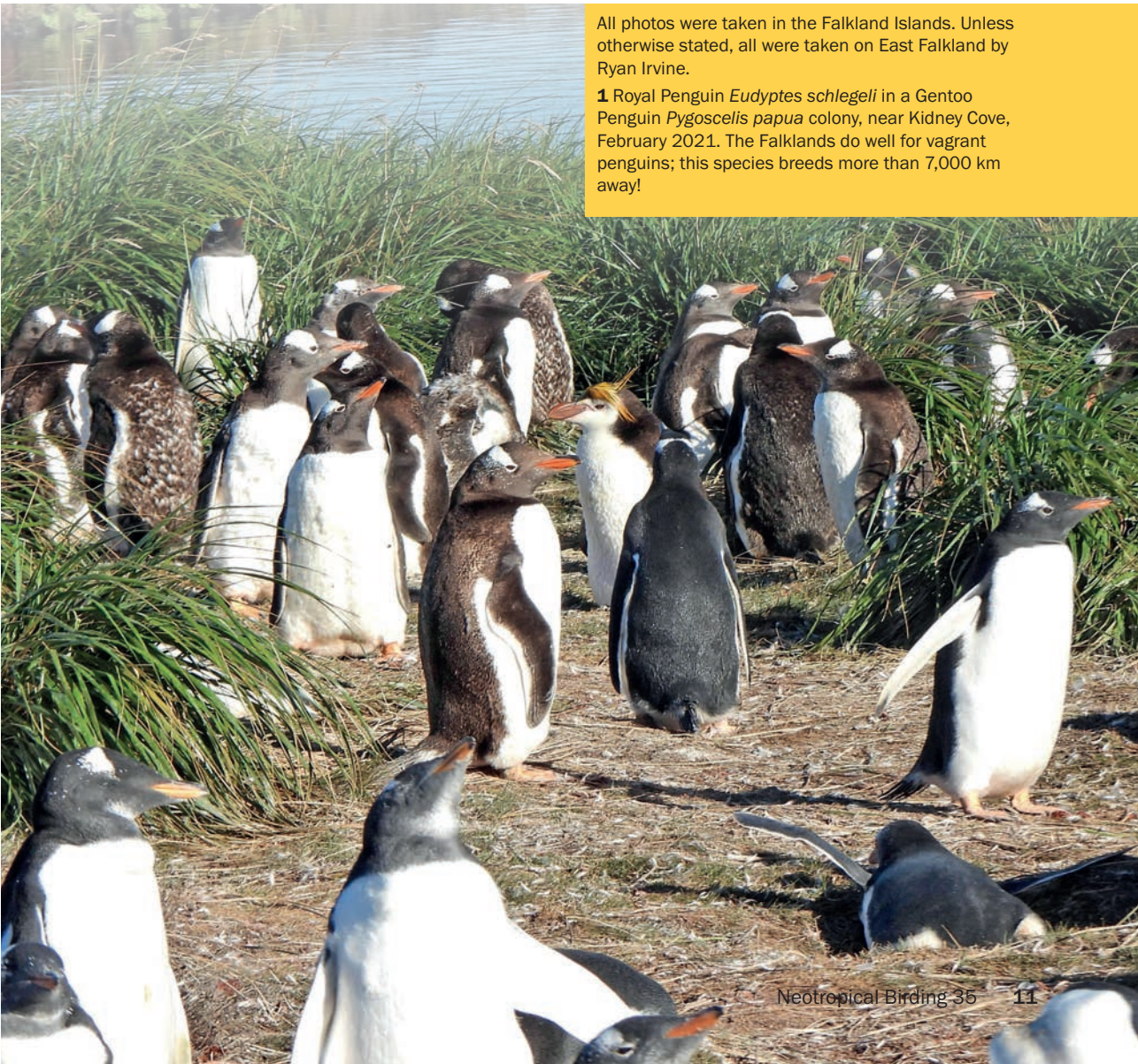
Vagrancy in the Falkland Islands

Ryan Irvine

Many islands are renowned ‘vagrancy traps’ – locations where vagrant birds pitch up unexpectedly, presenting thrilling birding opportunities. Here a former resident celebrates contributing to the Falklands’ vagrancy track record.

The Falkland Islands (Malvinas) sit at the south-eastern edge of the NBC region, over 500 km from the nearest coastline in mainland South America; the capital, Stanley, is over 750 km from the continental mainland. The Falklands are renowned for being home to outstanding penguin colonies and amazing seabird spectacles, the latter highlighted in *Neotropical Birding* 31 (Irvine 2022). But the islands are also an unexpected migration—and vagrancy—hotspot, providing welcome landfall for birds that have journeyed way out into the Southern Atlantic.



All photos were taken in the Falkland Islands. Unless otherwise stated, all were taken on East Falkland by Ryan Irvine.

1 Royal Penguin *Eudyptes schlegeli* in a Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua* colony, near Kidney Cove, February 2021. The Falklands do well for vagrant penguins; this species breeds more than 7,000 km away!

The Falklands don't lie along any migration route, so finding migrant birds (whether long-distance, intercontinental migrants—indicated here with an asterix ('*') at first mention of the species—or wandering South American residents) can be tough work. There are a few that occur commonly such as *White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*, which winters by the hundred during the austral summer, with a few *Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* and *Sanderling *Calidris alba* amongst them, but in general any other vagrant turning up is an unpredictable and rare event. Despite this, Woods (2017) considered 119 of the 205 species on the Falklands' list at the time to constitute vagrants. Avian vagrancy to the islands had a cameo in Bird *et al.* (2016) and was briefly discussed in Lowen *et al.* (2019), with some of the most extreme vagrants mentioned being two *American Redstarts *Setophaga ruticilla* in 2014, some 6,500 km south of their usual wintering grounds (Woods 2017), plus one in 2019.

The biggest hurdles to finding vagrants on the islands are the lack of observers and the large area to survey, most of which is inaccessible. During my time living on the islands (2020–22) fewer than 10 birders were present, plus a very few field researchers, the latter often studying seabirds on off-islands. Unsurprisingly, most vagrants are found in and around Stanley, or in settlements and farms around the various islands, not only as a result of the increased observer presence, but also because these areas generally have the best cover and greatest availability of food. The amount of vegetation in Stanley means that there is potential for vagrants to occur anywhere, but there are two main hotspots in the city, namely the Government House gardens, which are viewable from a public footpath, and the Market Gardens on the eastern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2 Adult male American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*, Douglas, November 2019 (Alan Henry). One of the most remarkable vagrants to have reached the Falklands: this is the third record.

3 Map showing the location of the best birding sites for vagrant birds around Stanley. Base map by OpenStreetMap (openstreetmap.org/copyright), using data available under the Open Database License.

4 Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinica*, Yorke Bay pond, Cape Pembroke peninsula, May 2011. Found by the author before he moved to the islands, this was only the second live bird recorded on the Falklands.

edge of town (Fig. 3). This area is a series of small crop fields with high hedges and a pond.

This article is a personal account of searching for vagrants over a two-year period from November 2020. I shall also look back at some of the more remarkable historical records. My first experience of a vagrant on the Falklands was nearly a decade before I became a resident. In May 2011, I worked on a seismic vessel for six weeks. Bad weather had given me the opportunity to explore the islands a little but with no transport and with winter in full swing I was limited to areas I could walk to from Stanley. Fortunately, the Cape Pembroke peninsula—the prime birding site close to Stanley—was a short walk from the harbour. Heading towards Yorke Bay pond I flushed a Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinica* from a shallow ditch. Not knowing how rare it was, I finally managed to get news out to locals, and four other birders managed to see the bird before dark. It turned out to be only the second live record of the species, as the six or seven other records had involved dead birds (Woods 2017). The species is a partial austral migrant, "highly prone to vagrancy," a trait that "may make it an effective pioneer to new wetlands" (West & Hess 2020).

As to be expected, spring and autumn are the key seasons for vagrant-finding on the islands, and my arrival in late November 2020 saw me miss the bulk of that year's spring vagrants, including

5 White-crested Elaenia *Elaenia albiceps*, Government House, Stanley, February 2021. Falkland records have increased over the past 25 years.

four Lake Duck *Oxyura vittata* (an austral migrant within southern South America: Carboneras & Kirwan 2020a), *Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, Black-faced Ibis *Theristicus melanopis* (whose Argentine, and some Chilean, populations are austral migrants: Matheu *et al.* 2020) and White-winged Coot *Fulica leucoptera* (a South American resident capable of making "considerable local movements": Taylor 2020b). Neither the ibis nor coot were recorded during my stay on the islands. Nevertheless, these records gave me hope that there were birds out there to find…

Fourteen days staring out of the window during COVID-19 quarantine provided me with my first taste of vagrancy as a resident, in the shape of two of the most common vagrants to the islands. I briefly watched *Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* and Chilean Swallow *Tachycineta leucopyga* (a partial austral migrant from southern South America: Marion 2020) feeding along my street in Stanley. Although these species are amongst the commonest vagrants to the islands, I only observed them 28 and six times respectively, with the majority of sightings in October and November, plus a few records from the austral autumn.

Summer (December–February)

December 2020 and January 2021 flew past without a sniff of a vagrant as I concentrated mainly on seawatching. The following month started with a bang with a White-crested Elaenia *Elaenia albiceps* (an austral migrant whose southern subspecies, *E. a. chilensis*, is "almost completely migratory": Schulenberg 2020) in the west end of Stanley in the Government House gardens, where it lingered for over a week (8–15 February). Remarkably, another was found in the same garden the following summer (11–13 February). Records of this species have increased over the last 25 years, and include a breeding pair on Carcass Island (Woods 2017).

The same month saw one of my favourite finds on the islands, a Cinereous Harrier *Circus cinereus* flushed from a ridge of thick mature tussac on Hummock Island as I went to check some remote sound-recorders. It circled us for a few minutes before the resident pair of Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* noticed it, chasing it away high to the south-west and out to sea until it was lost to view. Cinereous Harrier is generally resident in South America, but the southernmost population is an austral migrant (Bierregaard *et al.* 2020). It bred on the islands up to the early 20th century but is now very much a vagrant (Woods 2017), this record being the third in the past 15 years.

One dimension to the Falklands' uniqueness for avian vagrancy is the potential of finding a lost penguin! A call on 11 February 2021 about a Royal Penguin *Eudyptes schlegeli* on private land near Kidney Cove saw a few of us hatch a plan with the landowner to get to the Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua* colony it was associating with. By 08h00 the next day, we were sat at the edge of the colony watching royalty look slightly out of place. Royal Penguin breeds solely in Australia, on Macquarie Island and adjacent islets—roughly 7,600 km from the Falklands. That is quite some swim! The first record for the islands (and the first documented record for the Neotropical realm) came in January 2011 (Dehnhard *et al.* 2012). The 2021/22 summer began with another vagrant penguin, this time a slightly more predictable species, with a Chinstrap Penguin *Pygoscelis antarcticus* (which breeds in Antarctica and on sub-Antarctic islands) turning up in a Gentoo Penguin colony at Port Harriet, near Stanley, in December 2021.


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6–7 Cinereous Harrier *Circus cinereus*, Hummock Island, West Falkland, February 2022. A former breeder, this was only the third Falkland record in the past 15 years.

Autumn (March–May)

Most of my autumn in 2021 was spent working out in West Falklands and it wasn't until I was back in Stanley in late March that a Grassland Yellow-Finch *Sicalis luteola* was found at the Market Gardens in amongst a sizeable House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* flock in the fields. The first Falkland record of this species was in 2003 (Woods 2017) but it has become more regular over the past decade with birds occurring almost annually since 2017. This trend continued in 2022, when I found another in exactly the same spot in early May. Grassland Yellow-Finch is probably an overlooked species as both individuals I saw in the islands were incredibly elusive. In mainland South America, the southern populations of Grassland Yellow-Finch (subspecies *luteiventris*) are "mostly migratory", heading north during the austral winter (Rising *et al.* 2020), but even so the Falklands represent the southernmost records in eBird, making the regular records here rather surprising.

Back out west, working on Hummock Island in April 2021, I found an adult Diuca Finch *Diuca diuca* being chased by resident White-bridled Finches *Melanodera melanodera*. A partial austral migrant in South America (Cookson *et al.* 2021), this was the second record of Diuca Finch for the

8–9 Penguin colonies are always worth checking for vagrants. **8** Royal Penguin *Eudyptes schlegeli* in a Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua* colony, near Kidney Cove, February 2021. (This is the same individual as in **1**.) **9** More expected, given that it breeds in South Georgia (1,400 km east), is Chinstrap Penguin *Pygoscelis antarcticus*: this individual joined a Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua* colony at Port Harriet, near Stanley, in December 2021.

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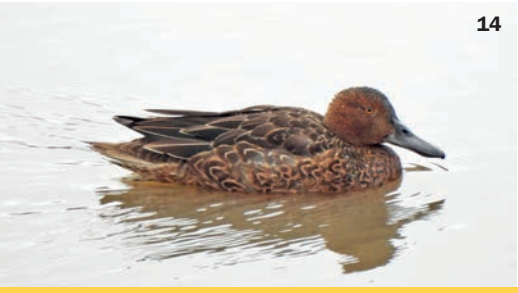
10 Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* (Cape Pembroke, May 2021) is a familiar sight in late autumn most years. **11** Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*, Goose Green, October 2022. The first Falkland record for 35 years was adequate compensation for an otherwise unsuccessful vagrant-hunting trip around Bull Point.

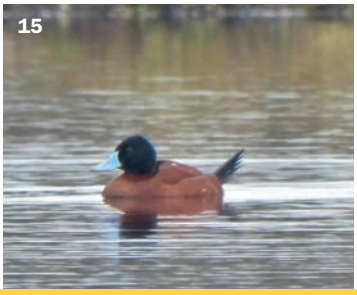
islands after one on Pebble Island in November 2011. The autumn of 2021 ended with a Cinnamon Teal *Spatula cyanoptera* moving around the ponds near Stanley: despite possibly breeding on the islands, this species remains an uncommon sight. Many mainland South American populations are thought likely to be resident, or short-distance migrants at best (Gammonley 2020). There were also a few Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis*: this species is a familiar sight in late autumn most years, sometimes in flocks of up to 10. As well as being strongly migratory, Cattle Egret has an incredible record of post-breeding dispersal (e.g., Telfair 2023), and this was evident when I found two on 5 May 2021 a boat *c.*320 km east of the Falklands, and then a couple weeks later found one at King Edward Point, South Georgia!

Winter (June–August)

As winter descends on the Falklands it is normally a case of battening down the hatches and enjoying the seawatching while waiting for the first signs of spring in September. Compensation for the lack of bird movements on land is the chance of seeing Antarctic Petrel *Thalassoica antarctica*, Kerguelen Petrel *Aphrodroma brevirostris*, Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea*, Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea* (Near Threatened) and Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma* (Endangered), all of which are very difficult to see other than during winter off Cape Pembroke.

The only vagrant that I found during winter was a very smart male Lake Duck at Round Pond, near Stanley, on 3 August 2022. This is a very rare vagrant to the islands with a few records during the 1990s (Woods 2017), but there has been an unprecedented run of records over the past few years: a flock of four (two immature males and two





12–16 By checking the islands' freshwater bodies, the author sometimes discovered vagrant South American waterbirds. Examples include: **12–13** Ashy-headed Goose *Chloephaga poliocephala* (**12** with two each of Ruddy-headed Goose *C. rubidiceps* and Upland Goose *C. picta*), Moody Bay, October 2021; **14** moulting drake Cinnamon Teal *Spatula cyanoptera*, Market Gardens, May 2021; **15** drake Lake Duck *Oxyura vittata*, Round Pond, August 2022; and **16** Red-fronted Coot *Fulica rufifrons*, Kidney Cove, November 2022.

females) in October 2020, again at Round Pond, and a flock of seven on Pebble Island in January 2021, involving six adult males and an adult female.

The Round Pond area is an excellent birding spot; to reach it, walk south-west along the coast from the tip of Eliza Cove. After passing several small rocky coves and rough grassland areas that are excellent for breeding birds, you arrive at Round Pond and an adjacent attractive sandy cove. The pond always has flocks of ducks and grebes, and every visit feels as if it has potential to produce a vagrant duck or wader.

Spring (September–November)

My first spring on the islands, in 2021, was a little disappointing. October saw the usual arrival of a few Barn and Chilean Swallows, while a long-staying or returning Cocoi Heron *Ardea cocoi* was the seasonal highlight. The Fitzroy area of East Falkland has been hosting a Cocoi Heron for a few years, but it appears to turn up only briefly each spring. It is not known whether it leaves the islands or just moves to inaccessible parts of the coast for the rest of the year. The species is considered essentially resident, with only occasional acts of vagrancy implying "movements by at least some birds" (Martínez-Vilalta *et al.* 2020). On the same day in October that I saw the heron, I also found my first *Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia* on the islands. This was at Berthas Beach, a popular cove near to the military base that is famous for its Gentoo Penguin colony and surfing Commerson's Dolphins *Cephalorhynchus commersonii*, but it also has an array of ponds and dunes with great potential for finding vagrants.

I lucked in on an Ashy-headed Goose *Chloephaga poliocephala* at Moody Brook as it flew in while I drove past on the 16 October. This South American waterbird is partially migratory, and occurs regularly on the Falklands (Carboneras & Kirwan 2020b). Otherwise, my only vagrants that October were two *Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* together at Yorke Bay pond at the end of the month. These lingered in the area all summer and were joined by two more at times. Pectoral Sandpiper has a strange history on the islands with no records before 1971, then 48 records between 1981 and 2013 (Woods 2017), then only two or three over the following 10 years, including this group in 2021.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Spring 2022 started very well in early September with an Aplomado Falcon *Falco femoralis* flying over my house in Stanley. It was seen several times over the following weeks but was never pinned down and remained incredibly elusive. With only four or five recent records (Woods 2017) it was popular with the locals who managed to catch up with it. In southern South America, juvenile Aplomado Falcons tend to disperse nomadically from natal sites, and can appear at locations well outside the normal breeding distribution (Keddy-Hector *et al.* 2020).

17–24 Shorebirds are renowned for their acts of vagrancy, so it is little surprise that the islands do well for these long-distance, intercontinental migrants. **17** Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*, Sea Lion Island, November 2021: the first Falkland record since 2004. **18** Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*, near Surf Bay, November 2022: flocks of 50 were seen on the islands as recently as 2003, but the species is now less than annual. **19–20** Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, Yorke Bay pond, November 2021: the species has a fluctuating status on the islands, and is currently rare. **21** Two Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, Cape Pembroke, October 2022. **22–24** Six *Wilson's Phalaropes *Phalaropus tricolor*, Philips Point, Stanley, November 2022 often consorted with four vagrant Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* (**22–23**) and White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* (**23**), the latter a species that flocks by the hundred during the austral summer.

Late October 2022 saw four of us head for a four-day trip to a remote part of the islands, primarily to look for vagrants in an area that gets checked at most once a year. The area, Bull Point, is the southernmost location on the East Falkland mainland. An excellent mix of sandy coves and a series of small ponds, it has a great track record for vagrant wildfowl and waders. Unfortunately, we failed to find a single vagrant. Nevertheless, the trip left me itching to get back there! Maybe one day…

The Bull Point trip wasn't a total bust, however, as on the way home on 26 October we checked the reservoir and creeks around Goose Green, picking up a Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*, which lingered until at least 5 November. As far as I can make out, this was the first sighting for 35 years and the first spring record (Woods 2017). The South American population is "suspected" to migrate, but there is only "sketchy" evidence of southwards post-breeding dispersal (Parsons & Master 2020). The only other vagrants that month were two Lesser Yellowlegs that I found on the Cape Pembroke peninsula while carrying out a breeding bird survey. In spring the Cape has myriad ponds and marshy areas, which are capable of drawing in rare birds. Unfortunately, these are drying up more quickly with every passing year.

My favourite month on the islands for vagrants is November, and although 2021 didn't produce much in terms of quantity, it definitely made up for it in quality. First up was a *Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus* found on Sea Lion Island the day before I was due to arrive: a great bit of luck. The following day, I was the only arriving passenger who headed off inland to see it as everyone else dashed along the coast to watch Killer Whales *Orcinus orca* putting on a show close to shore! This was the first record of Stilt Sandpiper for the islands since 2004 and the fifth record ever (Woods 2017). The spring ended with a similarly crazy record: an *Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus* at Rookery Bay, near Stanley; another fifth record for the islands and the first since 2011 (Woods 2017). It was a very obliging bird, feeding along a fence line and always giving great views despite strong winds. This tyrannid was well out of range: even in Argentina, it is an "overshooting migrant" (Pearman & Areta 2020).

November 2022 was my final full month on the islands and it didn't disappoint with 10 species of vagrant totalling 27 birds! The month started off with a *Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica* and a Bank Swallow near Surf Bay followed closely by a *Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* in

25 Two Cliff Swallows *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* (Cape Pembroke peninsula, November 2022) discovered by the author on seaside rocks by the water's edge were the first Falkland record for 10 years.

26 Eared Dove *Zenaida auriculata*, Government House, Stanley, November 2022: the seventh Falkland record in the past 15 years.

the same area and a Lesser Yellowlegs at Cape Pembroke. Hudsonian Godwit is a bit of a sad story on the islands: as recently as 2003, flocks of 50 would be found but in recent years they have became rare and the species has become less than annual. Historically, Kelp Point was where large flocks would arrive and on 17 November we found eight there—so perhaps there is hope for the future. Other waders continued to arrive: on 8–9 November, six *Wilson's Phalaropes *Phalaropus tricolor* were at Philips Point, Stanley, and a *Red (Grey) Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* was at Cape Pembroke. The Wilson's Phalaropes remained on a small pond for a few weeks and were joined by four Lesser Yellowlegs at one point.

Kidney Cove is an excellent site where it is possible to stay overnight in a hut near the Gentoo Penguin colony frequented by the Royal Penguin mentioned up-article. As well as up to five breeding species of penguin, plus a regularly returning (Northern or Moseley's) Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes* (*chrysocome*) *moseleyi* (Endangered), the area has excellent short grassland and ponds. During a short stay there in November, I accidently flushed a Red-fronted Coot *Fulica rufifrons* from the bank of the nearby pond, which (according to eBird) was only the second or third record for the islands of a species for which regular movements have not been recorded (Taylor 2020a). In two visits here I have seen two vagrants—and the coot was rarer than the Royal Penguin!

The southern population of Eared Dove *Zenaida auriculata* is a partial migrant, wintering to the north of the breeding range (Lees & Gilroy 2021). This common species is a relatively regular visitor to the Falklands as they are blown off course when migrating to or from their breeding grounds. Nevertheless, the one I saw happily feeding in the vegetable patches at the Government House gardens in November 2022 represented only the seventh record in the past 15 years.

27 Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus*, Rookery Bay, near Stanley, November 2021: the island's fifth record of an overshooting long-distance migrant.

A walk along the coast at Cape Pembroke on the sunny afternoon of 27 November had me dreaming of replicating the crazy scenes of Roseate Spoonbills *Platalea ajaja* (a species for which there are no eBird records south of Buenos Aires province, Argentina!) sat on the rocks there on 11 May 2003 (Woods 2017) but I had to make do with something smaller: two Cliff Swallows *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* were sat on the rocks by the water's edge. This was the first Falkland record for 10 years (Woods 2017).

The final vagrant of my time on the islands was a real showstopper: a Fork-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus savana*, a South American species whose southernmost populations move north in the non-breeding season (Jahn & Tuero 2020). Found on 21 November 2022 feeding along the seaweed line of a small cove near Surf Bay, it stayed for over a week without leaving the area. Occasionally it moved to a nearby fence but was generally to be found roosting and feeding on the rocky beach. It was the first record for five years, which is roughly the historical average.

Final thoughts—and when to visit

In December 2022, my time on the islands came to an end. I had loved every minute of it, whether seawatching or searching for vagrants (one was definitely harder than the other), and I realized that I was fortunate to have been there at a unique time. Due to COVID-19, there were very few visitors during my stay, and cruise ships started returning only in my final month. Even in that short time of heightened tourism, I realized that even ship passengers with just a few hours on these remote islands have the potential to find vagrants, when a Cattle Tyrant *Machetornis rixosa* was found at West Point, West Falklands. In the year since I left, three firsts for the Falklands have fallen: Epaulet Oriole *Icterus cayanensis* (in Stanley), Short-billed Miner *Geositta antarctica* (at sea) and West Peruvian Dove *Zenaida meloda* (Johnson's Harbour). The increase in visitors will undoubtedly continue to increase the Falklands' list, posing the inevitable exciting question: 'What's next?'

If you fancy a trip trying to find vagrants at the edge of the Neotropical region—potentially a first for the Falklands—then late October to late November is the peak time, as evidenced by my personal experience plus the mouth-watering list of historical rarities from these months, such as Chilean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus chilensis*, Picazuro Pigeon *Patagioenas picazuro*, Green-backed Firecrown *Sephanoides sephaniodes*, White-collared Swift *Streptoprocne zonaris*, Burrowing Owl *Athene cunicularia*, White-banded

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28–29 Fork-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus savana*, near Surf Bay, East Falkland, November 2022. The first record in the Falkland Islands for five years, this bird mainly frequented the incongruous location of a stony beach—but then vagrant birds are often found in unusual habitats.

Mockingbird *Mimus triurus*, Tropical Parula *Setophago pitiayumi* and Southern Martin *Progne elegans*. Hopefully the winds are from the west, and the rest is down to hard work and a bit of luck. If you linger into December, might you even add the next American Redstart for the islands! The potential is there and with only five or six active birders resident on the islands, there is plenty of untouched ground to cover. Good luck…

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Mike and Sue Morrison, Micky Reeves, Ryan Hawksworth, Alan Henry and Tabitha Pearman for all their help, whether in the field or with information on past and recent records. The base map for Fig. 3 is that of OpenStreetMap (openstreetmap.org/copyright) and uses data available under the Open Database License.

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Robin Restall: a celebration of a full life

Nigel Redman

A tribute to Robin Restall (1937–2023)—ornithologist, author, artist and more besides—from his principal publisher.

Robin Restall's name will be familiar to many in the ornithological world, but especially to those with an interest in Neotropical birds. His books and articles on birds in the Neotropics are well known to NBC members, but Robin's interests spanned much more than this. He came to ornithology from a different route than most birders or ornithologists. Robin was an avid aviculturist for most of his life, and a respected name in the avicultural community. He kept mainly local birds in large aviaries in his garden, wherever he was living, and had a particular interest in seedeaters—he chose to specialize in species that are frequently ignored by the ornithological community. He was a regular contributor to the *Avicultural Magazine* from the 1960s and his first book, *Finches and other seed-eating birds*, was published by Faber & Faber in 1975. Illustrated with his own artwork and line drawings, it gave insights into the world of bird breeders, allowing one to appreciate their contribution to our knowledge of birds.

1 Robin Restall pond-dipping (Nigel Redman).

Robin didn't just keep birds for fun. He studied them. He studied their behaviour, kept copious notes and painted or drew meticulous drawings of them. When he was living in Hong Kong, his interest turned to munias and mannikins, a group of undistinguished estrildids that occur mainly in Asia and Australasia. He kept many different species of *Lonchura* spp., producing fabulous and accurate paintings of them, often with their wings outstretched in the style of Charles Tunnicliffe's famous 'scale drawings' of British birds. Robin's work as an advertising executive had enabled him the opportunity to travel extensively, and during his long career he was posted to Venezuela (1976–79, where he met his second wife, Mariela), Chicago (USA), Tokyo (Japan), London (UK), and finally Hong Kong, retiring as the head of J. Walter Thompson's Asia–Pacific office in 1995. Much earlier in his career, he had trained as a draughtsman which undoubtedly helped him hone his artistic skills.

Sometime in 1995, not long after I began my career in publishing, the publisher Christopher Helm and I received a letter from Hong Kong, together with an unsolicited book proposal. It was from Robin. He wanted us to publish a monograph on munias and mannikins. On expressing interest, the manuscript soon appeared, complete with a comprehensive set of colour plates illustrating every possible plumage variation in these birds.

The subject was esoteric, even by the standards of our specialist publishing house, but I was impressed by the detail and scholarship of the work, and we felt that it would make a worthy addition to the Helm Identification Guides series. The key feature of the book was the artwork: a series of magnificent plates painted from living aviary birds and museum specimens, and including scale drawings of birds with wings spread open.

2 From left to right: Mariela Restall, Robin Restall, Nigel Redman (Cheryle Sifontes).

The book was contracted and was soon in production. *Munias and mannikins* (Restall 1996) contained considerably more detail than most of the previous volumes in the series, especially on behaviour, and covered rather fewer species, but it was a more than worthy addition—and was well received. That was the beginning of a long friendship.

In the following years Robin and Mariela made occasional visits to Britain, during which my wife Cheryle and I got to know them very well. They would come to stay with us at our cottage in Sussex, and we enjoyed many fine meals at gastropubs and restaurants in the area. Shortly after Robin retired from his successful advertising career, they relocated to Venezuela. Soon after his arrival in Caracas, Robin was offered the title of Research Associate at the Phelps Ornithological Collection (COP). It was here that Robin began to appreciate the vast range of plumages exhibited by many birds, whether by age, sex or geographical distribution. He also noticed how poorly these plumage variations were illustrated in books. Meanwhile, his lifelong interest in seedeaters continued, with his attention transferred to the many, frequently overlooked, species of *Sporophila*.

More book collaborations followed. Robin painted some of the plates for another monograph in the Helm Identification Guides series, *Parrots* (Juniper & Parr 1998), and then he proposed an ambitious new book covering all the birds of northern South America. The idea was bordering on preposterous. Robin wanted to cover the birds of Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela and the Guianas—some 2,300 species—together with every subspecies and major plumage variation. Moreover, he proposed painting all the birds himself, mostly from skins held in the COP. He enlisted help with the text from Clemencia Rodner, and with the maps from the COP curator, Miguel Lentino.

The project naturally took far longer than Robin expected (these big projects always do!), and it also ended up consuming quite a large part of my working life and that of our dedicated designer, Julie Dando. But eventually, in 2006, after 10 years of painstaking work, *Birds of northern South America* (BNSA) was finally published in two hefty volumes (Restall *et al.* 2006). It covered 2,308 species and included no fewer than 6,388 individual figures. It was, and remains, an incredible piece of work.

As Robin himself was quick to point out, BNSA was not a field guide, but was intended to provide a reference manual to the immense plumage variation in the region's birds, effectively supplementing published field guides. Some species, such as Bananaquit *Coereba flaveola* and Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia*, had as many as 18 and 20 illustrations respectively. Not

surprisingly, spin-off national field guides followed with other co-authors, namely *Birds of Trinidad & Tobago* (now in its third edition: Kenefick *et al.* 2019); *Birds of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao* (de Boer *et al.* 2012); *Birds of Venezuela* (Ascanio *et al.* 2017); and *Birds of Ecuador* (Freile & Restall 2018). Sadly, a planned *Birds of Colombia* failed to materialize.

When it came to artwork, Robin was prolific. He maintained a strict and punishing work schedule to produce the many thousands of illustrations for his magnum opus. He would typically spend the day at the museum, studying and painting birds from skins held in the collection, returning home in the evening to tend the birds in his aviaries. When the text writing fell behind schedule, he assisted with that too. His attention to detail and motivation to complete his ambitious project were exemplary. It was a joy to work with him, although it was sometimes hard to keep up with the many emails that ensued. Robin was always disciplined and hard-working, and he expected equal dedication from his collaborators. Moreover, Robin didn't just paint meticulous illustrations for field guides. He made innumerable sketches and paintings for book covers, magazine articles (including identification workshops in *Neotropical Birding*), calendars or just for fun, and many of these demonstrated a looser and more lifelike style than the regimented series of comparative images that were required for BNSA.

Cheryle and I made two visits to Venezuela, in 2002 and 2009. On both occasions, we based ourselves at Robin and Mariela's lovely home in Caracas, and made various birding trips out into the country, either on our own or with local birders to whom Robin introduced us, notably David Ascanio, who I later commissioned to write the text for *Birds of Venezuela*, the penultimate spin-off from BNSA. We both cherish those two wonderful holidays.

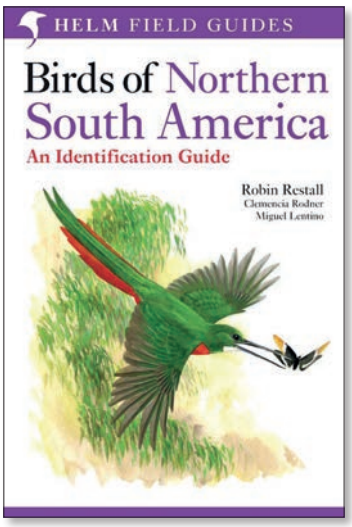
When Robin and Mariela moved back to England in 2014, they settled in Barton, near Cambridge, and we were able to see more of them. Much fine dining and drinking ensued, fulfilling another of Robin's great passions—he was an adventurous chef who loved to entertain and experiment with unusual or exotic ingredients. After returning to England, Robin developed a great interest in gardening, a passion that he shared with Cheryle, and they regularly swapped ideas. He also became very interested in pond life, digging a pond in his garden and stocking it with native flora and fauna. We even went pond-dipping in local ponds to find new things to introduce into our garden ponds. Even when we weren't able to

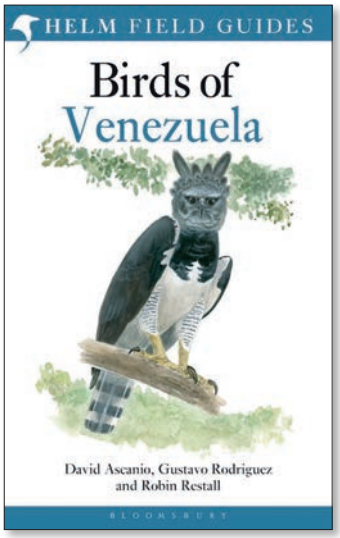
3–6 Originals of some of Robin Restall's artwork, demonstrating his varied repertoire (Nigel Redman). **3** The original plate of hummingbirds for *Birds of northern South America* (Restall *et al.* 2006). **4** The front cover of *Birds of Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire* (de Boer *et al.* 2012), featuring the three islands' different subspecies of Brown-throated Parakeet *Eupsittula pertinax*. **5** Studies of White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*. **6** A pair of Saffron Finches *Sicalis flaveola*.

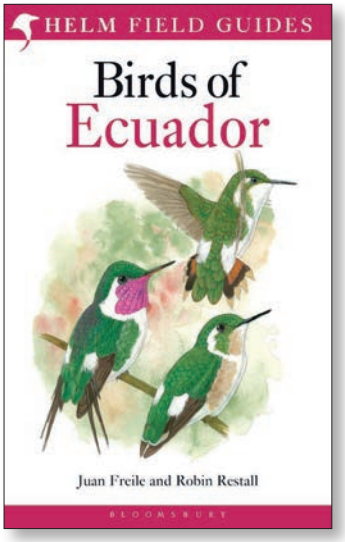
5


WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW
Zonotrichia leucophrys
probably the Eastern race
Z. l. leucophrys
♂ The adult male collected dead at McCormick place early June, 1979.
Full length 16-2
Culmen 1.0
wing 7.4
tarsus 2.2

6







7 **8** **9**

7–9 The front covers of books by Robin Restall, packed with his artwork, can doubtless be found in the libraries of many a *Neotropical Birding* reader: **7** Restall *et al.* (2006); 8 Ascanio *et al.* (2017); 9 Freile & Restall (2018).

meet up, Robin maintained regular email contact, and he was a very good correspondent. We shared identical political views and a similar sense of humour. I shall miss the regular exchange of jokes and satire that we enjoyed over so many years, as well as the many novel culinary experiences.

But it is also fair to say that Robin's interest in birds waned after he left Venezuela. Although he maintained an active interest in the birds in his garden, and especially in their behaviour, the move to Britain, which was undertaken out of necessity due to the political situation in Venezuela, seemed to dampen his interest in birds. It has to be said that Robin was never an active field birder. He undertook a number of research expeditions in Venezuela, and loved looking at birds in and around Caracas, but Robin's interests lay more in the plumage variations of birds as studied in museum specimens and in his aviaries, and his meticulous attention to detail made him the ideal person to undertake a project as massive as BNSA.

Robin maintained many contacts in the ornithological and avicultural worlds throughout his life, and he was a member of the editorial board of *Neotropical Birding* from its inception. In Britain, however, having largely stepped away from his ornithological interests, Robin returned to his other big passion in life—postage stamps. He was an authority on the British 1937 coronation stamp and wrote a monograph on the subject, which remained unpublished on his death. He contributed scholarly articles to the philatelic literature on flaws and printing variations in well-known stamps, applying a similar level of detail and obsession to the subject as he did in his studies on birds.

Robin retained his active mind right to the end, but eventually a variety of health issues caught up with him, slowly diminishing his quality of life. In May 2023, at the age of 86, he took the brave decision to end his regular kidney dialysis treatment, and after a final week of indulging in all the food and drink that he had been forbidden to consume in the previous months, he died peacefully at home with his family beside him.

Robin Restall was a remarkable man. He rose to the top in his chosen profession as an advertising executive, but he achieved so much more as a dedicated and self-taught amateur in the diverse worlds of his various interests. His legacy will live on.

10

>> IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOP SEPARATING SOCIAL AND RUSTY-MARGINED FLYCATCHERS

Separating Social and Rusty-margined Flycatchers

Robin Restall

Newcomers to the Neotropics are often baffled by an array of tyrant-flycatchers with bright yellow underparts and a black-and-white head. Little wonder, for these birds encompass five genera and cover a considerable size spectrum. But even experts can be flummoxed by members of the genus *Myiozetetes*. This Identification Workshop is intended as a contribution to the debate on a particularly tricky species pair, and is unlikely to be the last word on the subject!

Even at the outset, there was confusion. When Johann Baptist von Spix described Social Flycatcher *Myiozetetes similis* in 1825, he was actually looking at a Rusty-margined Flycatcher *M. cayanensis* from Brazil, but then wrote diagnostic notes from a specimen of Social Flycatcher! Cory & Hellmayr[1] subsequently assigned Spix's second specimen as the type. Nearly two centuries on, these two fairly common and widespread tyrant-flycatchers continue to cause confusion and misidentification across much of the Neotropics. Indeed, having researched this article, I sense that the problem may be more complex than almost anybody realises.

An apposite illustration comes from French Guiana. Just before submitting this article, Olivier Claessens told me that Social Flycatcher had been removed from the country's list. Claims[14] were found to relate to misidentified Rusty-margined Flycatchers of the subspecies *cayanensis* which, in French Guiana, has little rufous in the wings (Fig. 4, bird 2c), in contrast to the plate in the only field guide widely available at the time of the records[6].

Although the continent's top birders may not have problems, most of us are mere mortals and another illustration suggests that confusion may be systemic. To inform my research, I circulated a request for photographs of both species from throughout their range. Many kind people obliged, sending me nearly 500 images: a testament to the strength of our Neotropical ornithological community. However, the photograph labels suggested that there was indeed a problem afoot. With the exception of birds photographed

Figure 1. Subspecies of Social Flycatcher *Myiozetetes similis* and their ranges (Robin Restall)

Figure 2. Subspecies of Rusty-margined Flycatcher *Myiozetetes cayanensis* and their ranges (Robin Restall)

11

Variation in *Anthracothorax* hummingbirds

Robin Restall

12

Geographical differences in Fiery Topaz *Topaza pyra*

Robin Restall

13

Variation of wingbars in some tyrannid flycatchers

Robin Restall

10–13 Exhibiting a keen eye for detail, Robin Restall was a frequent contributor to the early issues of *Neotropical Birding*, writing and illustrating articles for our 'identification workshop' series, including on: **10** *Myiozetes* flycatchers (*Neotrop. Birding* 5: 24–31); **11** mango hummingbirds *Anthracothorax* spp. (*Neotrop. Birding* 4: 25–29); **12** Fiery Topaz *Topaza pyra* (*Neotrop. Birding* 6: 77–78) and **13** tyrannid flycatchers (*Neotrop. Birding* 3: 28–31).

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FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

Anyone seeking further reflections on the contribution to Neotropical ornithology of Robin Restall might wish to read two obituaries written by NBC-connected individuals: one by *Cotinga* editor Juan Freile (*Cotinga* 45: 88); and another, with a bibliography of Robin's publications, by Miguel Lentino and former *Neotropical Birding* editor Christopher J. Sharpe (*Bull. Brit. Orn. Club Bulletin* 143: 402-404; doi.org/10.25226/bboc.v143i4.2023.a1; and *Orn. Neotrop*. 34: 159–162; doi.org/10.58843/ornneo.v34i2.1295).

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If you love reading this magazine, how might you fancy writing for it? We are always on the lookout for article ideas. If you have one, please ✉ the Senior Editor, James Lowen: neotropicalbirding@yahoo.co.uk

Reflections on Guyana – and Red Siskins revisited

Lynn Houghton

It has been nearly 15 years since *Neotropical Birding* featured Guyana, which is far too long for a country that hosts great opportunities to see globally threatened species such as Giant Otter *Pteronura brasiliensis*, West Indian Manatee *Trichechus manatus* and Red Siskin *Spinus cucullatus*. Here are some reflections on a recent visit to this fabulous country.

As I fly over rainforest on route to Lethem, located on Guyana's south-western border with Brazil, the scene unfolding below me looks remarkably similar to clips from the BBC *Zoo Quest* series, filmed in the early 1950s, the series introduced young naturalist and broadcaster David Attenborough to a new audience. But I am primarily here to explore the vast savanna of interior Guyana, which lies on the Guiana Shield. This 1.7-billion-year-old Precambrian geological formation also encompasses parts of eastern Venezuela and Colombia, Suriname, French Guiana and northern Brazil. Elevated parts of the Shield—the Guiana Highlands—include table-like mountains called *tepuis* and several of the world's best-known waterfalls: Angel Falls, Kaieteur Falls and Kukenan Falls.

As covered in this magazine quite a few years previously (Collins 2007, Collins & Walker 2010), the Guianan Shield offers outstanding birding alongside stunning scenery, with an excellent group of biogeographical endemics including Guianan Cock-of-the-rock *Rupicola rupicola*. In the Rupununi River catchment alone, there are thought to be 400 species of bird. Throw in charismatic, often rare, animals such as Giant Otter *Pteronura brasiliensis* (Endangered), Giant Anteater *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* (Vulnerable), the mythical Giant Armadillo *Priodontes maximus* (Vulnerable), Goliath Birdeater *Theraphosa blondi* (the world's heaviest spider) and the largest scaled fish in the world—Arapaima *Arapaima gigas* (Data Deficient)—and you have ample ingredients for thrilling ecotourism offerings.

1 Male Red Siskin *Spinus cucullatus*, Venezuela, undated (Jhonathan Miranda/Red Siskin Initiative: redsiskin.org). This globally Endangered finch is a star attraction of any visit to Guyana.

Saving Red Siskin

I was visiting Guyana's Rupununi savannas to hopefully see one very important bird, Red Siskin *Spinus cucullatus*, and to learn about conservation efforts helping this globally Endangered species. The male of this predominantly bright red finch has a black head, throat, flight feathers and tail. In the early 20th century, it was common and widespread throughout its then known range of north Venezuela, but there have been recent observations in only four states (Sharpe 2016, Clement & Sharpe 2020). In north Colombia, the last record was in 2000—and that was the first since 1978—while there have been no records from Trinidad since 1960, and even that population may have been introduced (Clement & Sharpe 2020).

Exploitation of the species typifies the evolving tale of humans and their desire to manipulate nature for their own benefit. The global millinery industry was reportedly an early threat to this attractive finch in the early 20th century, with feathers apparently used to adorn fashionable hats (see biogenomics.si.edu/research/research-action/back-brinksaving-red-siskin). This was the start of the species' downturn. As a gregarious species known for its pleasing song, Red Siskin was always likely to be targeted for the cagebird trade. Similar in size to a domestic canary, Red Siskin became the focus of 1940s German bird-breeders seeking to create a new 'red-factor' variant canary via hybridisation. For this experiment, thousands of birds were presumably caught and removed from their natural environment. Extraction continued for decades: in 1975 at least 3,000 birds were recorded in trade, with trade volumes persisting above 1,000 in 1982 (Clement & Sharpe 2020).

Only in Guyana has there been positive news. In 2000, Robbins *et al.* (2003) found a population of perhaps 675 birds in the Rupununi savannas of Upper Takutu–Upper Essequibo. The location was an amazing 950 km from the nearest Venezuelan population, prompting Sharpe (2016) to suggest that this was "surely one of the most remarkable ornithological discoveries of recent times". It is possible that Guyana's Red Siskin population could number in the low thousands (Clement & Sharpe 2020, BirdLife International 2023).

The South Rupununi Conservation Society (@southrupununiconservationsociety) was set up by a group of friends in 1998 to serve as the guardians of the Red Siskin (E. Earls pers. comm.). Since, then the SRCS has been instrumental in protecting Red Siskin habitat and assisting its conservation. Today, more then 100 SRCS indigenous rangers and teachers work

2 Male Red Siskin *Spinus cucullatus* being fitted with colour rings, Rupununi savanna, Upper Takutu–Upper Essequibo, Guyana, May 2014 (South Rupununi Conservation Society: @southrupununiconservationsociety). Part of South Rupununi Conservation Society's study of this species involves colour-marking to enable individual identification in the field.

3 Our group trekking out to the Red Siskin site, near Sand Creek, Upper Takutu–Upper Essequibo, Guyana, November 2023 (Lynn Houghton).

4 Male Red Siskin *Spinus cucullatus*, Rupununi savanna, Upper Takutu–Upper Essequibo, Guyana, undated (South Rupununi Conservation Society: @southrupununiconservationsociety). A population of the species was discovered in Guyana as recently as 2000.

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5–7 Red Siskin *Spinus cucullatus*, Venezuela (Jhonathan Miranda/Red Siskin Initiative: redsiskin.org). **5** Male, July 2017. **6** Female, July 2017. **7** Female, undated.

7

in communities throughout the Rupununi to teach environmental education progammes and traditional skills, conduct research and manage community-run conservation programmes in threatened habitats and to benefit species including Red Siskin, Giant Anteater and the globally Vulnerable Yellow-spotted River Turtle *Podocnemis unifilis* (E. Earls pers. comm). The society is going from strength to strength, winning the 2023 Field Museum Parker/Gentry International Award in honour of its conservation work.

Scouting for Red Siskin

Established in 2016 (and thus too recently to be covered in Collins 2007 or Collins & Walker 2010), Wichibai Ranch has become an attractive destination for ecotourism, including for seeing Red Siskin close to the Wapishana village of Sand Creek. Our group, which included well-known British bird artist Darren Rees, joined inspiring conservation rangers from SRCS to drive an hour north, with 4WDs necessary to ford the Rupununi River. At Sand Creek, we picked up an additional local ranger and set about searching for Red Siskin.

For a while, we enjoyed common and widespread but attractive birds such as Fork-tailed Palm Swift *Tachornis squamata*, Vermilion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus rubinus*, Fork-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus savana*, Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna*, Bananaquit *Coereba flaveola*, Orange-bellied Euphonia *Euphonia xanthogaster* and Palm Tanager *Thraupis palmarum*. Eventually, a male Red Siskin was spotted taking a bath on a rocky hillside with a small creek running through it, causing quite a bit of excitement. Our return to Wichibai enabled us to see Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria* and Buff-necked Ibis *Theristictus caudatus* in marshy areas, with Black Caracara *Daptrius ater*, Crested Caracara *Polyborus plancus* and Pearl Kite *Gampsonyx swainsonii* making an appearance in the grasslands.

Wildlife and conservation at Rewa Eco-lodge

When our time on the Rupununi savanna ended, we headed north to lush rainforest at the community-built and operated Rewa Eco-lodge, which lies at the confluence of the Rupununi and Rewa Rivers, and is accessible only by boat. The enterprise provides local people with invaluable employment opportunities and gives outsiders a taste of rainforest life. Rewa's local guides have intimate knowledge of their surroundings, and its flora and fauna, which makes for unforgettable experiences—such as the Goliath Birdeater shown to us by our guide Vivian on one outing; he knew exactly where to find this enormous spider.

Each evening Rewa was visited by spectacular Blue-and-yellow Macaws *Ara arauana*, while other visitors to our compound included Lineated Woodpecker *Dryocopus lineatus* and Brown Capuchin *Sapajus apella* monkeys. Common birds along the river were eclipsed by fabulous Giant Otters. Easy trails gave access to forest, where birds encountered included Black-throated Trogon *Trogon rufus*. We also learnt about parrot conservation from a local villager, Lorakim. Setting the context of millennia of sustainable local use of forest resources, she explained that macaws were still killed for their feathers for use in headdresses. The only way to curb this behaviour, in her view, is to educate youngsters via the immensely popular wildlife clubs. "It is only by changing the behaviour of the young that progress can be made in any conservation project."

Final days, final thoughts

As our exploration of Guyana came to a close, we headed to Georgetown. Despite being busy and developed, this sprawling capital city has wildlife everywhere (something lauded by Collins 2007 and Collins & Walker 2010). Even so, I was quite surprised to see West Indian Manatees *Trichechus manatus* (Vulnerable) in a canal alongside Guyana National Park (which is actually more the size of a city park). Apparently, these manatees are a permanent fixture, presumably thanks to abundant eelgrass.

Meanwhile, an evening sunset cruise along the Demerara River threw up one of the best spectacles of the trip. As the coastline is fairly undeveloped and saturated with growth, there was an enormous number of Scarlet Ibis *Eudocimus ruber*, Cattle Egret *Bubulclus ibis* and Great Egret *Ardea alba* roosting there, in fact too many to count. And they continued to fly over towards us, from across the river: a fine finale to an enthralling visit.

The generosity, humour, and good will of everyone we met in Guyana could not have been surpassed. Local people and ranch owners alike have embraced the ethos of conservation with great enthusiasm. Hopefully, the Red Siskin and many more species will thrive because of this.

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On the way back from the Red Siskin site near Sand Creek village to Wichibai Ranch, birds seen included: **8** Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria* (near Karanambu, Upper Takutu–Upper Essequibo, Guyana, November 2019; Philip Precey/Wildlife Travel: wildlife-travel.co.uk) and **9** Crested Caracara *Polyborus plancus* (near Sand Creek, Upper Takutu–Upper Essequibo, Guyana, November 2023; Lynn Houghton).

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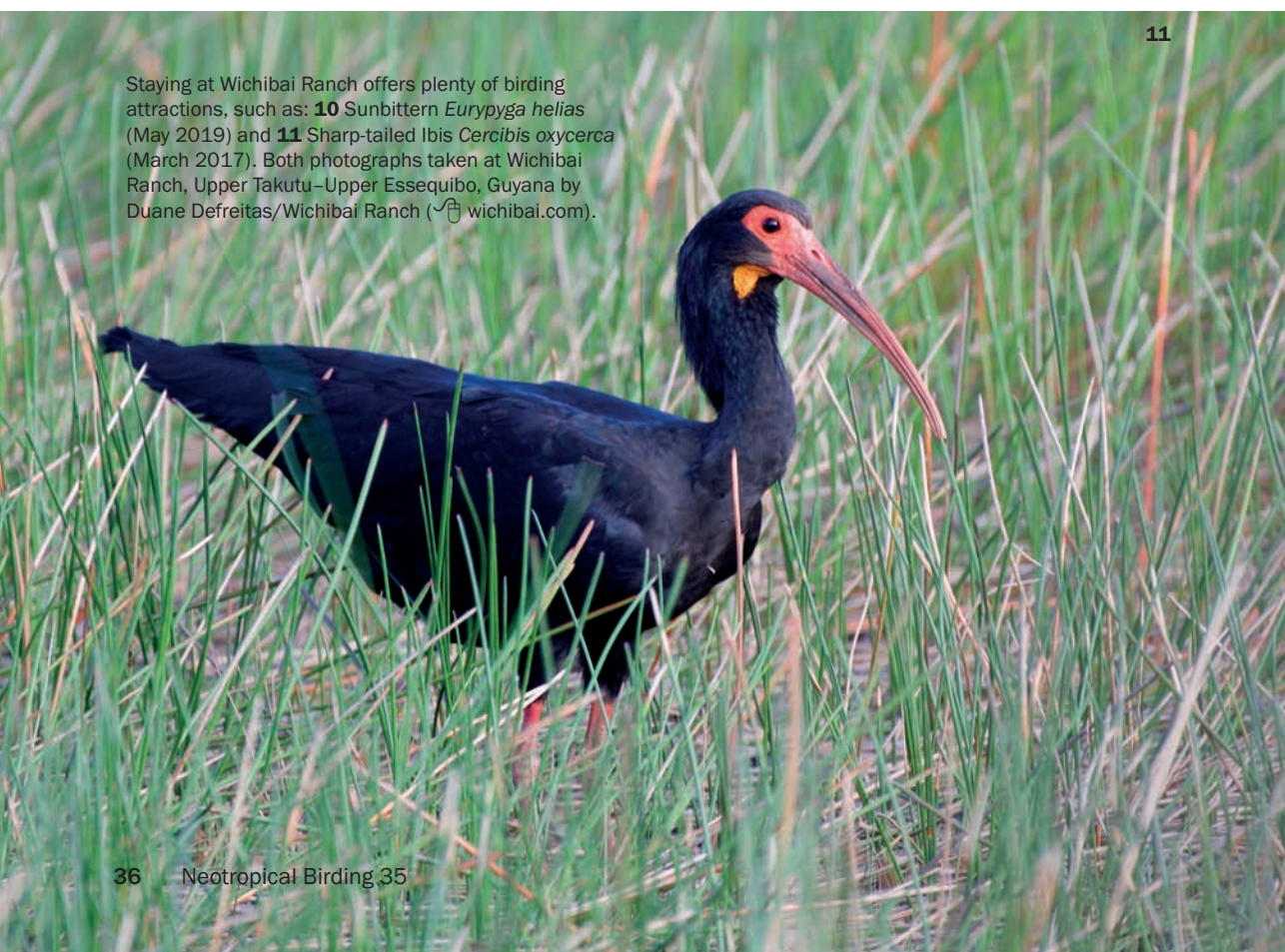

Staying at Wichibai Ranch offers plenty of birding attractions, such as: **10** Sunbittern *Eurypyga helias* (May 2019) and **11** Sharp-tailed Ibis *Cercibis oxycerca* (March 2017). Both photographs taken at Wichibai Ranch, Upper Takutu–Upper Essequibo, Guyana by Duane Defreitas/Wichibai Ranch (wichibai.com).

THE RED SISKIN INITIATIVE

Sharpe (2016) gave a synopsis of the Red Siskin Initiative, created in 2015 by a consortium of organisations from three countries, including Guyana's South Rupununi Conservation Society. Drawing on the website redsiskin.org, this box summarizes how impressively the Venezuela-based Initiative has developed since then. The Initiative's mission is 'to restore self-sustaining populations of Red Siskins across their historical distribution'. Partnership members collaborate on a range of measures to conserve Red Siskins both in the wild and in captivity. Scientists use fieldwork, labwork, and in-depth analyses to study the threats to, and the ecology and genetics of, the species. Surveys have included bioacoustic monitoring, using automated recording units, in South Rupununi, Guyana. The Initiative rescues Red Siskins confiscated from the illegal trade, and is developing strategies and methods to reintroduce them into the wild. In 2023, the Initiative successfully bred Red Siskins in its ex-situ aviary, with 16 eggs hatched. Captive and rescued birds are being fed on nutrition derived from a new nursery of native plants. The Initiative has also been instrumental in building a regional network of conservationists seeking to combat cagebird trafficking in South America and has been working to reduce demand within Venezuela for Red Siskins. It has safeguarded more than 600 hectares of Red Siskin habitat (forests and agroforestry) in northern Venezuela. The Initiative has helped more than 40 coffee producers commit to using best practices in organic and bird-friendly coffee production, who have formed an agroforestry co-operative, ACAFLO (acaflo.com). The combination of these targeted conservation interventions—among many others led by the Initiative—suggests a more positive future for Red Siskins in both Guyana and Venezuela.

INICIATIVA CARDENALITO REDSISKIN INITIATIVE

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12 Yellow-spotted River Turtle *Podocnemis unifilis*. Caiman House, Upper Takutu–Upper Essequibo, Guyana, December 2019 (Philip Precey/Wildlife Travel: wildlife-travel.co.uk). As well as helping Red Siskins *Spinus cucullatus*, South Rupununi Conservation Society is leading a new project to restore populations of this globally Vulnerable reptile.

13 Black Curassow *Crax alector*, Iwokrama River Lodge, Upper Demerara-Berbice, Guyana, November 2023 (Lynn Houghton). This impressive species also occurs at Rewa Eco-lodge.

14 Lineated Woodpecker *Dryocopus lineatus* was a regular visitor to the accommodation compound at Rewa Eco-lodge, Upper Takutu–Upper Essequibo, Guyana, November 2023 (Lynn Houghton).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the Guyana Tourist Board for hosting my trip and to Wilderness Explorers for organizing it. I thank Duane Defreitas/Wichibai Ranch (wichibai.com), Jhonathan Miranda/Red Siskin Initiative (redsiskin.org), Philip Precey/Wildlife Travel (wildlife-travel.co.uk) and the South Rupununi Conservation Society (@southrupununiconservationsociety) for use of their photographs, and additionally to Bárbara Santana/Red Siskin Initiative (redsiskin.org) for help sourcing images. Erin Earl (SRCS) provided useful information.

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15 Lorakim, a villager and conservationist who lives near Rewa Eco-lodge, believes that Guyana's wildlife clubs—here at Yupukari, near Caiman House, Upper Takutu–Upper Essequibo, Guyana (Philip Precey/Wildlife Travel: wildlife-travel.co.uk)—offer great potential to change the behaviour of the young, and thereby help wildlife conservation.

16 West Indian Manatee *Trichechus manatus*, near Georgetown, Demerara-Mahaica, Guyana, November 2019 (Philip Precey/Wildlife Travel: wildlife-travel.co.uk). A canal next to Guyana National Park is a good site for this globally Vulnerable mammal.

17 Scarlet Ibis *Eudocimus ruber*, Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* and Great Egret *Ardea alba* roosting along the Demerara River, near Georgetown, Demerara-Mahaica, Guyana, December 2023 (Lynn Houghton).

Birdwatching in Cuba: a need for change

Vladimir Mirabal

A volunteer-run project in Cuba is seeking to raise awareness of birds and increase domestic participation in birdwatching. Here is some of what it has achieved so far.

Cuba is an enticing, exciting birding location, with more species than other Caribbean countries and a high number of endemics (28 species: BirdLife International 2023a). Over half of Cuban vertebrate species are feathered, with 398 bird species so far recorded, grouped across 72 families in 27 orders (González Alonso *et al.* 2012, 2017; Navarro 2022). Of these, 155 species (39%) breed, 47 (12%) species are under some category of national threat and 67% are migratory (Navarro 2022). According to BirdLife International (2023a), 18 species are globally threatened and 23 Near Threatened. Little wonder then, that Cuba is very much on the map for global birders; six years ago, this magazine published an informative article about where to find the island's most sought-after species (Sharpe 2017).

1 A meeting of Havana birdwatchers, Havana, Cuba, October 2021 (Frank G. Batista).

Cuban birds and the cage-bird trade

Despite the Cuban government's efforts to protect nature in general, and birds and their habitats in particular, there is a climate of impunity in the country regarding the use of bird traps, the plundering of nests, the trade in species and their display as trophies. Many birds that breed in North America, such as Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*, Blue Grosbeak *Passerina caerulea*, Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus* and Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris*, are among the species most targeted by Cuban trappers. According to BirdsCaribbean, thousands of birds, especially males, are captured in Cuba each fall (autumn) and spring, especially males (see, e.g., tinyurl.com/Cuba-bird-traffic). The decline in their populations is alarming.

Several endemics such as Cuban Parakeet *Psittacara euops* (globally Vulnerable), Cuban Grassquit *Phonipara canora* and Cuban Bullfinch *Melopyrrha nigra* (Near Threatened), are also highly persecuted. The same is true of the endemic nominate subspecies of Cuban Parrot *Amazona leucocephala leucocephala* (Near Threatened), a regional endemic at the species level.

Formerly one of Cuba's most common endemic birds, Cuban Parakeet has declined by 20% over 50 years, principally due to increased trapping for the local and international cage-bird trade and habitat degradation (BirdLife International 2023b). Across its range, Cuban Parrot has undergone population reductions in the past mainly owing to trapping and the destruction of nest sites. Away from Cuba, these pressures have now slowed down or ceased. In Cuba, however, the species has declined, its range has constricted, and the population is thought to be continuing to decline as the result of poaching (BirdLife International 2023b).

More than 20 years ago, Cuban Grassquit numbers were thought to be decreasing, following decreases recorded near human settlements (Garrido & Kirkconnell 2000). The decline has continued subsequently. With its bright coloration and pleasing song, the species is targeted for the cage-bird trade. In areas where Cuban Grassquit was abundant 20 years ago, "they have completely disappeared" (BirdsCaribbean 2020). BirdLife International (2023b) infers Cuban Bullfinch to be declining as a result of habitat loss and fragmentation, as well as trapping for the cage-bird market (González Alonso *et al.* 2012, Ayón Güemes *et al.* 2023). It is among the most prevalent species in trade, desired for its an attractive song and ease of care in captivity, and susceptible because of its strong territoriality (Ayón Güemes *et al.* 2023).

In recent years, extraction levels have increased, mainly because of the species' increasing commercial value domestically and internationally, with anecdotal observations and questionnaires suggesting that thousands of individuals—particularly juvenile males and chicks—have been removed from the wild populations annually (Ayón Güemes *et al.* 2023). In November 2022, the Cuban government requested the addition of Cuban Grassquit and Cuban Bullfinch to Appendix III of the Convention in International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES; see cites.org/sites/default/files/notifications/E-Notif-2022-077.pdf).

Promoting birdwatching in Cuba

Historically, birdwatching in Cuba has been almost exclusively practiced by foreign tourists. The main source markets have been the USA, UK, Canada and, to a lesser extent, European countries and, sporadically, Asian countries. International avitourism is concentrated in enclaves boasting a rich avifauna, particularly endemic species. There has been little or no domestic birdwatching movement due to socio-economic and cultural factors. But this reality is changing.

An independent, non-profit project established in 2019, Birding Havana aims to deepen and broaden the work of environmental awareness and education among the Cuban population, especially among the youngest, through organizing and developing the practice of birdwatching beyond international tourism and academic circles. Through this, Birding Havana strives to help stop the decline in populations of migratory species and endemic residents.

We are convinced that you cannot love or care for what you do not know. Since the inception of Birding Havana, we have been committed to promoting an environmental culture of respect and knowledge about birds and their habitats. Our aim is to involve as many people as possible in the activity of birdwatching by means of field trips, educational talks, information campaigns etc. Increasing the use of the citizen science platform eBird is also a priority.

As part of our project, in March 2021, we created a free magazine called *The Cuban Birder/El Observador de Aves Cubanas* (thecubanbirder.wordpress.com/home/). It

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2–7 The front cover of recent issues of the e-magazine *The Cuban Birder/El Observador de Aves Cubanas*, which is produced in English and Spanish.

Cuban endemics threatened by the cage-bird trade include **8** Cuban Parakeet *Psittacura euops* (Vulnerable), Zapata Swamp, Ciénaga de Zapata, Matanzas, Cuba, February 2022 (Vladimir Mirabal); **9** male Cuban Grassquit *Phonipara canora*, Sierra del Rosario, Artemisa, Cuba, March 2023 (Vladimir Mirabal); and **10** male Cuban Bullfinch *Melopyrrha nigra* (Near Threatened), Sierra del Rosario, Artemisa, Cuba, November 2023 (Vladimir Mirabal).

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11 Birdwatchers at Sierra del Rosario, Artemisa, Cuba (Gonzalo Fernández).

is issued quarterly and in digital form; versions are produced in English and Spanish. This communication and environmental education tool aims to reach the public in Cuba and beyond. Its main objective is to promote birdwatching as a way of generating positive feelings for protecting and caring for wild birds, taking advantage of the progressive increase in knowledge about their characteristics, habits and natural history. We are trying to raise awareness and strengthen the fight against poaching of birds and destruction of their habitats, and against illegal trade in wild birds.

With *The Cuban Birder* magazine, we are trying to educate people in the hope of turning things around. We hope it contributes to making our country and its people better citizens, with clearer environmental awareness and greater sensitivity to the importance of conserving birds and their natural environments. The magazine is produced by volunteers. Donations are welcome to keep the magazine running. Please contact the author if you are keen to help.

How birdwatching in Cuba has already changed

One initiative seeking to promote birding in Cuba was the successful project 'Big Year Cuba 2022', held for the first time that year (with Birding Havana as part of the organizing committee). A total of 79 birdwatchers from 13 provinces registered for the competition, 13 of whom were female. Five birdwatchers broke the 200-species barrier, and more than half of participants reported 100 or more species, which is a significant achievement.

This is part of a gradual but positive change in birding in Cuba. Birders are constantly adding to the island's avifauna—subject to acceptance, 18 new birds were found from 2021 to July 2023. We now have several birding clubs throughout the island. Baracoa, Holguín, Gibara, Granma, Santiago de Cuba and Havana are the most active.

A look at Cuba's eBird statistics provides a variety of welcome evidence. The number of eBirders has increased dramatically: from 2,907 (2021) to 3,860 (July 2023). During the same timeframe, published eBird lists jumped from 54,500 to 77,800, and eBird sites of birdwatching interest leapt from 237 to 379. During 2022, Cuba sustained growth in uploaded eBird lists: year-on-year, lists submitted in April were up 338% on 2021; August was up 126% and November up 145%. A close look at the data shows that these statistics reflect increasing participation from Cuban nationals rather than foreigners: in 2022, half of the top 100 eBirders were Cuban (compared to an all-time figure of 29%); of the top 100 eBird all-time listers, the proportion of Cubans has increased from 13% (June 2021) to 29% (December 2022).

Of course, I am not claiming that Birding Havana alone is responsible for these modest but consistent qualitative and quantitative changes. Among others, the Cuerpo Cubano de Guardabosques (Cuban Forest Ranger Corps), the Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología y Medio Ambiente (Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment) and its dependencies, Cuban universities, and national and provincial press media, have made a special push from their respective areas of influence.

Although still insufficient, more and more people and more and more institutions have already become involved in environmental education activities and in promoting the love

12 Birdwatchers at Parque Lenín, Havana, Cuba (Frank G. Batista).

for and protection of Cuba's wild birds. We shall continue working to maintain and multiply these results. The work of environmental education, of raising awareness, of embracing citizen science as an indispensable tool for change, is an ongoing daily task.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Gonzalo Fernández and Frank G. Batista for the use of their photographs.

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On the utility of thermal imagers for birding in Neotropical rainforests

Oliver Metcalf, Cássio Alencar Nunes & Jarilson Garcia Vilar

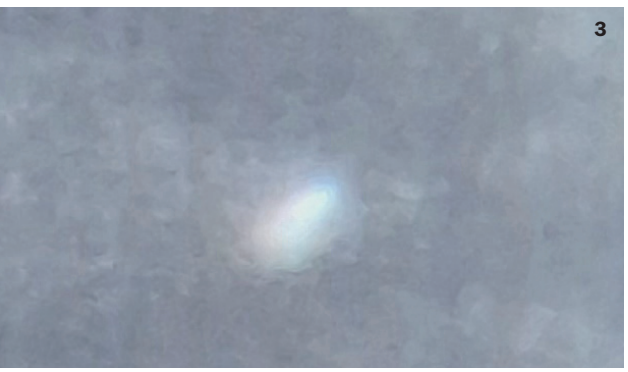
Birders are grasping the benefits of using thermal imagers to detect nocturnal or reclusive birds. Here the technology is put to the test in rainforests in the Brazilian Amazon, with pleasing initial results.

Cristalino Jungle Lodge, in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso, will require little introduction here, being one of South America's most celebrated ecolodges (see Lees *et al.* 2013 for a thorough review of the avian delights available). Our latest research project, using passive acoustic monitoring to survey rainforest birds (see Metcalf 2022), required some pilot data at short notice, and Cristalino kindly agreed to host us. We approached the trip with mounting excitement—it was the first visit to this hallowed locality for all three of us—but also with a degree of trepidation, for we were going in January, i.e., during the rainy season, when Amazonian birds can be quiet and notoriously tricky to detect.

All photographs were taken at Cristalino Jungle Lodge, Mato Grosso, Brazil, during January 2024.

1 Cássio Alencar Nunes using the thermal imager at Cristalino Jungle Lodge (Oliver Metcalf).

As we had lots of equipment and several internal flights to catch, luggage space and weight were at a premium. One item that had caused some pre-departure discussion as to whether it should make the cut was a thermal imager (aka thermal camera, thermal-imaging camera or simply 'thermal'). For anyone unfamiliar with the technology, thermal imagers detect heat emissions, converting the emissions normally invisible to the human eye into a visible light display. This enables the user to detect, in non-invasive fashion, comparatively warm objects that may otherwise be difficult to spot visually, such as skulking birds or animals at night.



2–4 Images of three birds as viewed down the thermal camera. **2** Alta Floresta Antpitta *Hylopezus whittakeri*, singing from a log (Oliver Metcalf). **3** Screaming Piha *Lipaugus vociferans*, measured as being 13 m up in the mid-canopy. **4** Common Pauraque *Nyctidromus albicollis* showing the 'hot-headed' appearance seen in all the nightjars we observed at Cristalino. The thermal imager used did not have a built-in record function (i.e., it was not a camera), so all photographs were taken by holding a smartphone camera to the lens: when directly observed with the eye to the thermal, the image quality is considerably higher.

We could find little information online about using thermal imagers in rainforests. In OM's experience in the UK, they tended not to present very good contrast in wetter conditions such as drizzle, fog and mist, and required a high temperature differential between the target and its surroundings for the target to become 'visible'. None of that made the steaming Mato Grosso rainforest seem like the ideal environment for using a thermal to search for small passerines, but nevertheless we decided to pack a pocket-sized model, the Axion Pulsar XM30 Key.

After two days of walking Cristalino's trails, we had established two things—that the birding (and other wildlife-watching) was incredible, but also that collecting data on two of the target species (Alta Floresta Antpitta *Hylopezus whittakeri*, a Brazilian endemic, and Black-spotted Bare-eye *Phlegopsis nigromaculata*) was going to be extremely challenging. We needed to record individual birds singing, then measure the distance between the individual and the recorder to obtain the amplitude of the song, something that required clear, and ideally prolonged, views.

Alta Floresta Antpitta, however, was only singing between 05h15–05h40, well before it got light enough to see the bird under the canopy. Meanwhile, Black-spotted Bare-eyes were flicking around so rapidly at ant swarms that they were almost impossible to keep track of under the canopy, where the pervasive 'twilight' lasted until mid-morning.

By day three, we had remembered the thermal camera and charged it up. Our fortunes changed overnight. Instead of frustratedly peering into darkness, listening to the sober notes of an impossibly distant antpitta, we could now instead see a bright white glow, with a characteristic egg-on-legs shape, perched on a fallen log 25 metres away. Detecting our other target species also became much easier. Rufous-capped Antthrushes *Formicarius colma* were easy to follow as they strutted across the forest floor. Cinereous Antshrikes *Thamnomanes caesius* were visible even in dense vine tangles. It did, however, remain a challenge to keep up with the Black-spotted Bare-eyes' frenetic pace.

5–7 A comparison of the efficacy of a standard camera versus a thermal imager (Oliver Metcalf). **5** A photo of JGV taken with a Samsung S10 camera at 2.5x zoom and cropped. **6** the same image taken down the thermal imager. **7** JGV, an experienced Brazilian field ornithologist (left-hand heat source), unable to spot a Cinereous Tinamou *Crypturellus cinereus* (right-hand heat source) at *c.*8 m range that it is eminently visible when viewed through the thermal imager at *c.*20 m distance.

It was not just work where the thermal imager became a firm favourite. We also used it to find prized nocturnal species such as Zigzag Heron *Zebrilus undulatus*, Ladder-tailed Nightjar *Hydropsalis climacocerca* and Lowland Tapir *Tapirus terristris*. During the day, we used it to find hidden species or just to watch, in dismay, all the unidentifiable birds that passed high above us in canopy flocks. Despite our pre-trip misgivings, the image showed good contrast across the range of temperatures we experienced (roughly 20–31°C), although the contrast was notably lower during the most humid or hottest periods of the day.

There will always be people who believe that extra gizmos and gadgets detract from the pleasure of birding, or who may quibble about the validity of watching a bird via an LED screen instead of through an optical lens. There are also, of course, limits to the capacity of thermal imagers in rainforest environments: many of Cristalino's birds and even mammals remained stubbornly unseen. But the ease with which many species could be detected, despite being almost impossible to find using binoculars or the unaided eye, suggests that this technology could be highly beneficial to birders in the Neotropics.

Indeed, in many cases, it may be a worthwhile trade-off to exchange the 'authenticity' of reflected light hitting the retina directly to be able to have prolonged views of undisturbed birds and other animals behaving naturally. Certainly the capacity to do so opens up a wide range of exciting possibilities for behavioural and conservation studies, and for filling in some gaps in basic natural history for elusive Neotropical species.

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The thermal camera was very useful for finding nocturnal species at Cristalino, including **8** Ladder-tailed Nightjar *Hydropsalis climacocerca* (Jarilson Garcia Vilar), **9** (Austral) Tawny-bellied Screech-owl *Megascops watsonii usta* (Oliver Metcalf) and **10** Zigzag Heron *Zebrilus undulatus* (Oliver Metcalf).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Fieldwork was supported by the NERC Rainfauna project NE/X015262/1. We would like to thank Cristalino Jungle Lodge for allowing us to stay at a discounted rate, and for their exemplary hospitality and local knowledge of flora and fauna.

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Mailing of bulletins outside UK

Due to issues with delivery and increased postage charges, mailings outside of the UK will only be made when we have sufficient packages to make it worthwhile sending out a bulk delivery. So, to ensure prompt delivery renewing membership before the end of February each year is advisable.

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 is a 'splitfest', with many splits in two species of schiffornis and in Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, the prospect of a number of splits in Royal Flycatcher, and even a split in Masked Flowerpiercer.

1 A proposed six-way split has been proposed in the Royal Flycatcher *Onychorhynchus coronatus* complex, including *O. mexicanus*, Laguna Lagarto Lodge, Alajuela, Costa Rica, June 2023 (Carlos Roberto Chavarría: costaricarainforestexperience.com).

Schiffornis splits: second time around

Currently seven species of schiffornis (genus *Schiffornis*!) are recognized. Two of these, Varzea Schiffornis *Schiffornis major* of Amazonia and Greenish Schiffornis *S. virescens* of the Atlantic Forest, rarely attract much attention. Until recently, however, the other five all were included within a single species, as Thrush-like Schiffornis *S. turdina*, with a distribution from southern Mexico south to southern Brazil. 'Thrush-like' did not refer to the song, which is a series of short whistled notes: pleasant enough, but not comparable to the vocal artistry we expect from thrushes. Instead, the name seems to have referred to the uniformly brown plumage of these birds, vaguely resembling that of some of the duller Neotropical thrushes, such as Cocoa Thrush *Turdus fumigatus* or Hauxwell's Thrush *T. hauxwelli*.

Geographic variation in the songs of these birds was well known, but the complex was not investigated in any depth until Nyári (2007) mounted a broad-scale genetic and vocal survey of the group; coupled with an independent, and more in-depth, review of songs by Donegan *et al.* (2011), the result was the current split into five look-much-alike species. This was seen as a marked improvement over the traditional arrangement, but left as many questions as it answered: geographic sampling by Nyári was relatively coarse, for example, in many cases leaving it unclear where the distribution of one species ended and another began.

2–3 Lima *et al*. (2023) propose splitting Northern Schiffornis *Schiffornis veraepacis* into two species: **2** 'true' Northern Schiffornis *S. veraepacis* (Cerro Gaital, Coclé, Panama, April 2019; Josanel Abir Sugasti Sánchez) in Middle and Central America; and **3** *S. rosenbergi*, which might logically become known as 'Choco Schiffornis' (Buenaventura Reserve, El Oro, Ecuador, September 2021; Alex Luna: ebird.org/profile/NDI3MTkz/EC), of western South America.


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4–9 Lima *et al*. (2023) also propose a wide-ranging split of Brown-winged Schiffornis *Schiffornis turdina*. The northernmost subspecies, *amazonum*, would become three species, including **4** the previously undescribed *S. cracrafti* (Rio Cristalino, Mato Grosso, Brazil, September 2017; Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding: antpitta.com) and **5** *S. amazonum* (Sabanitas, Inirida, Guainía, Colombia, February 2021; Luis Carlos García Mejía). Also carved off from Brown-winged Schiffornis and recognized as a species is **6** *S. steinbachi* (mid-elevations of Pantiacolla Ridge, Madre de Dios, Peru, August 2017; Graham Montgomery: grahammontgomery.us). This means that there are now two species occurring in the Andean foothills that occur above adjacent lowland *Schiffornis* spp., the other foothill-dweller being **7** Foothill Schiffornis *S. aenea* (WildSumaco Lodge, Napo, Ecuador, January 2022; Shailesh Pinto: flickr.com/photos/27280035@N05/albums), which remains unscathed from the 'splitfest'. Lima *et al.* also recognize: **8** populations in eastern Amazonia as a new species, *S. wallacii* (Fazenda Mangue Seco, Vigia, Pará, Brazil, August 2014; Alexander Lees/Manchester Metropolitan University); and **9** populations in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest as 'true' *S. turdina* (Reserva Natural da Vale do Rio Doce, Linhares, Espírito Santo, Brazil, November 2018; Gabriel Bonfa: @gsbonfa).

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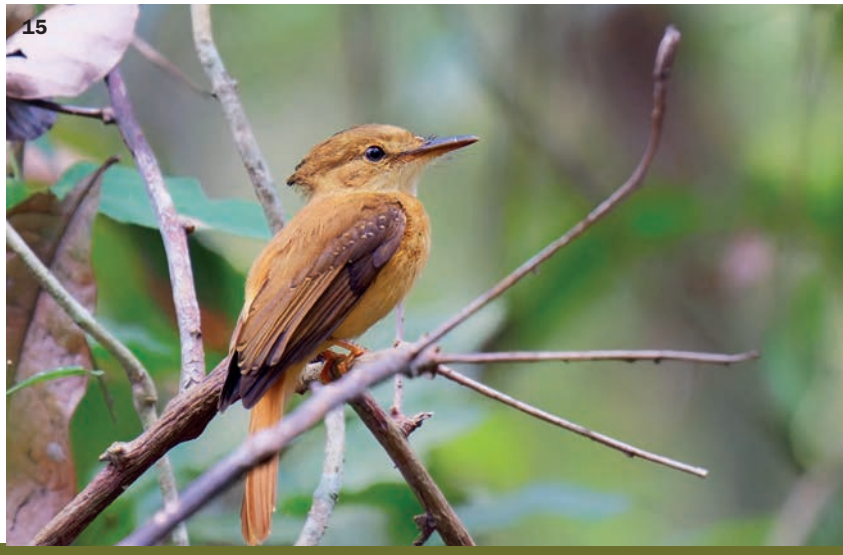

10–16 As explained overleaf (pp 54–55), Reyes *et al.* (2023) suggest that each of the six taxa in the Royal Flycatcher *Onychorhynchus coronatus* complex should be treated as a full species. **10** 'Atlantic Royal Flycatcher' *O. swainsoni* (Pindamonhangaba, Parque Natural Municipal do Trabiju, São Paulo, Brazil, October 2021; Alex Mesquita: ebird.org/profile/ODI2MzEx/BR) is deeply genetically divergent, geographically disjunct and vocally distinct. What del Hoyo & Collar (2016) treat as 'Amazonian Royal Flycatcher' *O. coronatus* may comprise two species that are almost identical in plumage but are very different genetically: **11** *O. castelnaui* of western Amazonia (left bank of Rio Madeira, Porto Velho, Rondônia, Brazil, November 2013; Bruno Rennó: wikiaves.com.br/perfil_brunoornitologia); and **12** *O. coronatus* of eastern Amazonia (Projeto 118, Canaã dos Carajás, Pará, Brazil, August 2017; Luiz Fernando Matos). **13–14** What del Hoyo & Collar (2016) treat as 'Northern Royal Flycatcher' *O. mexicanus* may merit splitting into *O. mexicanus* and *O. fraterculus*: **13** *O. mexicanus*, Laguna Lagarto Lodge, Alajuela, Costa Rica, June 2023 (Carlos Roberto Chavarría/ costaricarainforestexperience.com); **14** *O. fraterculus*, Reserva Gairama, Magdalena, Colombia, November 2017 (Jorge Muñoz-García: @caquetabirding). Finally, Reyes *et al.* consider **15** 'Pacific Royal Flycatcher' *O. occidentalis* (Sendero Aulladores, Manglares Churute, Guayas, Ecuador, January 2023: Holger Teichmann) also worthy of species status.

We now have a much more comprehensive review of vocalizations, plumage and genetic relationships, thanks to Lima *et al*. (2024). The simple takeaway is that they propose to more than double the number of species to be carved out of the former 'Thrush-like Schiffornis': per Lima *et al*., the group represents not one species, nor five, but rather no fewer than eleven (!) species. They reach this total this in part by classifying as species some populations that already were known to be candidates for just such a split; but also by recognizing some species that had 'flown under the radar' until now.

To begin sorting all this out, there are three species that remain unchanged, even in the new splitfest; these are Olivaceous Schiffornis *S. olivacea* of the Guianan region, Foothill Schiffornis *S. aenea* of the Andean foothills in eastern Ecuador and northern Peru, and Russet-winged Schiffornis *S. stenorhyncha* of eastern Panama into northern Colombia and Venezuela. All of the proposed splits, then, relate to Northern Schiffornis *S. veraepacis* and Brown-winged Schiffornis *S. turdina*.

Northern Schiffornis would be split into two. These are 'true' *S. veraepacis* (Mexico to eastern Panama) and *S. rosenbergi* ('Choco Schiffornis'?), of western Colombia south to extreme northwestern Peru.

The northernmost subspecies, *amazonum*, of Brown-winged Schiffornis is itself split into no fewer than three species. The name *amazonum* would be restricted to populations north of the Amazon River and west of the Negro River, with a 'tail' occurring south of the Amazon in northern Peru, west of the Huallaga River. The population south of the Amazon, from eastern Peru (east of the Huallaga River) and northern Bolivia east to the west bank of the Madeira River, would be known as *S. intercedens*. The name *intercedens* previously was considered to be a junior synonym of *amazonum* (that is, a more recently proposed name for this population). So, this is not a completely new name, but recognition of *intercedens* as a species still is something that will take many people by surprise: *intercedens* is very similar to *amazonum* in plumage, and similar (although slightly different) in song, but genetically it is more closely related to populations of the Andean foothills of southern Peru and Bolivia than it is to *S. amazonum*. The final split from *amazonum* is for the populations that occur south of the Amazon, between the Madeira and the east bank of the Tapajós River. This split represents a previously undescribed population, which Lima *et al*. designate *S. cracrafti*. The name '*cracrafti*' honours Joel Cracraft, a prolific American ornithologist who perhaps is best known in Neotropical circles for a seminal paper that rigorously defined areas of endemism for South American birds (Cracraft 1985).

But we're just getting started with the Brown-winged Schiffornis splits. Also carved off and recognized as a species is a population in the foothills of the Andes from central Peru south to northern Bolivia, *S. steinbachi*; so, *S. steinbachii* occurs in close proximity to the westernmost populations of *S. intercedens*, but at higher elevations. As a side note, this means that there are two species—*S. aenea* and *S. steinbachi*—that occur in the foothills of the Andes, near to, but at higher elevations than, adjacent lowland populations. But these two geographically replacing foothill species are not particularly closely related: *S. aenea* is more closely related to populations that occur west of the Andes (such as Northern Schiffornis and 'Choco Schiffornis'), whereas *S. steinbachi* is more closely related to its lowland neighbour, *S. intercedens* (Nyári 2007, Lima *et al*. 2024).

We have two more splits to go, both still from Brown-winged Schiffornis. Lima *et al*. propose to recognize populations in eastern Amazonia, east of the Tapajós River, as yet another species, *S. wallacii*. It turns out that this species may be in direct contact with *S. cracrafti* on the east bank of the Tapajós. These two are essentially indistinguishable by plumage, but the songs do differ; the two also appear to be genetically different, but that distinction will be of little use to the twitcher. Finally, Lima *et al*. recognize 'true' *S. turdina* of the Atlantic Forest region of eastern Brazil as a separate species.

As usual, it remains to be seen whether these proposed splits gain wide acceptance; but it is very likely that at least some of these splits will take hold. Heard far more often than seen, and not offering much to look at, these shy understory birds represent a classic example, two times over now, of my standard mantra: twitch everything, even the most common or widespread species, everywhere one goes, as one never knows what might be split down the line. And a corollary, I suppose, would be to never assume that one round of splits will be the final word.

Revising the Royal Flycatcher

How many royal flycatchers are there? Most authorities recognize a total of six, but these are arranged in anything from one species (with six subspecies), 'the' Royal Flycatcher *Onychorhynchus*

coronatus, to four species (del Hoyo & Collar 2016): 'Northern Royal Flycatcher' *O. mexicanus* (with *fraterculus* as a subspecies); 'Pacific Royal Flycatcher' *O. occidentalis*; 'Amazonian Royal Flycatcher' *O. coronatus* (with *castelnaui* as a subspecies); and 'Atlantic Royal Flycatcher' *O. swainsoni*. The four-way split is based largely on size and colour, and makes considerable intuitive appeal: the large, buff-coloured, plain-breasted 'Pacific Royal Flycatcher', for example, indeed is notably different from the smaller, browner, bar-breasted Amazonian populations.

But a recent genetic survey across all six members of the group (Reyes *et al*. 2023) suggests that the correct number of species might be, well, six: every member of the group could merit recognition as a species. This conclusion is based on two lines of evidence, the depth of genetic divergence between populations and the pattern of relationships. The most genetically divergent population is *swainsoni* of the Atlantic Forest, which also is highly disjunct from all other royal flycatchers, and is the most vocally distinct: splitting *swainsoni* seems straightforward enough.

After that, things get more interesting. The two Amazonian members of the group, *castelnaui* of western Amazonia (east to the Negro and Madeira rivers) and *coronatus* of eastern Amazonia, also are fairly deeply diverged from each other; but more importantly, *castelnaui* is more closely related to the three 'trans-Andean' populations (*mexicanus*, *fraterculus* and *occidentalis*)—that is, the three populations found 'across' or on the western or northern side of the Andes—than *castelnaui* is to the geographically adjacent *coronatus* of eastern Amazonia (east of the Negro and Madeira rivers).

Now, there are two limitations to the project by Reyes *et al*. The first is that—unlike the papers on schiffornis discussed above—it does not take vocalizations into consideration. The second is that the genetic data comes entirely from mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA). Mitochondrial DNA is widely used in genetic surveys, and can be very informative, but it represents only a small portion of the genome, and because mtDNA is inherited matrilineally, it can present an incomplete view of genetic relationships between closely related populations; there are instances, for example, in which nuclear DNA reveals that two or more populations are freely interbreeding despite showing a rather deep divergence based on mtDNA.

The research by Reyes *et al*. should be more than enough, however, to keep royal flycatchers on the mind for all birders visiting the Neotropics. For one thing, this is yet another instance of a species in which there seems to be more going on than meets the eye: genetic data reveal a more complicated pattern of relationships than one would infer just by an assessment of size and colour patterns. And if these results are corroborated (perhaps, as suggested, by nuclear DNA), then they will make a hash of the proposed four-way split. For example, regarding the trans-Andean trio, one could lump all three into a single species (based on the much more shallow genetic divergence between the three); or recognize two species, *mexicanus* and *occidentalis* (with *fraterculus* as a subspecies); or split all three (as is recommended by Reyes *et al*.). And recognizing a single species in Amazonia becomes problematic if the two Amazonian populations are not sister taxa (that is, if they are not more closely related to each other than either is to anything else). As usual, it may be best to just twitch them all, and wait for this to be sorted out.

Slicing up the Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush

Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush *Catharus fuscater* occurs in humid montane forests from Costa Rica south to central Bolivia. Several subspecies are recognized across its wide range, but, at least at first blush, all Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrushes look and sound pretty similar to one another; and only a single species has been recognized in recent years. Therefore, this is not a species that would seem to be a good candidate for rampant splits; but it is a widespread species, and time and again we see that careful attention to geographic variation in widespread species may reveal overlooked patterns of divergence. Such seems to be the case with this nightingale-thrush, as documented by Halley *et al.* (2023).

These authors took the same kind of comprehensive approach as was taken by Lima *et al*. with respect to the schiffornis discussed above: Halley *et al*. surveyed genetic divergence (with both mitochondrial and nuclear genes), as well as differences in song and plumage. The upshot is that they propose to recognize no fewer than seven species in this group. They do not, however, simply elevate a suite of currently recognized subspecies to the rank of species. Instead, they elevate six subspecies to species (including a subspecies name, *berlepschi*, that had not been in recent use but which they resurrected, in much the same way as was described above regarding *Schiffornis intercedens*); and they describe a new species, as well as two new subspecies.

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16–21 Paying careful attention to geographic variation in widespread species may reveal overlooked patterns of divergence. Such seems to be the case with Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush *Catharus fuscater*, as documented by Halley *et al*. (2023), who elevate six subspecies to species, and describe both a new species and two new subspecies. These include: **16** 'Cordilleran Nightingale-Thrush' *C. fuscater*, Cuchilla de San Lorenzo, Magdalena, Colombia, March 2018 (Lisa and Li Li); **17** 'Trans-Andean Nightingale-Thrush' *C. berlepschi*, Santa Rosa Bird Lodge, Pichincha, Ecuador, January 2022 (Shailesh Pinto: flickr.com/photos/27280035@N05/albums); **18** 'Antioquia Nightingale-Thrush' *C. opertaneus*, Guango Lodge, Napo, Ecuador, December 2023 (Dean LaTray); **19** 'Pirre Nightingale-Thrush' *C. mirabilis*, Cerro Pirre (central ridge), Parque Nacional Darién, Darién, Panama, January 2015 (Jurgen Beckers: la-isla-escondida.com); **20** 'Talamanca Nightingale-Thrush' *C. hellmayri*, Monserrat de Coronado, San José, Costa Rica, December 2018 (Lisa and Li Li); and the new species **21** Darién Nightingale-Thrush' *C. arcanus*, Chucanti (upper slope), Darién, Panama, January 2019 (Jan Cubilla: @janaxelcubilla).

The details of the splits are as follows: Halley *et al*. propose to recognize 'Talamanca Nightingale-Thrush' *C. hellmayri*, of the highlands of Costa Rica and western Panama; 'Darién Nightingale-Thrush' *C. arcanus*, which Halley *et al*. describe as a new species from eastern Panama, in the Serranía de Majé, and the Serranía del Darién from Cerro Azul east to Cerro Tacarcuna; 'Pirre Nightingale-Thrush' *C. mirabilis*, which as the name suggests is restricted to Cerro Pirre in Darién, eastern Panama; 'Cordilleran Nightingale-Thrush' *C. fuscater*, of the Andes of Venezuela and of northern and eastern Colombia, including the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta; 'Trans-Andean Nightingale-Thrush' *C. berlepschi*, which occurs on the west slope of the Andes of Ecuador and northwestern Peru (south to La Libertad), and on the east slope of the Andes of northern Peru, from Amazonas south of the Marañón River to western Cusco (east side of the Apurímac Valley); 'Antioquia Nightingale-Thrush' *C. opertaneus* of the western and central Andes of Colombia, eastern Ecuador, and adjacent northernmost Peru; and, finally, 'Cochabamba Nightingale-Thrush' *C. mentalis* of southeastern Peru (eastern Cusco and Puno) and Bolivia (south to Santa Cruz). These English names, by the way, were suggested by Halley *et al*.; most seem fine, although 'Trans-Andean' may need some work.

Make no mistake, all of these thrushes look pretty much alike (again, as with the schiffornis); what differences they do show are subtle, and often not completely diagnostic. 'Talamanca Nightingale-Thrush', for example, has darker underparts than most other members of the group; but its duskier underparts are matched, or perhaps even exceeded, by *sanctaemartae*, the subspecies in the Santa Martas of Colombia; Halley *et al*. include *sanctaemartae* in the same species as nominate *fuscater*, which has 'normal' coloured underparts. So, underparts colour differs, but is not in itself a reliable guide to species status. Indeed, Halley *et al*. comment that "the taxa in this complex exhibit an unprecedented and confusing degree of sexual and geographic variation" in plumage. Similarly, the songs are similar across the entire range of the complex. Using some rather convoluted analyses, Halley *et al*. find vocal differences between most or all taxa; these are not always discrete differences, however, but sometimes reflect the relative frequencies of a given feature in the song of one population compared to another.

The upshot is that these proposed splits largely come down to the patterns of genetic divergence. And those patterns are striking, with some deep genetic divergences between geographically adjacent populations. One such example is in eastern Panama, where 'Pirre Nightingale-Thrush' *C. mirabilis* is restricted to a single mountain (Cerro Pirre) in eastern Darién, Panama, but another species, 'Darién Nightingale-Thrush' *C. arcanus*, occurs in adjacent highland areas in Darién, in the Serranía de Majé, and from Cerro Azul east to Cerro Tacarcuna; a scant 50 km separate 'Pirre Nightingale-Thrush' on Pirre from 'Darién Nightingale-Thrush' on Tacarcuna. There also are some interesting distributional patterns regarding 'Trans-Andean Nightingale-Thrush' and 'Antioquia Nightingale-Thrush'. The name 'Trans-Andean' refers to the fact that this species occurs on both the western and eastern slopes of the Andes—at least, as this species currently is composed, as Halley *et al.* suggest that further research may yield yet another split here, across the Andes. Otherwise, what is of interest here is that some populations of 'Trans-Andean Nightingale-Thrush' in northern Peru are very close to the southernmost populations of 'Antioqiua Nightingale-Thrush' in southeastern Ecuador and immediately adjacent Peru, with no obvious biogeographic barrier between them.

Unmasking the Masked Flowerpiercer

Masked Flowerpiercer *Diglossa cyanea* is a frequent member of mixed-species flocks in humid forest from northern Venezuela and Colombia south to northwestern Bolivia. It is an easy bird to deprecate: as one scans a flock of tanagers, in the hope of finding something scarce, something colourful, or something scarce *and* colourful, time after time up pops 'only' a Masked Flowerpiercer. This is, in other words, another common, widespread bird that is readily taken for granted. And as was the case with Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, I don't think anyone had Masked Flowerpiercer in mind as the next obvious opportunity for a split.

But we know by now that widespread species are just the place to look for potential splits, regardless of whether there is 'obvious' geographic variation or not. While plumage differences across the vast range of Masked Flowerpiercer are minimal, careful review by Martínez-Gómez *et al*. (2024) of variation in other traits yielded a bonanza. To begin with, there is a very deep genetic divergence in this species across the 'North Peruvian Low', the deep, arid valley of the Marañón River in northern Peru. Even more astounding,

22–23 Martínez-Gómez *et al.* (2024) propose splitting Masked Flowerpiercer *Diglossa cyanea* into two groups: in the north, **22** 'Warbling Masked Flowerpiercer' *D. cyanea*, Reserva Zuro Loma, Pichincha, Ecuador, June 2022 (Luke Seitz); and, in the south, **23** 'Whistling Masked Flowerpiercer' *D. melanopis*, Wayqecha Cloud Forest Biological Station, Cusco, Peru, August 2022 (Holger Teichmann).

the genetic data further suggest that the northern group of Masked Flowerpiercer is more closely related to Bluish Flowerpiercer *Diglossa caerulescens* than it is to the southern group of Masked Flowerpiercer. Taken at face value, this is a pattern of relationships that mandates a split; but the genetic evidence is based entirely on mtDNA, and in this case the authors themselves caution that this unexpected pattern of relationships should be confirmed with nuclear DNA—just in case.

Not to despair, however, as Martínez-Gómez *et al.* also investigated the structure of the song across the entire range of Masked Flowerpiercer. I have long thought that the song of this species is rather insipid; whether that characterization is true or not, there is a clear difference in songs between the two genetic groups, with the song of the southern group ending with a few whistled notes that are completely lacking in the song of the northern group. Martínez-Gómez *et al.* propose a split: the northern group retains the scientific name *Diglossa cyanea*, and the authors suggest the English name 'Warbling Masked Flowerpiercer' for these birds, whereas the southern group would become *Diglossa melanopis*, with a suggested English name of 'Whistling Masked Flowerpiercer'. Often I hedge my bets as to whether any proposed split will be accepted, but the combination of a deep genetic divergence and vocal differences suggest that this is a case where a split is almost inevitable: an armchair tick for many, no doubt.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the following, whose images illustrate this article: Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding (antpitta.com); Jurgen Beckers (la-isla-escondida.com); Gabriel Bonfa (@gsbonfa); Carlos Roberto Chavarría (costaricarainforestexperience.com); Jan Cubilla (@janaxelcubilla); Luis Carlos García Mejía; Dean LaTray; Alexander Lees/Manchester Metropolitan University; Lisa and Li Li; Alex Luna (ebird.org/profile/NDI3MTkz/EC); Luiz Fernando Matos; Alex Mesquita (ebird.org/profile/ODI2MzEx/BR); Graham Montgomery (grahammontgomery.us); Jorge Muñoz-García (@caquetabirding); Shailesh Pinto (flickr.com/photos/27280035@N05/albums); Bruno Rennó (wikiaves.com.br/perfil_brunoornitologia); Luke Seitz; Josanel Abir Sugasti Sánchez; and Holger Teichmann. And thanks to Brooke Keeney for sourcing and organizing the photographic submissions.

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Birdman from the Pampas

Conor Mark Jameson

In a fascinating new book, William Henry Hudson's biographer explores the Argentine naturalist's contribution to ornithology and conservation. This article should whet your tastebuds...

1 Hudson's Canastero *Asthenes hudsoni*, La Covina, General Lavalle, Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 2022 (Nick Brooks). This Near Threatened species is one of two, both described by Philip L. Sclater in the 1870s, that bear Hudson's name. (The other is Hudson's Black-Tyrant *Knipolegus hudsoni*.)

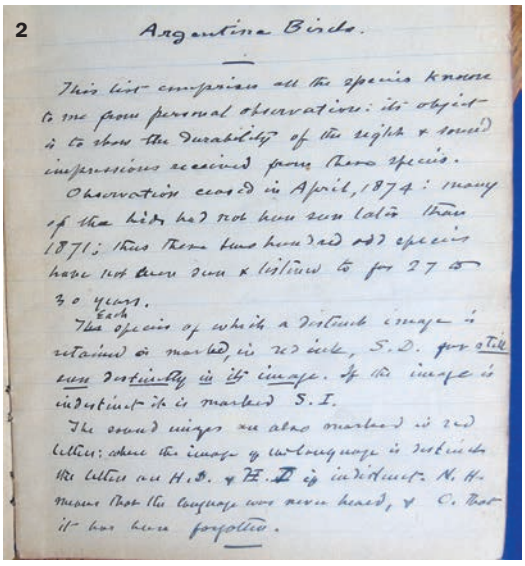
"W. H. Hudson did an eccentric thing for an English naturalist," as his close friend the poet Edward Thomas neatly put it. "He was born in South America." In fact, William Henry Hudson spent his first 33 years there, immersed in Argentina's nature, Spanish language and culture. He was born in 1841, fourth child (of six) of New England (USA) settlers of English and Irish origin, never attended a school, and taught himself everything he knew about Argentine nature in general and ornithology in particular.

From early childhood Hudson led a semi-feral existence on the family *estancia* (ranch) and beyond. It was a day or two's ride from Buenos Aires, the then small but rapidly growing Argentine capital. He was bareback riding from age six, the nature-obsessed of the family's gaggle of six kids: think *Little house on the prairie* meets *The Waltons* in a Latin American context.

Although he never had formal schooling, Hudson became a voracious reader in his teens, his imagination fired by romantic poets and Gilbert White of Selborne (UK). When at age 18 he was given Charles Darwin's *On the origin of species by means of natural selection* (hereafter simply *On the origin of species*), his Christian faith was shaken. And while this student of nature could see the rationale in evolutionary theory, he would remain irritated by the "Darwin purists" who talked as though evolutionary theory was the key to the mysteries of the universe. "Darwin wants some thinking," he once said. Darwin would be hearing from him.

For reasons best known to himself, Hudson liked to let his friends and colleagues believe that he had arrived in England in 1869, five years before he actually did. This red herring continued to be shared by writers on Hudson for 30 years after his death, which suggests that the letters he had been sending to Dr Philip Sclater, Secretary of the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), in the years leading up to his emigration from Argentina in 1874 were not known about. In researching a biography about Hudson (Jameson 2023; reviewed on p79), I initially assumed these letters must have been long lost, and not kept by ZSL.

Then I discovered that someone had been well ahead of me, not in the UK (where ZSL and I are based), but in the USA. The bundle of letters to Dr Sclater had been sought out (they are indeed held by ZSL) and transcribed by a Scottish journalist called David R. Dewar and published by Cornell University Press nearly 70 years earlier (Dewar 1951). "They were the first published work of a great writer," says Dewar in his notes, "and they give us a little more insight into the obscure life


2

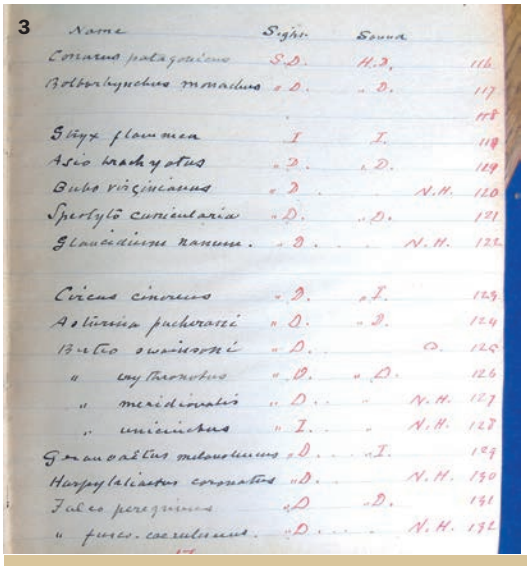
Argentina Birds.

This list comprises all the species known to me from personal observation: its object is to show the durability of the sight & sound impressions received from these species.

Observation ceased in April, 1874: many of the birds had not been seen later than 1871; thus three hundred and odd species have not been seen & listened to for 27 or 30 years.

The species of which a distinct image is retained is marked in red ink, S.D. for each can distinctly in its image. If the image is indistinct it is marked S.I.

The sound images are also marked in red letters: where the image of the language is distinct the letters are H.D. & H.I. if indistinct. N.H. means that the language was never heard, & C. that it has been forgotten.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Name	Sight	Sound	
Conurus patagonicus	S.D.	H.D.	116
Bolborhynchus monachus	" D.	" D.	117
			118
Strix flammea	I	I.	119
Asio brachyotus	" D.	" D.	120
Bubo virginianus	" D.	N.H.	121
Speotyto cunicularia	" D.	" D.	122
Glaucidium nanum	" D.	N.H.	123
Circus cinereus	" D.	" I.	124
Asturina pucherani	" D.	" D.	125
Buteo swainsoni	" D.	O.	126
" ventralis	" D.	" D.	127
" meridionalis	" D.	N.H.	128
" unicinctus	" I.	N.H.	129
Geranoaetus melanoleucus	" D.	" I.	130
Harpyhaliaetus coronatus	" D.	N.H.	131
Falco peregrinus	" D.	" D.	132
" fusco-coeruleus	" D.	N.H.	133

2–3 Extracts from W. H. Hudson's notebook, relating to the birds of Argentina; the notebook is held in the RSPB archives, Sandy, Beds, UK (Conor Jameson).

of one of literature's most enigmatic and fascinating characters".

I was intrigued as to why writers on Hudson (e.g., Frederick 1972, Thomas 1984, Tomalin 1982) had for so many years never thought to enquire of ZSL about any such correspondence, as some of Hudson's letters were published in their journal; sight of them would have set the record straight on his arrival date in Britain, and also opened up sooner the question—the mystery—of why Hudson wanted people to believe he spent those five years, 1869 to 1874, in Britain rather than in Argentina.

4 Male Hudson's Black-Tyrant *Knipolegus hudsoni*, Pedro Luro, Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 2014 (Silvia Vitale). The second species to bear Hudson's name, after description by Philip L. Sclater in the 1870s. Hudson's Black-Tyrant breeds exclusively in Argentina but migrates north during the austral winter.

My mind raced. Did he need an alibi for some reason? Or did traumatic events happen in the period before he left that he needed to erase? Writer and society hostess Violet Hunt mentions that Hudson was apt to conceal his real age, taking "an elfish pleasure in our ignorance of his secret" (Looker 1947). What's curious is that if Hudson liked to let people believe he was younger than he was, adding five years to his time in England hardly helped with that. Getting to know the real Hudson clearly presented some challenges to those who met him in his lifetime, as it does now.

I was able to buy a copy of a small bound volume of seven hitherto unpublished Hudson letters, together with five that were printed in ZSL's *Proceedings*, overlooked by Hudson's biographers for three decades. This neglect also speaks to the fact that these Hudson scribes were less interested in him as a naturalist than in other aspects of his life and personality. This is curious, as Hudson defined himself first and foremost as a field naturalist. "Saving the birds" was his mission; writing was a means to that end.

Dewar's 1951 volume is dedicated "To Lovers of W.H. Hudson everywhere," while recognizing that this constituency may already be diminished in number—citing a recent article in the *New York Times* that reported "the general public has forgotten Hudson, but, with his friend Joseph Conrad, he will come back into favor". Dewar and the *New York Times* were right about Conrad, at least.

Although Hudson would paint a vivid picture of his boyhood in his late-life memoir of childhood, *Far away and long ago*, his activities as a young adult are shrouded in mystery. We know that he spent some time in the Argentine army, at a time of great unrest and conflict over borders. Then, as he approaches 30 years old, a picture emerges of Hudson from his ornithological letters as a wide-ranging and extraordinarily expert observer of birds, their habitats and their behaviour. Coverage of the avifauna of Argentina was decidedly patchy at that time. Hudson was essentially following up on the work of Félix de Azara (1746–1821), a Spanish military engineer and naturalist who explored South America from 1781–1801.

The first letter to Hudson from the ZSL was written in January 1868, after the Smithsonian Institution, to whom Hudson had up until then been sending his bird skins, had shared some of these with Dr Philip Sclater at ZSL. Hudson's reply came 15 months later. Hudson hinted that his association with the Smithsonian may be ending as they seemed unable to cover his expenses.

Hudson remained in Argentina for another four years before he boarded *The Ebro*, a steamship with sails, in April 1874 and left his homeland for ever. He was following a half-formed dream

5 Campo Flicker *Colaptes campestris*, Rincón de Cobo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 2008 (James Lowen: jameslowen.com). Based on his first-hand experience of the 'Pampa Woodpecker' (as he called it), Hudson contested Charles Darwin's assertion that the species never climbed trees.

Common species that frequented Hudson's ranch in the Argentine pampas included **6** Rufous Hornero *Furnarius rufus* (Rincón de Cobo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 2007; James Lowen: jameslowen.com) and **7** Red-crested Cardinal *Paroaria coronata* (Ceibas, Entre Ríos, Argentina, June 2008; James Lowen: jameslowen.com).

of being a naturalist in the land of his ancestors. Hudson was in many ways a man of mystery, particularly during his first 15 years in England. I think he liked it that way. He didn't wish to be reminded later of what would be years of grinding poverty, caged like an imported bird himself in sooty, noisy, squalid London. There are frequent house moves, and a marriage to the much older Emily Wingrave, a retired opera singer who managed boarding houses and taught music.

We can only build a sketchy picture of Mrs Hudson, but we do know that her husband was engaged in the long, laborious and poorly rewarded business of collaborating with Philip Sclater on what would eventually be the two-volume *Argentine ornithology* (1888–89). Hudson's biographer Ruth Tomalin (1954, 1982) wrote of the "antagonism between poet and pedant" that characterized their relationship. But perhaps they were the perfect complement—the lyrical Hudson with first-hand field knowledge of the species, and Sclater the classifier, attentive to plumage detail and other taxonomic matters. "We are both big ugly men," Hudson declared, thinking that the first and last thing they had in common.

Issues with Darwin

The letters reveal that Hudson dared to find fault with Darwin and—worse still—aired his criticisms through this public platform. "The audacity with which the then unknown Hudson assails his famous

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In his book *Idle days in Patagonia*, Hudson is quite open about his days as a bird-specimen collector, and expresses remorse at shooting: **8** a Great (Magellanic) Horned Owl *Bubo (virginianus) magellanicus* (Estancia La Angostura, Santa Cruz, Argentina, November 2008; James Lowen: jameslowen.com); and **9** an Andean Condor *Vultur gryphus* (immature, Ongamira, Córdoba, Argentina, April 2009; James Lowen: jameslowen.com).

HUDSON'S COLLECTED WORKS

1885: *The purple land that England lost: travels and adventures in the Banda Oriental*; 1887: *A crystal age* (published anonymously); 1888: *Argentine ornithology* (co-authored with Philip Sclater); 1892: *Fan – the story of a young girl's life* (as Henry Harford); 1892: *The naturalist in La Plata*; 1893: *Idle days in Patagonia*; 1893: *Birds in a village;* 1895: *British birds*; 1898: *Birds in London*; 1900: *Nature in downland*; 1901: *Birds and man*; 1902: *El ombú* (later *South American sketches*); 1903: *Hampshire days*; 1904: *Green mansions: a romance of the tropical forest*; 1905: *A little boy lost*; 1908: *The Land's End: a naturalist's impressions in west Cornwall*; 1909: *Afoot in England*; 1910: *A shepherd's life: impressions of the South Wiltshire Downs*; 1913: *Adventures among birds*; 1916: *Tales of the Pampas*; 1918: *Far away and long ago: a history of my early life*; 1919: *The book of a naturalist* and *Birds in town and village*; 1920: *Birds of La Plata* (revised from 1887 minus Sclater's part) and *Dead man's plack and an old thorn*; 1921: *A traveller in little things*; 1922: *A hind in Richmond Park*; 1922–23: *The collected works* (in 24 volumes); 1923: *Rare, vanishing and lost British birds* (expanded from Hudson's 1894 pamphlet, *Lost British birds*); 1923: *Ralph Herne* (originally serialized as a short story in 1888); 1930: *South American romances* (bringing together *The purple land*, *Green mansions* and *El ombú*; 1946: *Tales of the gauchos* (an anthology of Hudson stories about gaucho life and the wonders of nature).

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10 Red-legged Seriema *Cariama cristata*, Santa Olga, Formosa, Argentina, July 2008 (James Lowen: jameslowen.com). This impressive species adorned the front cover of Volume 1 of *Argentine ornithology*, which Hudson co-authored with Philip Sclater (Sclater & Hudson 1888).

opponent is astonishing," writes Dewar. While broadly accepting the principle of natural selection, Hudson found errors about South American woodpeckers in Darwin's *On the origin of species*, and he wasn't shy about pointing them out.

Darwin had travelled in South America, first arriving in 1832. In *On the origin of species*, first published in 1859, he had described the behaviour of the 'Campo Woodpecker', a species that Hudson knew well from his days in La Plata and calls 'Pampa Woodpecker'. (It is now known as Campo Flicker *Colaptes campestris*.) Darwin used this as an example of a species adapting to a new environment, one that he said was almost treeless, reporting that now the species never climbed trees. Hudson dared to state in the pages of ZSL's *Proceedings*, in 1870 (*fide* Dewar 1951):

"So great a deviation from the truth in this instance might give opponents of his book a reason for considering other statements in it erroneous or exaggerated… The perusal of the passage I have quoted from, to one acquainted with the bird referred to, and its habitat, might induce him to believe that the author purposely wrested the truths of Nature to prove his theory."

Ouch. Not surprisingly, Hudson's accusation prompted a lengthy response from Darwin, which was also published in the *Proceedings ZSL*, in which he said (Dewar 1951, Tomalin 1982):

"I should be loath to think that there are many naturalists who, without any evidence, would accuse a fellow worker of telling a deliberate falsehood to prove his theory".

In the 1872 sixth edition of *On the origin of species*, Darwin adjusted the wording, recognizing that it was wrong to say this woodpecker species never climbed trees, although it might, in a treeless situation, be able to live without them, and nest in earth banks where suitable. As many readers will know, this species is adept at foraging on the ground.

In any event, this tells us something about Hudson's lack of airs and graces, and his forthrightness of views and approach. He became well-known among friends and associates for his candour. Interestingly, his literary associates seemed keen to seek out his views on their work, presumably in the knowledge that he would give an unvarnished view. In one notable example, one of his many aristocratic admirers, Maggie Ponsonby, had written a play. "I'm afraid to ask her to show it to me," Hudson confessed, "as I'm so brutal in saying just what I think" (Shrubsall 2007). Hudson's public criticism of Darwin may not have helped his aspirations to move in academic and scientific circles, but it does not seem to have done him any harm in the eyes and esteem of Alfred Russel Wallace, who became a later ally.

11 Hudson's Canastero *Asthenes hudsoni*, San Clemente del Tuyú, Buenos Aires, Argentina, September 2008 (James Lowen: jameslowen.com). This Near Threatened furnariid is resident in Uruguay and south-eastern Brazil, but is most common in the pampas of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

HUDSON'S LEGACY IN SOUTH AMERICA

In South America, Hudson is a legend to this day. Alejandro Di Giácomo of the Department of Conservation, and board director, at Aves Argentinas gave me his perspective on the importance of Hudson to ornithology and conservation there, and why he and his books remain in such high regard. Alejandro calls Hudson "our foundational ornithologist: the first Río de la Plata field ornithologist". Alejandro draws attention to Hudson's paper on the birds of Río Negro in Patagonia, which included no less than seven new species for the Argentine avifauna. Even when in England, Alejandro continues, "Hudson kept in touch with his native country, serving as Honorary Member and UK Correspondent for the Asociación Ornitológica del Plata, which today is Aves Argentinas. He always declared himself a 'field naturalist', even in the pages written not long before his death."

Late-life revisions

As late as 1920, as Hudson approached his 80th year, he had the satisfaction of being able to revisit another early project (he repackaged many of his books for the American market that discovered him late) and produce his 1920 *Birds of La Plata*, a reworking of *Argentine ornithology*. Free to revise it how he liked, Hudson now stripped out Sclater's part altogether. With more than a trace of bitterness, he wrote: "The original work was out of date as soon as published, and the only interest it still retains for readers is in the accounts of the birds' habits contributed by me" (Shrubsall 2007).

Hudson may have found this belated parting of ways with Sclater cathartic, but it seems the effect was fleeting. "It was my poverty that made me allow it to be re-published," he confided to his friend and first biographer Morley Roberts in 1920 (Roberts 1924), regarding *Birds of La Plata*. "It wasn't worth it." Re-immersing himself in these memories of exploration as a young man, making fresh discoveries in nature, forced Hudson to retrospectively re-evaluate his path in life, writing in the preface to *Birds of La Plata*: "Now after so long a time the pang returns, and when I think of that land so rich in bird life… the reflection is forced on me that, after all, I probably made choice of the wrong road of the two then open to me."

But Hudson's low moods would often occasion statements like this that sit uncomfortably with the evidence. The other road open to him was a boat back to Buenos Aires. It is fair to conclude that it was an idle thought, a late-life revision of things, as he had never previously indicated any strong desire to give up on his British adventure, despite the occasional pleadings of his siblings, none of whom he ever saw again.

We will never know for certain why Hudson claimed to have been in Britain from 1869, although David Dewar (1951) proposed a theory. "To guess at the motives animating a character so complicated, mysterious, and reserved would be foolhardy," he wrote, "but the hypothesis may be diffidently advanced that Hudson hated to be reminded of the unregenerate days when he had shot birds, not for scientific research, but, as a professional collector, for money."

There is a problem with Dewar's theory, however. Hudson may not have relished reminders, but he didn't deny or hide his previous life—just the dates. In his *Idle days in Patagonia*, for example, Hudson is quite open about his bird-collecting days, including his remorse at shooting a Great Horned (Magellanic) Owl *Bubo (virginianus) magellanicus*, and even taking a pot shot at an Andean Condor *Vultur gryphus* (nowadays categorized as globally Vulnerable), on one occasion. Perhaps most vividly of all, Hudson describes in one of his letters to Sclater how a bird that he had shot, and gathered up, was still alive, and continued to sing as he held it and as the life ebbed from it. As Dewar puts, it: "If it were not for these letters, we would not know of that wounded and forgiving singer and of many other incidents and influences which were molding the soul of 'Mr William Henry Hudson of Conchitas'."

Professional collectors became the people Hudson blamed most for the problems faced by the world's birds, and right to the end, as he amassed money from American publishers to leave to his beloved 'Bird Society' (today known as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds or RSPB, a UK-based conservation organisation), he wanted to make it a condition of his will that they campaign to criminalize those he believed were most responsible for the demise of rare birds.

One way or another Hudson's financial legacy was game-changing for the RSPB and the conservation movement. He lived just long enough to see the UK's Plumage Act become law in April 1922 and, two months later, the first meeting in London of delegates from several countries that launched what we know today as BirdLife International. Hudson's letters reveal an intention to meet T. Gilbert Pearson of Audubon, who was in London to chair the meeting.

In a letter to his old compadre, the radical Robert Cunninghame Graham (who had made lengthy expeditions in Argentina and South America more widely), written less than three weeks before he died in August 1922, Hudson mentions his hopes for the future in Argentina, saying that the new president Marcelo Torquato de Alvear has "ideas of progress" that will suit the country. He signs off with "*carinos recuerdos*" to Cunninghame Graham's mother. Thoughts of his past life were ever with him. Fourteen years later, 'Don Roberto' (as Cunninghame Graham was widely known) made the Atlantic crossing one more time on a pilgrimage to Hudson's natal home, recently rediscovered on the Pampas. He died a few days later. Few people understood the two lives and dual identity of Hudson better than Cunninghame Graham, a man who seemed to know all the great and the good of the era, but who placed Hudson—for all his rough edges—on a pinnacle of his own.

"There was no one I thought more highly of as a man, or respected as a genius," Cunninghame Graham wrote of Hudson. "That he was a genius, I think all his real admirers know. Someday the world will become aware of it."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Zoological Society of London archivist Sarah Broadhurst for sending me scans of all 16 of W. H. Hudson's letters to ZSL. I am also grateful to Hernan Casañas, Alejandro Di Giacómo, Andie Filadoro and all the team at Aves Argentinas; Ruben Ravera and the Friends of Hudson Ecological Park Association; and The Cunningham Grahame Society. Finally, thanks to Nick Brooks, James Lowen (jameslowen.com) and Silvia Vitale for their images.

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Peruvian treasures: endemic Inca-finches

Rob Jansen

Among Peru's numerous avian treasures are five members of an intriguing passerine genus that is wholly endemic to this marvellous South American country: the Inca-finches *Incaspiza*. This Photospot is an ode to this quintet of stunning species.

All photographs are taken in Peru by Rob Jansen Photography (robjansenphotography.com).

1 Great Inca-Finch *Incaspiza pulchra,* Valle de Santa Eulalia, Lima, November 2022. One member of a fascinating genus endemic to Peru.

Peru, a land of majestic landscapes and an immense range of habitats, harbours an avian treasure trove with 1,861 different species, the second highest in the world (Plenge *et al.* 2023). No fewer than 139 of these species are breeding endemics (BirdLife International 2023). Inca-finches of the genus *Incaspiza* stand out as charming ambassadors of this rich endemism, for all five members of this delightful genus (and thus the genus as a whole) are endemic to Peru. Such exclusivity—entire genera comprising multiple bird species endemic to a single country (other than an island)—is a rare phenomenon, adding a unique allure to the country's already diverse avian population. This exceptional endemism showcases Peru's significance as a biodiversity hotspot and underscores the need for targeted conservation efforts.

Long thought to be part of a passerine oscine family such as finches (Fringillidae: Hellmayr 1938, Meyer de Schauensee 1966) or Old World buntings (Emberizidae: Paynter 1970) due to its sparrow-like appearance, the genus *Incaspiza* has been reclassified through phylogenetic analysis of DNA sequence data (García Bravo 2020). The analysis (Burns *et al.* 2014) distinctly places *Incaspiza* within the tanager family (Thraupidae). The genus is monophlytic and is sister to a small clade comprising four species now brigaded in the genus *Rhopospina*, which includes Mourning Sierra Finch *R. fruticeti* (Burns *et al.* 2014).

All five *Incaspiza* inhabit parts of the area in and around the Marañon River valley and replace each other geographically or elevationally (Schulenberg *et al.* 2007). All are sedentary and mostly feed on or near the ground (Billerman *et al.* 2022). Each of the five species is characterized by a pointed yellowish bill, a black face and chin, a grey head and upper breast that contrasts with a rufous or brown mantle, and a tail containing white outer feathers. The species differ essentially in the amount and location of black on the head, and in mantle and wing colour (Schulenberg *et al.* 2007).

Great Inca-Finch *Incaspiza pulchra*
Found on the west slope of the Andes (Ancash, Lima and locally in La Libertad) in west Peru. It inhabits arid slopes and ravines with large cacti and/or terrestrial bromeliads at altitudes of 1,000–2,700 m (mostly above 1,500 m). Great Inca-finch feeds on fruits of *Melocactus* cacti and occurs singly, in pairs or in groups of up to seven individuals in the non-breeding season (Jaramillo & Kirwan 2020).

2 Great Inca-Finch *Incaspiza pulchra*, Valle de Santa Eulalia, Lima, November 2022. Differs from congeners by showing less black above and beside the bill, and having a browner back.

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3–5 Rufous-backed Inca-Finch *Incaspiza personata*, Carretera a Huaylas, Ancash, November 2022. The biggest of the five *Incaspiza*. Aptly named for its totally rufous back without brown tones, it can also be distinguished by having more extensive black on the face.

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6–7 Grey-winged Inca-Finch *Incaspiza ortizi*, El Limón, Cajamarca, December 2022. The least colourful of the genus *Incaspiza*, with a grey-brown, slightly streaked mantle.

8–9 Little Inca-Finch *Incaspiza watkinsi,* Jaén–Bosque de Yanahuanca, Cajamarca, December 2022. As its vernacular name suggests, the smallest member of the genus. The mantle is dull brown with some streaking.

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10–12 Buff-bridled Inca-Finch *Incaspiza laeta*, Jesús district, Cajamarca, December 2022. Easily recognisable by the large pale buff spot in the lower malar area.

Rufous-backed Inca-Finch *Incaspiza personata*
Found in the upper Marañon Valley (south Cajamarca, east La Libertad, northeast Ancash and west Huánuco) in northwest Peru. It inhabits dry mountain slopes with cacti, agave and the huge bromeliad *Puya raimondii* at altitudes of 2,300–4,000 m. Rufous-backed Inca-finch feeds on the ground, singly or in pairs (Jaramillo 2020a).

Grey-winged Inca-Finch *Incaspiza ortizi*
Found very locally on the west bank of the central Marañón Valley and its tributaries (northeast Piura, central Cajamarca and northeast La Libertad) in northwest Peru. It inhabits acacia scrub on arid hillsides with large cacti and terrestrial bromeliads, or open woodland with grass and thorny scrub at 1,800–2,600 m altitude. Forages singly or in pairs for seeds and other plant matter as well as insects on or near the ground near patches of sparse desert vegetation (Jaramillo & Sharpe 2020).

Little Inca-Finch *Incaspiza watkinsi*
Globally Vulnerable. Found exclusively in the arid lowlands of the inter-Andean Marañón Valley in north Peru. Inhabits arid lowland scrub with terrestrial bromeliads from 350–900 m altitude altitude. Little Inca-Finch forages mostly on the ground, but often perches on cacti, shrubs and trees (García Bravo 2020).

Buff-bridled Inca-Finch *Incaspiza laeta*
Found in the middle and upper Marañón Valley (south Cajamarca, southwest Amazonas, east La Libertad and adjacent northeast Ancash) in northwest Peru. It inhabits dry, sparse woodland with thorny undergrowth at 1,000–2,750 m altitude. Buff-bridled Inca-finch forages on seeds and insects on or near the ground, as well as in bushes and trees (Jaramillo 2020b).

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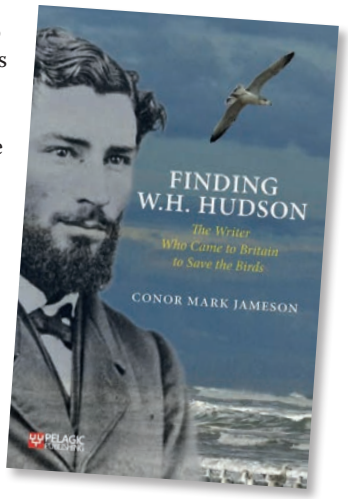
Reviews

Finding W.H. Hudson: the writer who came to Britain to save the birds *by Conor Mark Jameson. 2023. London: Pelagic Publishing. Softback. 347 pp. ISBN 978-1784273286. £17.99.*

For 25 years, Conor Mark Jameson was a conservationist working for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the UK's leading conservation organization. For most of Jameson's employment, he writes, "W. H. Hudson was just 'the man above the fireplace', looking back at the world from a painting: pensive, mute. Then I got to know him better." Jameson's book—the first biography reviewed in *Neotropical Birding* and complemented by an article on p61 of this issue—is the result of his curiosity about the life, works and impact of the Argentina-born naturalist, whose reach spanned two centuries and two continents.

For a man of such obvious import during his lifetime (1841–1922)—a household name, with Hollywood studios bidding for his work, who was deeply influential in establishing the RSPB and in fathoming the ecology of Argentine birds—it is somewhat surprising that Hudson needed rediscovering at all. Indeed, Jameson observes, "the more I found out about Hudson, the more perplexed I became that he had faded into obscurity". The book, Jameson explains, "is an attempt to give Hudson his voice back, to help it be heard; in a sense to revive him and his milieu".

This is not to say that Hudson has been ignored since his passing. Jameson's own reference section lists nearly double figures of biographies, including two this century. And, from my own years living in Argentina, it is clear that ornithologists there continue to venerate Hudson as 'the naturalist in La Plata', who wrote also of *Idle days in Patagonia*. So what makes Jameson's book different—and worth reading?



Above all, it is the intimacy inherent in Jameson's approach that enables his entertaining biography to stand apart. Jameson engages through enthusiastic, even passionate, storytelling premised on a detailed investigation of the many letters that Hudson wrote and on revisiting places special to the man. Through weaving Hudson's words into his own text, Jameson gives us a real sense of the individual behind the name, his mindset and his motivations.

Understandably, given Jameson's own career, this portrait of Hudson focuses very much on the Argentine's life and impact in the UK, particularly his influence on and contribution to the nascent 'Bird Society', as he referred to it. Although I personally (and perhaps *Neotropical Birding* readers more widely) might have wished to learn more about Hudson's earlier existence on the Argentine pampas, Jameson conveys the influence of Hudson's South American upbringing and his love for the birds of the region that is integral to this magazine. In *Finding W.H. Hudson*, Jameson has produced a fascinating portrait of an inspirational figure: a great campaigner and influencer, and an accomplished naturalist. It is a great read.

James Lowen

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Gordon Ellis NBC Council would like to place on record our thanks to Gordon Ellis, who is standing down as our bookkeeper. Gordon was involved with NBC Council from 2008–18, and subsequently maintained connections by keeping a record of NBC finances.

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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. Bird 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). For mammals, please use the taxonomy and nomenclature of the *Illustrated checklist of the mammals of the world* (Lynx Edicions 2020). References should be cited in alphabetical order at the end of the paper in the same style as the current edition of *Neotropical Birding*.

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NEOTROPICAL
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RARE ENDEMICS OF EASTERN BRAZIL CONSERVATION TOUR

This two-week tour to south-eastern Brazil (Espirito Santo and Minas Gerais) will focus on range-restricted species found in the Campo Rupestre, Cerrado and Atlantic forest habitats, including two Critically Endangered species, Cherry-throated Tanager and Brazilian Merganser. We will visit a number of birding hotspots, including Caraça Sanctuary, Serra do Cipó and Serra da Canastra, where we hope to find a plethora of other Brazilian endemics and some charismatic mammals like Maned Wolf.

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