

Splits, lumps and shuffles

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Black Tinamou *Tinamus* (o.) *osgoodi*, San Pedro, Manu Road, Cusco dept., Peru, June 2004 (Dan Lane), one of very few field photos of this taxon.

This series focuses on recent taxonomic proposals—be they entirely new species, splits, lumps or reorganisations—that are likely to be of greatest interest to birders. This latest instalment is replete with novelties, headlined by a new (and likely recently-extinct) treehunter, a new tapaculo (!), two new subspecies of Foothill Eleania and splits galore looking at Sedge Wrens, Blossomcrowns, McConnell's Flycatchers, validation of species status for Socorro Warbler and Scaled Ground-cuckoo and huge revisions of rails, cotingas and vireos. Get your lists out!

Black Tinamou systematics

The Black Tinamou *Tinamus osgoodi* is a rare, very poorly known and disjunctly distributed denizen of Andean forests; two subspecies are recognised subspecies—*T. o. herskovitzi* of south-central and northern Ecuador and *T. o. osgoodi* of south-east Peru. Its taxonomy has been the subject of previous speculation and debate, including even its

generic placement but genetic data routes it firmly in *Tinamus* despite its phenotypic resemblance to the smaller *Crypturellus* tinamous. In an effort to test the magnitude of differences between the two Black Tinamou taxa, Negret and Laverde-R (2015) compiled range and climate data to model the distribution and undertook vocal analyses to test for taxon-specific vocal differences. The authors



Scaled Ground Cuckoo *Neomorphus squamiger*, Cristalino Jungle Lodge, Alta Floresta, Mato Grosso, Brazil, June 2014 (Jorge Lopes / Cristalino Jungle Lodge), from a series of the first high quality images of this species

provide five lines of evidence that they consider warrants treating the two taxa as full species: a 1,100 km gap between the ranges of the two; clear preference for different climatic envelopes; elevational ranges; very different vocalisations; and lastly consistent plumage differences, most notably in *T. o. osgoodi* being darker, with distinct “speckling, vermiculation, or barring”. The authors highlight the relatively poor conservation prospects of both taxa, vulnerable to habitat loss and over-hunting.

Some rail re-mixing required

Garcia-R. *et al.* (2014) produced what is to date the most comprehensive phylogeny of the Rallidae which looked at 70 species in 22 of 33 extant genera. Their new tree has many taxonomic implications, including for some Neotropical species. Chief among these are the not-unexpected finding that Yellow-breasted Crake *Porzana flaviventer*, Dot-winged Crake *P. spiloptera* and Ash-throated Crake *P. albicollis* are not close to true *Porzana*. The first two grouped together with the genus *Laterallus*, for which the type is Rufous-sided Crake *L. melanophaius*. Moving them there seems the obvious option but to maintain *Laterallus* as monophyletic including *spiloptera* and *flaviventer* you also need to include the enigmatic members of *Coturnicops* (in our region the Yellow Rail and Speckled Crake). To keep *Coturnicops*, two new genera need to be

resurrected—*Hapalocrex* for the group containing *flaviventer* and *Creciscus* for the group containing Black Rail *L. jamaicensis*. The situation with Ash-throated Crake is also complicated, and requires either the resurrection of the genus *Mustelirallus* to house this species or throwing it in with the two species of *Neocrex*. Finally Spot-flanked Gallinule *Gallinula melanops* also needs shuffling: true *Gallinula* is sister to the *Fulica* coots, whereas *G. melanops* is sister to true *Porzana* so this species looks set to reoccupy the genus *Porphyriops*.

Validation of species status for Scaled Ground Cuckoo

Natural rarity, sensitivity to disturbance and their elusive nature make the ground-cuckoos of the genus *Neomorphus* one of the greatest prizes in Neotropical ornithology. These features also conspire to make them difficult subjects for taxonomists as there is little material in museum collections. The Scaled Ground Cuckoo *Neomorphus squamiger* is a member of the Rufous-vented Ground Cuckoo superspecies and is endemic to Amazonian Brazil, occurring between the rivers Madeira and Tocantins in the states of Pará and Amazonas. Many taxonomic authorities have considered it to be a subspecies of *N. geoffroyi* and the *N. squamiger* was recently downgraded to subspecies status by BirdLife International in del Hoyo *et al.* (2014) and removed from the global Red List. However, no sooner had the latter

publication gone to press then a new paper by Firme *et al.* (2014) was published, which examined all of the 17 known specimens of *N. squamiger*. They found that *squamiger* exhibited a number of diagnostic characters which were invariable across its restricted geographic range, most notably the unmarked cinnamon-buff ear-coverts and malar regions. Backed by significant genetic differences reported in Payne (2005) which are of the magnitude of many currently-recognised cuckoo species, these findings should promote a rapid re-evaluation of this species' taxonomy and reinstatement on the global Red List. It is in serious trouble because its distribution overlaps one of the world's most aggressive agricultural frontiers in southern Amazonia

The Blossomcrown is two species

The Blossomcrown *Anthocephala floriceps* is a Colombian endemic polytypic hummingbird sitting in a monotypic genus. Two subspecies live in regions separated by more than 900 km: *A. f. floriceps* occurring in the foothills and mid elevations of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in northern Colombia and *A. f. berlepschi* in the Andes in the departments of Tolima and Huila. The latter differs apparently in having largely white tips to its tail (Züchner *et al.* 2015). Lozano-Jaramillo *et al.* (2014) recently used DNA sequence data (mitochondrial and nuclear loci) and niche modelling tools to investigate differences between these two taxa. They found that the distribution of *A. floriceps* has been discontinuous for a long period of time (at least 1.4 million years—so comparable with other species-level hummingbird taxa) and that the two populations exhibit clearly different climatic niches. The authors do not explore phenotypic or vocal differences but argue that given the disjunct nature of the two populations their status as 'evolutionary' species is likely to persist over the long term. They propose the names Sierra Nevada Blossomcrown *A. floriceps* and Andean Blossomcrown *A. berlepschi* for the two taxa.

Cryptic Treehunter—a recently-extinct furnariid from north-east Brazil

The avifauna of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest is famed for both the number of endemics and the number of threatened species. The region is divided into discrete biogeographic provinces

and the most threatened is the 'Pernambuco Centre of Endemism' in the far north-east. This supports several Critically Endangered endemic species and we recently reported on the apparent disappearance of the Alagoas Foliage-gleaner *Philydor novaesi* in Neotropical Birding (Lees *et al.* 2014). This story is now a triple tragedy: as we intimated in the aforementioned article, the late Juan Mazar Barnett had realised that there were two similar looking furnariids haunting the forests of the north-east and there were representative specimens of both in Brazil's Museu Nacional. Juan started, but did not survive to see finished, the paper that described a new treehunter *Cichlocolaptes mazarbarnetti* that now bears his name (Mazar Barnett & Buzetti 2014). The new taxon—Cryptic Treehunter—was described from two specimens taken in 1986 at Murici, Alagoas and differs from *P. novaesi* by its considerably larger size (and huge bill), darker and more uniform forehead and crown (it also has a very flat-headed appearance) and a pale orange-rufous tail that contrasts with the rump and the rest of the dorsal plumage. The authors speculated that the species may have been a specialist on bromeliads and its vocalisations also suggest that it belongs in the genus *Cichlocolaptes*, being quite similar to Pale-browed Treehunter *C. leucophrus*—see recordings on xeno-canto (<http://www.xeno-canto.org/species/Cichlocolaptes-leucophrus>). The authors speculate there may be only ten individuals left, but this is very optimistic, since no treehunters have been seen since 2007 (Pereira *et al.* 2014) and this species was just evaluated as 'Extinct' in the latest addition of the Brazilian Red List (MMA 2014). Several more species are now racing towards global extinction in this region, notably Alagoas Antwren *Myrmotherula snowi*, which seems next in line.

Is Plain Xenops hiding multiple species-level taxa?

Harvey and Brumfield (2014) have just completed an amazingly thorough analysis of the historical demography and phylogeography of the Plain Xenops *Xenops minutus*. Buried amongst these evolutionary insights, they point out some findings that have big implications for *Xenops* taxonomy. They found three deeply divergent clades with little to no gene flow and associated vocal differences: a trans-Andean clade of Central and north-western South America including the subspecies *mexicanus*, *ridgwayi*, and *littoralis* (and which may include the unsampled trans-Andean subspecies *olivaceus* and *neglectus*); an

Amazonian/Guianan clade including *genibarbis*, *obsoletus* and *ruficaudus* (north-western Amazonian *remoratus* was not sampled in this study and Burney 2009 had already indicated it to be very divergent based on mitochondrial data; northern Atlantic Forest populations also fit with this clade); the final clade contains the nominate subspecies of the Atlantic Forest which was the most highly distinct genetically. In contrast to this strong congruence of genetic and vocal data, morphological differences were rather slight with much of the variation apparently clinal. This is with the exception of the distinctive nominate subspecies with its reddish colouration, unmarked underparts and white throat. The authors did not propose any specific splits but reading between the lines these three clades seem like an obvious starting place and few can fail to be impressed with the distinctiveness of the southern Atlantic Forest nominate birds.

More support for a Lesser Woodcreeper split

The Lesser Woodcreeper *Xiphorhynchus fuscus* is an Atlantic Forest endemic occurring from eastern Paraguay and Argentina north to north-eastern Brazil. There are four named subspecies—*atlanticus*, *brevirostris*, *tenuirostris* and the nominate. Cabanne *et al.* (2008) have already shown that the endemic subspecies *atlanticus* of north-eastern Brazil is monophyletic, which has already precipitated species-level treatment by some authorities (e.g. CBRO 2014). In a new study Cabanne *et al.* (2014) investigated body size and plumage colour in Lesser Woodcreeper populations and found that *atlanticus* can be separated by both plumage characters (e.g. plain undertail coverts) and body size (larger in *atlanticus*). The authors reiterate their recommendation to separate *atlanticus* as a species-level endemic of these fast-disappearing forests with the English moniker Northern Lesser Woodcreeper. However this split was rejected by SACC, pending quantitative vocal work, which is apparently ongoing. So despite this initial hiccup it looks as if this proposed split will eventually be accepted.

Species status for ‘Ceara Gnateater’

Batalha-Filho *et al.* (2014) recently investigated phylogenetic relationships amongst the gnateaters (Conopophagidae) in the genera *Conopophaga* and *Pittasoma* using mitochondrial genes and nuclear

introns. The most exciting news for birders from their paper concerns the finding of paraphyly in Rufous Gnateater *C. lineata*. The disjunct subspecies *cearae* was found to be sister to the western Ash-throated Gnateater *C. peruviana*. This form is endemic to the area around the Serra de Baturité in northern Ceará, occurring in humid montane forest in these isolated ‘sky islands’. This same region also hosts an endemic subspecies of Rufous-breasted Leaf-tosser *Sclerurus scansor cearensis* for which species status has been recommended (D’Horta *et al.* 2011) and a population of Short-tailed Antthrush *Chamaeza campanisona* that seems likely to be at the very least an undescribed subspecies. The authors hypothesise that similarities in plumage between the remaining Rufous Gnateaters *C. lineata* and *C. (lineata) cearae* could be the result of retention of ancient plumage polymorphisms or even parallel evolution. Elsewhere the paper also highlights the deep divide within the complex of Chestnut-belted Gnateater *C. aurita* but stops short of recommending splits, calling for a more thorough study to investigate phenotypic and vocal variation within the remaining *Conopophaga* gnateaters.

A new tapaculo from the Brazilian Atlantic Forest

Barely an issue of *Splits, Lumps and Shuffles* goes by without a mention of Brazilian *Scytalopus*; this issue is no exception, but this time we do not refer to the ‘ongoing’ and ‘notorious’ historical taxonomy debate. More excitingly Maurício *et al.* (2014) have recently described a new species of tapaculo, *Scytalopus gonzagai* from Bahia, Brazil. The new species has been found at just five localities in two distinct mountain ranges in Bahia and can be told from all remaining Brazilian tapaculos by a combination of morphometrics, plumage (barring pattern), vocalizations and genetics. Although most of these differences are subtle (in keeping with tapaculo taxonomy generally), differences in vocalisations exceed those between other currently-recognised eastern tapaculo taxa. The species is already rare and the authors make a case for considering it globally Endangered. There is already a debate surrounding their proposed English name of ‘Bahian Mouse-coloured Tapaculo’, with SACC members suggesting various alternatives given the need to add a modifier to the English name of Mouse-coloured Tapaculo *S. speluncae/notorius*.



Top left: Sierra Nevada Blossomcrown *Anthocephala floriceps*, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Magdalena, Colombia, April 2012 (Arthur Grosset / www.arthurgrosset.com).

Bottom: Two type specimens of Alagoas Foliage-gleaner *Philydor novaesi* (left) and two type specimens of Cryptic Treehunter *Cichlocolaptes mazarbarnetti* (right), all collected at the Estação Ecológica de Murici, Alagoas, Brazil between 1983 and 1986 (Guilherme Brito / Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro).

Top right: Northern Lesser Woodcreeper *Xiphorhynchus atlanticus*, Serra do Baturité, Guaramiranga, Ceará, Brazil, January 2012 (Pablo Cerqueira / Pinima Birding Brazil), another addition to the growing catalogue of threatened species in north-east Brazil.



Top left: Ceará Gnatcatcher *Conopophaga cearae*, Pacoti, Ceará, Brazil, December 2008 (Ciro Albano / NE Brazil Birding), a new Brazilian endemic of the Ceará 'sky islands'.

Bottom: Bahia Tapaculo *Scytalopus gonzagai*, Boa Nova, Bahia, Brazil, April 2008 (Ciro Albano / NE Brazil Birding), a species-level addition to the imperilled avifauna of the Atlantic Forest.

Top right: Sierra de Lema Flycatcher *Mionectes roraimae*, Amaila Falls, Guyana, March 2011 (Andrew Whittaker / Birding Brazil Tours). Incredibly, through a combination of audio surveys and mist netting, AW and Jaqueline Fortuna found three *Mionectes* flycatcher in sympatry at this location: Sierra de Lema Flycatcher, McConnell's Flycatcher *M. macconnelli* and Ochre-bellied Flycatcher *M. oleagineus*!

Splitting McConnell's Flycatcher

McConnell's Flycatcher *Mionectes macconnelli* is a largely Amazonian flycatcher for which three subspecies are recognised: the nominate *M. m. macconnelli* of a huge swathe of northern and eastern Amazonia in Venezuela, and lower Amazonian Brazil, SE Peru and NE Bolivia; *M. m. roraimae* of the Pantepui region of Venezuela, Guyana and Brazil; and the poorly-known *M. m. peruanus* of central Peru. Hilty & Ascanio (2014) recently investigated vocal variation, display behaviour, elevational distribution and morphology of McConnell's Flycatchers and came to the conclusion that the two northern populations should be treated as two species-level taxa, the widespread lowland Amazonian *macconnelli* and a highland species *roraimae*. Although phenotypically similar, the two differ significantly in morphometrics (wing and tail length) and have very divergent songs and display behaviour (no lekking yet recorded in the highland *roraimae*). The two are also ecologically separated, with *macconnelli* occurring in humid lowland forest up to c.500 m whereas *roraimae* is typically found well above 500 m. This pattern of altitudinal replacement has been documented before in other suboscines in the region such as the Spot-winged *Percnoscotia leucostigma* and Roraiman Antbirds *P. saturata* (Braun *et al.* 2005). The authors did not investigate other forms of *macconnelli* which may yet harbour more cryptic splits. They note that no English name exists for the highland *roraimae* and the authors suggest Sierra de Lema Flycatcher after the mountain range where they first discovered its unusual song.

Two news subspecies of Foothill Elaenia

The elaenias of the genus *Myiopagis* are fertile ground for cryptic splits and Cuervo *et al.* (2014) have just described two new taxa within this genus. Both are from the northern Andes and form part of the *M. caniceps-olallai* (Grey Elaenia and Foothill Elaenia) group. The first is named *Myiopagis olallai coopmansii* (honouring the late Paul Coopmans) and occurs in the Central Cordillera of Colombia and possibly Serranía de San Lucas and the second *M. o. incognita* occurs on the Sierra de Perijá in Venezuela and they were originally mistaken for female Grey Elaenias *M. c. caniceps*. The authors treat them both for now as minimally distinct subspecies (Remsen 2010)

under the biological species concept (Mayr 1942). The study identified at least four distinct lineages within the *M. caniceps-olallai* group and hint that species diversity could be underestimated.

A phylogeny for the cotingas

Courtesy of Berv & Prum (2014) the cotingas are now blessed with a comprehensive phylogeny sampling 61 species in all 25 genera. The authors confirmed the monophyly of the cotingas, and their work will precipitate a number of significant reshuffles. They found for example, that the swallow-tailed cotingas *Phibalura* are sister to the highland *Ampelion* and *Doliornis*, and found that the spectacular *Tijuca* cotingas are embedded in the most modestly-plumaged *Lipaugus* pihas. They found little molecular support for splitting Bolivian Swallow-tailed Cotinga *Phibalura flavirostris boliviana*, despite the phenotypic and ecological differences shown by Hennessey (2011), or the disjunct populations of White Bellbird *Procnias albus* from Venezuela, the Guianas, and Brazil. They did find more substantial genetic differences (0.53% of 932 base pairs of ND2) between Bearded Bellbirds *P. averano* from Brazil—ssp. *averano* from Brazil and ssp. *carnobarba* from Trinidad. Significant genetic structuring was also found in the polytypic Red-ruffed Fruitcrow *Pyroderus scutatus*, the authors found 0.9% average sequence differentiation between nominate *scutatus* from Paraguay and *masoni* from Peru. Even more surprising was the discovery of deep genetic gulf (1.2% differentiation in mtDNA) between populations of the monotypic Scaled Fruiteater *Ampelioides tshudii* from San Martin, Peru and from Azuay, Ecuador. Finally they highlight strong genetic differentiation (4.6% average sequence divergence) between the subspecies *riefferii* and *melanolaema* of the Green-and-Black Fruiteater *Pipreola riefferii*, and given accompanying phenotypic differences, they recommend species-level treatment for Venezuelan Fruiteater *Pipreola melanolaema*.

Shuffles following a Vireo phylogeny

Slager *et al.* (2014) produced a phylogeny of the Vireonidae, one of the most widespread and well-known New World avian radiations using mitochondrial and nuclear genes and representing 46 of 52 currently recognized vireos. They found the Vireonidae to be monophyletic, a finding consistent with a single colonization of the New World by an Asian ancestor. The genera

Cyclarhis and *Vireolanius* are monophyletic and were the first to diverge from the rest of the family. The genus *Hylophilus* was found to be polyphyletic, with three distinct clades that reflect differences in morphology, habitat, and voice. This finding requires the transferral of five species of *Hylophilus* (*decurtatus*, *hypoxanthus*, *muscapinus*, *aurantiifrons*, and *semibrunneus*) to the resurrected genus *Pachysylvia* (and changes to the ending of four of those specific epithets to agree in gender with *Pachysylvia*). The Golden Vireo *Vireo hypochryseus* also moves to *Pachysylvia* and will require a change to its English name. Secondly, the divergent Tawny-crowned Greenlet *Hylophilus ochraceiceps* needed its own genus, described in a second paper written in parallel by Slager & Klicka (2014) and named *Tunchiornis*. There are several species-level taxa within this new genus, with deep divergence north and south of the Amazon and considerable vocal variation between southern Amazonian interfluvia. Lastly, Tepui Greenlet *Hylophilus sclateri* was not a greenlet at all (it is embedded within the genus *Vireo*) and becomes Tepui Vireo *Vireo sclateri*! *Vireo*, in turn, consists of several well-supported intrageneric clades so we can expect four new genera for the spectacled vireos *Lanivireo* (type *flavifrons*), the eye-ringed vireos *Vireo* (type *griseus*), the eye-lined *gilvus* group *Melodivireo* (type *gilvus*), and the eye-lined *olivaceus* group *Vireosylva* (type *olivaceus*), pending widespread acceptance and copious debates. The paper also identified a potential split involving Slaty-capped Shrike-Vireo *Vireolanius leucotis* with the cis-Andean populations in Ecuador (subspecies *miketiae*) not grouping with birds east of the Andes. The papers provide support for a split of 'Central American Vireo' *Vireo notius* (including the subspecies *montanus*) which is basal in the Solitary Vireo group and needs to be split from Plumbeous Vireo *V. plumbeus*. Likewise the split of Eastern Warbling Vireo *V. gilvus* and Western Warbling Vireo *V. swainsoni* is supported, as is that of the South American Chivi Vireo *V. chivi* from Red-eyed Vireo *V. olivaceus*. Lastly, the authors also found that Mexico and northern Central America populations of Brown-capped Vireos *V. leucophrys* were genetically distinct from the remaining Brown-capped Vireos, which may portend a split; watch this space.

Genetic help backs species status for the Socorro Warbler

Socorro Island is the largest of the four Revillagigedo Islands and lies approximately 700

km west of Manzanillo, Colima, Mexico and hosts several endemic bird taxa. One of these, the Socorro Warbler *Setophaga pitiayumi graysoni*, is currently classified as a subspecies of the Tropical Parula. Given the potential for very restricted gene flow with mainland populations, Evans *et al.* (2014) recently evaluated the phylogenetic position of the Socorro using blood samples from four Socorro Warblers and found significant genetic divergence and a basal position of the Socorro Warbler relative to its mainland counterparts. The Socorro Parulas exhibited a 2.7 % sequence divergence from their mainland counterparts, and this should be interpreted in context of the 0.6 % divergence between Northern Parula and Tropical Parula! This divergence is estimated to have occurred some 1.15 million years ago and pre-dates the separation of both the Socorro Mockingbird *Mimus graysoni* and Socorro Dove *Zenaida graysoni* from their respective mainland sister species. Given this distinct phylogenetic placement and its geographical isolation they recommended returning the Socorro Warbler to its original specific status as *Setophaga graysoni*.

Sedge Wren species limits revisited

Robbins and Nyári (2014) recently examined the phylogeography of the Sedge Wren *Cistothorus platensis*, a polytypic species with a huge range throughout natural grasslands from Canada to Tierra del Fuego, using molecular and vocal data. Their genetic data indicated that Sedge Wren was paraphyletic with respect to Mérida Wren *Cistothorus meridae* and Apolinar's Wren *C. apolinari* necessitating a re-evaluation of current species limits. They propose the recognition of eight species-level taxa namely: Sedge Wren *C. stellaris* of North America (just creeping in to our region in NE Mexico); Mérida Wren *C. meridae* of the Venezuelan Andean páramo; Apolinar's Wren *C. apolinari* of the marshes in the northern Colombian Andes in Boyacá and Cundinamarca (and including *hernandezii*); Grass Wren *C. elegans* found in upland grassland and marshes in the transvolcanic belt in central Mexico south to western Panama (and including the subspecies *tinnulus*, *potosinus*, *jalapensis*, *warneri*, *russelli*, *graberii*, *lucidus*); Austral Wren *C. hornensis* of the Southern Cone in Chile and Argentina south through Tierra del Fuego, and including the Falkland Islands/Malvinas (including the island endemic *falklandicus*); Tucumán Wren *C. tucumanus* of the highlands of Santa Cruz, Bolivia, south to Tucumán and at least



Top: Male Green-and-black Fruiteater *Pipreola riefferii*, Rio Blanco Reserve, Caldas, Colombia, April 2012 (Arthur Grosset / www.arthurgrosset.com).

Bottom left: Female Green-and-black Fruiteater *Pipreola riefferii*, Rio Blanco Reserve, Caldas, Colombia, April 2012 (Arthur Grosset / www.arthurgrosset.com).

Bottom right: Male Green-and-black Fruiteater *Pipreola riefferii melanolaema*, Guaramacal National Park, Trujillo, November 2009 (Jorge L Matheus).



Top left: Austral Wren *Cistothorus hornensis*, Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina (James Lowen / www.jameslowen.com). Elevation of this taxon to species status formed part of an eight-way split.

Top right: Tricoloured Brush Finch *Atlappetes tricolor*, Carmen de Atrato, Chocó, Colombia, December 2012 (Wilmer Quiceno).

Left: Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus perplexus*, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, May 2014 (Francesca Albini).

the mountains in western Córdoba province, Argentina (including '*boliviae*'); Pampas Wren *C. platensis* of central South American lowland grasslands in south-eastern Brazil, southern Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay and dptos Beni and Santa Cruz in Bolivia (and including *polyglottos*); Puna Wren *C. minimus* of puna grasslands from dpto Ayacucho, Peru south to La Paz, Bolivia; Junín Wren *C. graminicola* of the páramo south of the Río Marañón drainage to dpto Junín, Peru; Páramo Wren *C. aequatorialis* of the páramo of Andean Venezuela and northern Colombia south to northern Peru (and including *tamae* and *tolimae*); and finally the endemic Venezuelan Wren *C. alticola* of high elevation grasslands in the Gran Sabana and the coastal mountains of Venezuela from Carabobo east to Sucre/Monagas border. The authors finish by highlighting the

dire conservation status of many of these new microendemics; grasslands are under threat across the Neotropics.

***Atlapetes* taxonomy under the molecular spotlight**

The *Atlapetes* brush finches comprise a speciose genus of New World sparrows that are found in highland forests from Mexico to north-western Argentina. This diversity is greatest in South America where there are high rates of local replacement and little sympatry between parapatric taxa. Sánchez-González *et al.* (2015) recently reconstructed a molecular phylogeny of the core group of Andean *Atlapetes* species and related outgroups. They found that most Andean species are closely related to a geographical neighbour but in many cases these neighbours were phenotypically quite different, with for example yellow-plumaged species sister to grey-plumaged taxa. These colour differences often reflected local ecological conditions, with darker plumage tones in wetter areas and paler tones in dry environments on the Pacific slope. The most significant taxonomic implications included species limit treatment for the taxon *taczanowskii* of the Andes of central Peru, which is isolated by 700 km from nominate Slaty Brush Finches *A. schistaceus*, which are not its closest relative (that falling to the various taxa referred to as Yellow-breasted Brush Finch *A. latinuchus*). This split is backed by vocal differences and the authors propose the name Taczanowski's Brush Finch *A. taczanowskii*. A second key split concerns the subspecies *crassus* of Tricoloured Brush Finch *A. tricolor*, which occurs in the Andes of western Colombia and Ecuador, and recognised as Chocó Brush Finch *A. crassus*.

Confusing siskins

A history of taxonomic confusion surrounds the Black-capped Siskin *Spinus atriceps* and the southernmost form of Pine Siskin *S. pinus perplexus*. Both are endemic to the highlands of southern Mexico and Guatemala and three plumage variants have been variously associated with the two names: 1) birds that are mainly olive, 2) birds that are mainly grey, and 3) birds that are streaked brown and white. Valley *et al.* (2014) recently carried out a review of the taxonomic history of these forms sorting specimens into three morphotypes and found the grey morphotype (which had previously been deemed to have a hybrid origin) to be

unlike the supposed parent forms (and thus not an intermediate character state). The olive birds were found to be morphologically distinctive and are correctly associated with the name *atriceps*. The authors do not put their foot down with firm conclusions, which they believe requires genetic and vocal evidence to ascertain species limits and phylogenetic relationships in the *S. pinus* / *S. atriceps* complex.

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