

Splits, lumps and shuffles

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Based on features including boot colour and tail shape, Booted Racket-tail *Ocreatus underwoodii* may be as many as four species. **1** 'Anna's Racket-tail' *O. (u.) annae*, male, Cock-of-the-rock Lodge, Cuzco, Peru, August 2017 (Bradley Hacker).

This series focuses on recent taxonomic proposals – descriptions of new taxa, splits, lumps or reorganisations – that are likely to be of greatest interest to birders. This latest instalment includes: new species of sabrewing, parrot (maybe), tapaculo, and yellow finch (perhaps); proposed splits in Booted Racket-tail, Russet Antshrike, White-backed Fire-eye (split city!), Collared Crescentchest, Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner, Musician Wren, Spotted Nightingale-Thrush, Yellowish and Short-billed Pipits, Black-and-rufous Warbling Finch, Pectoral and Saffron-billed Sparrows, and Unicolored Blackbird; a reassessment of an earlier proposed split in Black-billed Thrush; the (gasp!) possibility of the lump of South Georgia Pipit; and re-evaluations of two birds each known only from a single specimen.

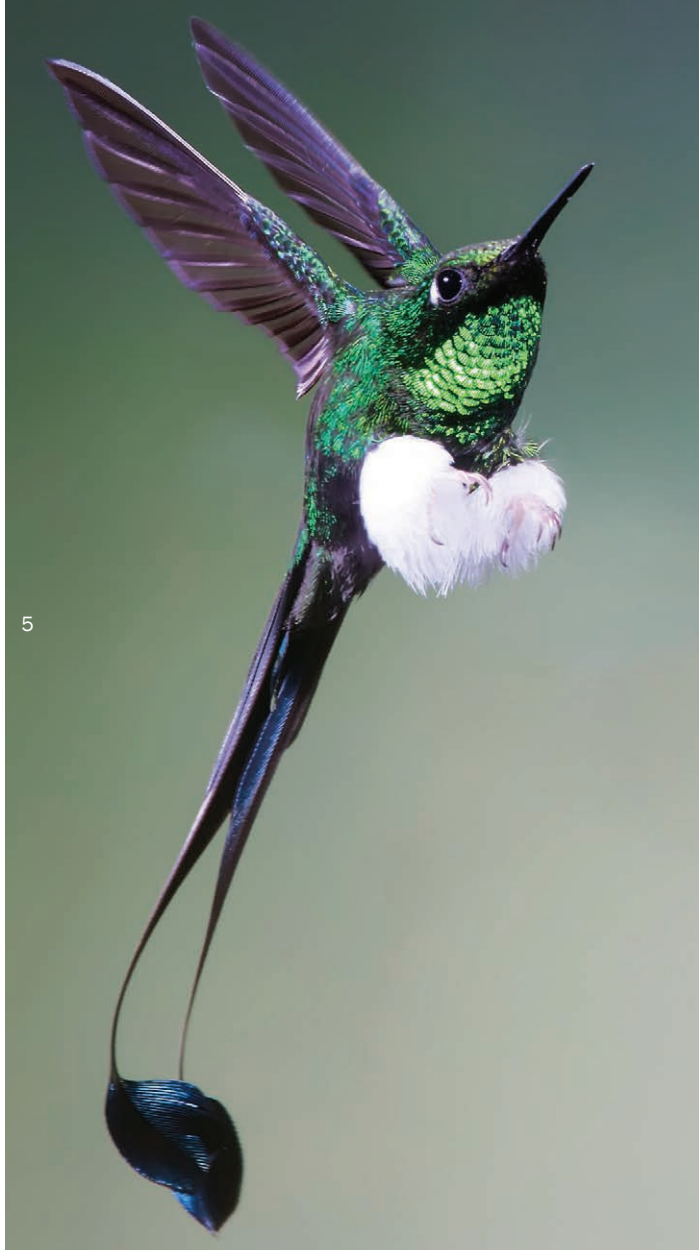
Racking up the racket-tails

Booted Racket-tail *Ocreatus underwoodii* is one of the most widespread, and one of the fanciest, hummingbirds of the Andes. It occurs from

Venezuela to Bolivia; across its range, the puffy 'boots' (leg feathering) may be white or buffy, and the racket-tipped outer tail feathers may be straight, or so curved that the outermost rectrices cross over one another.



2 'Peruvian' Racket-tail *O. (u.) peruanus*, female, Abra Patricia, San Martín, Peru, October 2011 (Nick Athanas/antpitta.com).
3 'Peruvian Racket-tail' *O. (u.) peruanus*, male, Wild Sumaco, Napo, Ecuador, June 2012 (Nick Athanas/antpitta.com).



4 'White-booted Racket-tail' *O. (u.) melanantherus*, female, Tandayapa Bird Lodge, Pichincha, Ecuador, February 2013, (Nick Athanas/antpitta.com). **5** 'White-booted Racket-tail' *O. (u.) melanantherus*, male, Tandayapa Bird Lodge, Pichincha, Ecuador, December 2015 (Thomas Lebeau: flickr.com/thomaslebeau). **6** 'Adda's Racket-tail' *O. (u.) addae*, male, Apa Apa, La Paz, Bolivia, September 2015 (Rich Hoyer/birdernaturalist.blogspot.com).

Some authors have proposed recognising two species of racket-tail, based on boot color (e.g. Ridgely & Greenfield 2001), but Schuchmann and colleagues (2016) propose to recognise no fewer than *four* species: the white-booted northern and western subspecies (Venezuela, Colombia and western Ecuador) as White-booted Racket-tail *O. underwoodii*; the rufous-booted, straight-tailed birds of eastern Ecuador and northern Peru as Peruvian Racket-tail *O. peruanus*; and the rufous-booted, curve-tailed birds as two species, Anna's

Racket-tail *O. annae* of central and southern Peru, and Adda's Racket-tail *O. addae* of Bolivia.

These splits are justified in part on the basis of the parapatric (abutting) ranges of White-booted and Peruvian Racket-tails in eastern Ecuador, as documented by a few older specimens, although the absence of recent records of contact between the white- and buffy-booted racket-tails calls this distributional pattern into question (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). On the other hand, Schuchmann *et al.* also report differences in the courtship

displays of White-booted, Peruvian, and Anna's/ Adda's racket-tails; otherwise, Anna's and Adda's are very similar to one another, distinguishable only by subtle differences in plumage and measurements.

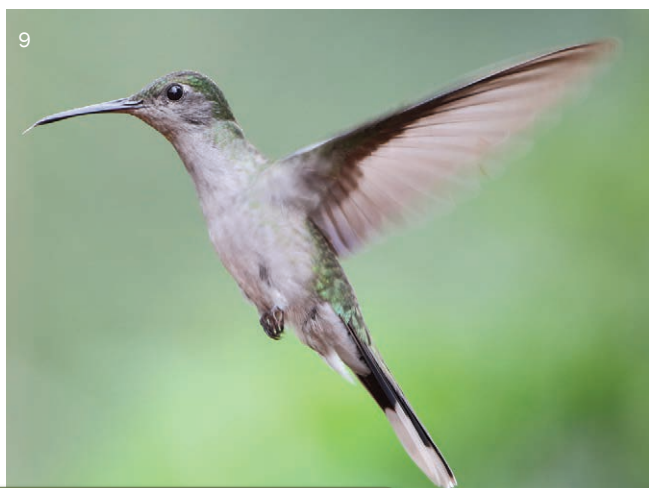
One species? Two? Three, or four? Best to twitch 'em all, and let the experts sort it out.

Hiding in plain sight: a new sabrewing

Grey-breasted Sabrewing *Campylopterus largipennis* is a large but drab hummingbird that is widespread across Amazonia. The sexes are similar, apart from the greatly stiffened and curved outer primaries of the male (the wing 'sabres'), being green above and grey below, with white tips to the outer tail feathers.

Standing out from the crowd is a highly disjunct subspecies, *diamantinensis*, which occupies *campos rupestres* (brushy savannas) in the Serra Espinhaço in Minas Gerais, eastern Brazil – far removed, in other words, from Amazonia, both in distance and in habitat. Potentially confounding this pattern, however, have been a few reports from dry forests in intervening areas in central Brazil; some of these were identified as *diamantinensis*, others as one of the Amazonian populations, but most were not classified to subspecies at all.

Lopes *et al.* (2017) critically examined specimens from across that vast range of Grey-breasted Sabrewing, with a particular focus on those from central and eastern Brazil. They discovered that there is a previously unrecognised population of sabrewings that occupies deciduous dry forests in east-central Brazil, geographically separated from Amazonia but with a distribution that is parapatric to the range of *diamantinensis*. This population is more similar to *diamantinensis* than it is to Amazonian populations, but is smaller, and has slightly more extensive white tips to the tail. In view of the difference in habitat preferences between *diamantinensis* and the dry forest population, and the lack of evidence of hybridisation between them, Lopes and colleagues describe the dry-forest population as a new species, Dry-forest Sabrewing *C. calcirupicola*.



Recent research suggests that Grey-breasted Sabrewing *Campylopterus largipennis* may comprise four separate species, including two taxa endemic to Brazil, one of which constitutes a previously unrecognised population. The latter is **7** 'Dry Forest Sabrewing' *C. (l.) calcirupicola*, Fazenda Corredor, Bocalúva, Minas Gerais, Brazil, July 2006 (Leonardo Esteves Lopes). The other Brazilian endemic has no proposed English name, although 'Cibo Sabrewing' is a possibility: **8** *C. (l.) diamantinensis*, Caraça, Minas Gerais, Brazil, October 2007 (Nick Athanas/antpitta.com). Both taxa are distinct from **9** Grey-breasted Sabrewing *C. largipennis*, Manaus, Amazonas, Brazil, March 2014 (Anselmo d'Afonseca).

Not surprisingly, they also elevate *diamantinensis* to species rank; they don't suggest an English name, but 'Cipo Sabrewing' is one possibility.

Not content with stopping there, Lopes *et al.* further suggest that the Amazonian populations also be split into two species, a more widespread *C. obscurus* (western and southern Amazonia), and *C. largipennis* of northeastern South America (north of the Amazon, east of the Rio Negro). Time will tell on that score. In the meantime, the interior of eastern Brazil seems poised to gain two new endemic species!

A split in Russet Antshrike, yes, but where?

Russet Antshrike *Thamnistes anabatinus* occurs in the midstorey and lower canopy of humid montane forests from southern Mexico south to Bolivia; both sexes are tawny brown, and are superficially similar to some foliage-gleaners *Philydor*. Zimmer & Isler (2003) suggested that there might be two species of Russet Antshrike, one on either side of the Andes, and this split was implemented by del Hoyo & Collar (2016).

Isler & Whitney (2017) take a closer look at vocalisations across the range of Russet Antshrike, however, and reach a slightly different conclusion. The most distinctive population, vocally, is subspecies *rufescens* of Peru and Bolivia, and Isler & Whitney would split this population, without hesitation, as a separate species, Rufescent Antshrike *T. rufescens*. This leaves Russet Antshrike as a species that includes both the populations west of the Andes, and some, but not all, of the populations on the east side of the Andes. There may be another shoe to drop,

10 Russet Antshrike *Thamnistes anabatinus* *aequatorialis*, Wildsumaco lodge, Napo, Ecuador, July 2016 (Roger Ahlman; pbase.com/ahlman). Unlike the confidently split 'Rufescent Antshrike' *Thamnistes (anabatinus) rufescens*, vocal differences between *aequatorialis* and other populations of *T. anabatinus* are not quite enough to justify proposing a split.

however, as Isler & Whitney acknowledge some vocal differences between subspecies *aequatorialis* (eastern Andes from Colombia to northernmost Peru) and other populations. For now, they are reluctant to recommend splitting *aequatorialis*, but... watch this space: if we wait long enough a final split may yet fall into place!

Calling out the fire-eyes

Fire-eyes are large antbirds that take their name from their bright red irides, a feature shared by both sexes. Fire-eyes occur from the Pacific coast of Ecuador and northernmost Peru east to southeast Brazil, but the distribution is patchy. Males are almost entirely black, but all have some white in the plumage (although this may take the form of a concealed interscapular patch). Females on the other hand are much more variable in appearance. Typically three species of fire-eye are recognised, although two of them (White-shouldered *P. leucoptera* and White-fringed *P. atra*) have a narrow zone of hybridisation in eastern Brazil.

Maldonado-Coelho (2010) conducted a genetic analysis of all *Pyriglena*. One result of this survey was to identify four separate genetic lineages (clades) within the most widespread species, White-backed Fire-eye *P. leucoptera*. Furthermore, White-shouldered and White-fringed Fire-eyes were placed, genetically, inside of White-backed; the implication of this is that there could be either one species in the genus, or up to five or six.

Isler & Maldonado-Coelho (2017) extend this analysis, and use vocalisations as an additional data set with which to sort out the fire-eyes. Songs show some variation in pace between different populations, but otherwise one fire-eye song sounds much like any other: variation in songs alone does not seem sufficient to define species. On the other hand, calls turn out to be rather variable across the fire-eyes.

The upshot is that Isler & Maldonado-Coelho not only recommend retaining White-shouldered and White-fringed Fire-eyes as species, but also would partition White-backed into three species: their analysis maps closely onto the genetic clades, but lumps two genetic lineages into a single group defined by calls. The splits in White-backed Fire-eye recommended by Isler & Maldonado-Coelho break down as: Western Fire-eye *P. maura* (western Ecuador, east slope of the Andes from Colombia to Bolivia, and southwestern Brazil); Tapajos Fire-eye *P. similis* (eastern Amazonia, between the Tapajos and Xingu rivers); and East Amazonian Fire-eye *P. leucoptera* (eastern





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If adopted, splits in White-backed Fire-eye *Pyriglena leuconota* would make **11** 'Tapajos Fire-eye' *P. (l.) similis* (Altamira, Pará, Brazil, May 2013; Victor Castro) a different species from **12** 'East Amazonian Fire-eye' *P. (l.) leuconota* (Caxias, Maranhão, Brazil, June 2012; João Quental: flickr.com/jquental).



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Amazonia, and northeastern Brazil). As so often is the case, however, Isler & Maldonado-Coelho end by pointing to vocal and plumage differences between subspecies that may lead to yet further splits.

A fifth species of crescentchest?

Crescentchests *Melanopareia* are peculiar terrestrial suboscines of semi-arid habitats of South America. Traditionally four species are recognised, but this may change, following a review by Lopes & Gonzaga (2016) of the three subspecies of Collared Crescentchest *M. torquata* of central South America. Variation within



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13 Is 'Double-collared Crescentchest' *Melanopareia (torquata) bitorquata* (Vila Bela da Santíssima Trindade, Mato Grosso, Brazil, January 2014; Márcio Repenning) a fifth species of crescentchest, distinct from **14** Collared Crescentchest *M. torquata* (Altiplano Leste, Distrito Federal, Brazil, February 2017; Cristofer Martins: flickr.com/147473680@N03)?

the two subspecies of Brazil and Paraguay is clinal, and perhaps these subspecies should be merged. Subspecies *bitorquata* of eastern Bolivia,

however, is markedly different. Both *torquata* and *bitorquata* have a rufous nuchal collar, but in *bitorquata* this is bordered by a narrow black collar, streaked with white, and *bitorquata* generally has darker, richer tones to the plumage, especially on the underparts.

Although Lopes & Gonzaga do not make this point, arguably *bitorquata* and *torquata* are at least as different as are two other taxa recognised as species, Elegant *M. elegans* and Marañon *M. maranonica* crescentchests. And although most range maps show the distribution of Collared Crescentchest as continuous from Bolivia into Brazil, Lopes & Gonzaga find no evidence for hybridisation between *bitorquata* and other populations (nor, however, can they document sympatry between them either). Lopes & Gonzaga conclude that *bitorquata* be split, as Double-collared Crescentchest.

A halt to the name ‘Alto Pisones Tapaculo’

In 1992 the noted ornithologist Gary Stiles encountered a tapaculo *Scytalopus* with a distinctive churring vocalisation, which at first he mistook for a frog; this discovery was at a site known as Alto de Pisones, in the highly diverse

15 Gary Stiles and his ‘charge’, Tatamá Tapaculo *Scytalopus alvarezlopezi*, Cerro Montezuma, Risaralda, Colombia, April 2015 (Julian Heavyside). The species was finally described 25 years after its discovery.

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Western Andes of Colombia. Since that time, legions of birders have visited this region, and many of them have twitched what they came to call ‘Alto Pisones Tapaculo’. But during all this time, ‘Alto Pisones Tapaculo’ had no formal English, or scientific, name. This situation finally was resolved when Stiles and colleagues (2017) published a formal description of this tapaculo.

They named the species after Humberto Álvarez-López, an influential Colombian ornithologist, and so it takes the scientific name *S. alvarezlopezi*. The formal English name is not ‘Alto Pisones’, but rather is Tatamá Tapaculo; the distribution of this tapaculo is centered on the region of Cerro Tatamá, in Parque Nacional Tatamá (Alto de Pisones is only a few kilometers outside of the park). The known distribution of this species, however, extends along the Pacific slope of the Western Andes from western Antioquia south to southwestern Valle del Cauca. As is typical of *Scytalopus* tapaculos, the male Tatamá Tapaculo is mostly grey, and is very similar to other species in plumage (although easily distinguishable by song); the female presumably is similar but browner, but its plumage still has not been described in detail.

A multiplicity of Musician Wrens

The song of Musician Wren *Cyphorhinus arada*, composed “of often complex and musical phrases accompanied by low guttural churring notes” (Ridgely & Tudor 2009), is a familiar sound in the understorey throughout the Amazon Basin. Bocalini & Silveira (2016) surveyed variation across the entire range of Musician Wren. They found that each of the six subspecies was distinguishable by plumage and in measurements; this may seem like an obvious conclusion, but bird taxonomy is replete with poorly defined subspecies, so confirmation of the ‘reality’ of all six is a bit unusual. Strictly on this basis, Bocalini & Silveira would recognise each of the six as a species.

As often is the case with understorey birds of the Amazon, however, the subspecies typically are separated from one another across major rivers, and so reproductive isolation cannot be tested directly. Bocalini & Silveira take the matter one step farther, and also surveyed songs across the range of the species. Due to the high levels of individual variation in the songs, this survey was a considerable challenge. The most distinctive songs were those of nominate *arada* of the Guianas and northeastern Brazil; *interpositus*, of east-central Amazonia (between the Tapajós and Xingu rivers); and *griseolateralis*, of eastern Amazonia (east of



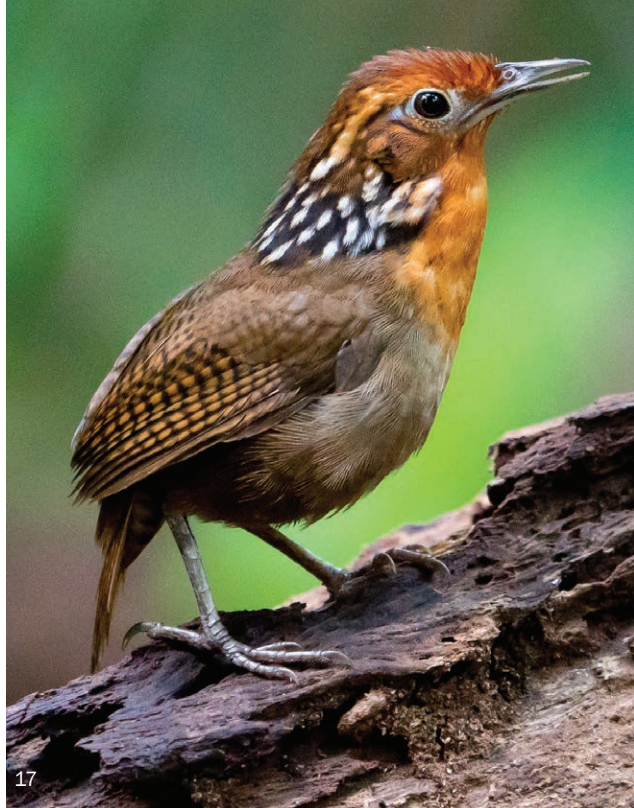


Rio Xingu). One species? Four? Six? A familiar tale emerges: never take a common, widespread species for granted, but make sure to see them all, just in case! Names that have been suggested for each of the six subspecies/species are: Imeri Musician Wren *C. transfluvialis*; Grey-eared or Napo Musician Wren *C. salvini*; Ferruginous or Inambari Musician Wren *C. modulator*; Guianan Musician Wren *C. arada*; Rondonia Musician Wren *C. interpositus*; and Grey-flanked or Tapajos Musician Wren *C. griseolateralis* (Bocalini & Silveira 2016, del Hoyo & Collar 2016).

The final split for Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner?

Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner *Automolus infuscatus* is a common, widespread bird of the understorey of Amazonian forests. As is typical of foliage-gleaners, its plumage is drab and relatively unpatterned, and, in appearance, it looks much the same across its large range. But Zimmer (2002) showed that despite the apparent low levels of geographic variation, there's a different story to be told when vocalisations are taken into account.

Zimmer documented that the population in southeastern Amazonia has dramatically different vocalisations; based on this research, that



Musician Wren *Cyphorhinus arada* may comprise as many as six species, four of which are illustrated here; English names are the author's own suggestions. **16** 'Rondonia Musician Wren' *C. (arada) interpositus*, Cristalino, Mato Grosso, Brazil, October 2014 (João Quental: flickr.com/jquental). **17** 'Guianan Musician Wren' *C. (a.) arada*, Presidente Figueiredo, Amazonas, Brazil, September 2017 (João Quental: flickr.com/jquental). **18** 'Ferruginous (or Inambari) Musician Wren' *C. (arada) modulator*, Reserva de Biosfera del Manú, Madre de Dios, Peru, November 2009 (Lars Petersson; larsfoto.se). **19** 'Grey-eared (or Napo) Musician Wren' *C. (arada) salvini*, Yasuní Research Station, Orellana, Ecuador, August 2010 (Nick Athanas; antpitta.com).



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20 Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner *Automolus infuscatus purusianus*, Los Amigos/CICRA, Madre de Dios, Peru, September 2007 (Joseph Tobias). Olive-backed Foliage-gleaners in southwestern Amazonia (subspecies *infuscatus* and *purusianus*) are now suggested to be a species distinct from those in northern Amazonia (taxa *cervicalis* and *badius*, collectively called Olive-crowned Foliage-gleaner *A. cervicalis*).

population was split off as what we now recognise as a separate species, Para Foliage-gleaner *A. paranesis*. Zimmer also pointed to differences in songs between Olive-backed Foliage-gleaners north of the Amazon (subspecies *badius* and *cervicalis*), and those in southwestern Amazonia (subspecies *infuscatus* and *purusianus*), and suggested that each also could be recognised as a separate species.

At the time he held off from pressing this point, in part because the vocal differences between these subspecies pairs are more subtle than those between the quartet and Para Foliage-gleaner. A recent genetic survey, however, provides strong evidence that Zimmer should have been less reticent about advocating for this additional split: Schultz *et al.* (2017) found that the populations north and south of the Amazon are not 'sisters' (that is, are not each other's closest relative), and so each should be recognised as a species. Schultz and colleagues do not slow down to propose English names for the two populations, but good enough names already in use are Olive-capped Foliage-gleaner for the northern population *A. cervicalis*, and Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner for birds of southwestern Amazonia *A. infuscatus* (del Hoyo & Collar 2016).



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Central American and South American populations of Spotted Nightingale-Thrush *Catharus dryas* should be split into, respectively, **21** 'Gould's Nightingale-Thrush' *Catharus dryas* (here subspecies *ovandensis*, El Triunfo, Chiapas, Mexico, February 2012; Christoph Moning) and **22** 'Sclater's Nightingale-Thrush' *C. (dryas) maculatus* (Milpe Bird Sanctuary, Pichincha, Ecuador, March 2013; Nick Athanas/antpitta.com).

A cryptic *Catharus*

Thrushes of the genus *Catharus* tend to be retiring, and relatively drab and unpatterned. Perhaps the most distinctive species in this group, Spotted Nightingale-Thrush *C. dryas*, does its best to break the mould. It is shy, to be sure, but takes its name from the heavily spotted underparts, all overlain with a pale yellow wash, and topped off with a glossy black head that contrasts with

an orange bill and eyering. This species occupies the understorey of humid forests from southern Mexico south through the Andes to northern Argentina, although, in contrast to most species with a similar geographic pattern, it does not occur in Costa Rica and Panama (and only barely enters Nicaragua). Several subspecies of Spotted Nightingale-Thrush are recognised, but at first blush all populations are very similar, and this species has attracted little attention from the taxonomy throng. That was the case, anyway, until Halley *et al.* (2017) conducted a commendably multifaceted review of variation in this species.

Genetically, Central American and South American populations are rather deeply divergent (although still are each other's closest relatives); Central and South American groups also can be distinguished consistently by subtle differences in plumage, by measurements, by song (with songs shorter, but containing more notes, in Central American birds), and by habitat (or so is predicted, anyway, from an assessment of environmental niche models). Halley and colleagues interpret the consistency of these different lines of evidence to point to only one conclusion: Spotted Nightingale-Thrush is ripe for a split!

They recommend retiring the English name 'Spotted Nightingale-Thrush', which seems fair enough, and then propose 'Gould's Nightingale-Thrush' for the population in Central America *C. dryas*, and 'Sclater's Nightingale-Thrush' for the South American species *C. maculatus*. My suspicion is that the better names must be available: can the birding crowd generate any contenders?

Black-billed Thrush: mistakes were made?

Earlier (*Neotropical Birding* 19: 37), I reported on a genetic analysis (Cerqueira *et al.* 2016) that recommended a three-way split in Black-billed Thrush *Turdus ignobilis*, a common, widely distributed thrush of northern South America. To briefly recapitulate, Black-billed Thrush has five subspecies: two of the Colombian Andes (*ignobilis* and *goodfellowi*); *murinus* of the tepuis of Venezuela and Guyana; *debilis* of humid forest edge in the Amazon Basin; and *arthuri*, also of the Amazon, but inhabiting white-sand forests and savanna, primarily in eastern Amazonia. Cerqueira and colleagues found that *murinus* was only distantly related to the other subspecies, and that *debilis* and *arthuri* formed a group with a different species, Mara on Thrush *T. maranonicus*.

Therefore they suggested that Black-billed Thrush should be split into three: (i) *ignobilis*,

goodfellowi and *murinus*; (ii) *debilis*; and (iii) *arthuri*. A weakness of this study, however, is that it did not include samples from the two Colombian subspecies. Cerqueira *et al.* suggested that these were related to *murinus*, based on plumage similarities and that all three occupied highland areas; but, reasonable as this seemed, it was just their best guess.

More recently Avenda o *et al.* (2017) conducted an independent genetic study of this species, and were able to include *all* subspecies. Avenda o *et al.* confirmed a key finding from the earlier study, that *murinus* of the tepuis is not related to the four other subspecies (and so is a clear candidate for a split). The two Andean subspecies, however, are *not* related to *murinus* after all, but are closer to the two lowland populations. Avenda o *et al.* were not able to completely unravel the relationships among these four subspecies, which grouped closely with one another and, again, with Mara on Thrush. They strongly intimate, however, that *arthuri* also merits species rank, based in part on its differing habitat preferences. In sum, all agree that there are at least two species in Black-billed Thrush, and that there probably are three species, just with a different composition than Cerqueira *et al.* had proposed. Avenda o *et al.* suggest the English name 'Pantepui Thrush' for *murinus*; 'Campina Thrush' already is in use for those who prefer to get on with it already by splitting *arthuri* as well (del Hoyo & Collar 2016).

Pipits bring pleasure and pain

van Els & Norembuena (2017) use a combination of genetics and vocalisations to puzzle out a classification of the Neotropical pipits (*Anthus*). This leads to several recommendations for taxonomic revisions, some widely anticipated, but others of which are more of a surprise. A proposed split that will surprise no one is to recognise the Pacific coast subspecies of Yellowish Pipit *A. lutescens* as a separate species, Peruvian Pipit *A. peruvianus*. The vocal differences between *peruvianus* and other Yellowish Pipits have been known for a long time (Jaramillo 2003), and genetics now show that *peruvianus* is not at all closely related to Yellowish.

Less expected is the discovery that the Venezuela subspecies (*meridae*) of Paramo Pipit *A. bogotensis* is also very divergent, genetically, from other populations of that species. Unfortunately, genetic data for *meridae* are relatively sparse, and there also are very few available recordings of *meridae*. Therefore van Els & Norembuena refrain



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As anticipated, research has shown that **23** 'Peruvian Pipit' *Anthus (lutescens) peruvianus* (Puerto Etén, Chiclayo, Peru, August 2017; Nick Athanas/ antpitta.com) is a different species to **24** Yellow Pipit *A. lutescens* (Recreio dos Bandeirantes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, August 2016; Aisse Gaertner). More surprising is that **25** the Venezuela subspecies (*meridae*) of Paramo Pipit *A. bogotensis* (Páramo La Culata, Mérida, Venezuela, December 2014; Jay McGowan) is genetically divergent from other populations of that species.



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for now from elevating it to a species, but this will be one to keep an eye on.

Finally, on the basis of moderate levels of divergence in both genes and song, they propose to split Short-billed Pipit *A. furcatus*, elevating the Andean population as Puna Pipit *A. brevirostris*. The other side of the coin is the discovery that South Georgia Pipit (*A. antarcticus*) is genetically indistinguishable from Correndera Pipit *A. correndera*, and its song also is similar to that of Correndera (although it has the most distinctive song within the Correndera group). van Els & Norembuena therefore take the rare

step of advocating a lump, and would recognise *antarcticus* as no more than a subspecies.

What's in a warble?

All populations of Black-and-rufous Warbling Finch *Poospiza nigrorufa* have a similar pattern, but the coloration differs subtly: populations of the Andes of Bolivia and Argentina (*whitii*) are dark chestnut below and dark gray above, whereas birds from central Argentina to southeastern Brazil (*nigrorufa*) are paler overall, and in particular are cinnamon-rufous below. These sometimes



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There is now strong evidence to support what many birders have argued since the 1980s: that **26** 'Black-and-chestnut Warbling Finch' *Poospiza (nigrorufa) whitii* (Jujuy city, Jujuy, Argentina, July 2008; James Lowen/jameslowen.com) of the Andes is a different species to **27** Black-and-rufous Warbling Finch *Poospiza nigrorufa* (Ribera Norte, Buenos Aires, Argentina, February 2008; James Lowen/jameslowen.com) of further east.

are recognised as separate species (e.g. Ridgely & Tudor 2009, del Hoyo & Collar 2016), but more on the basis of a good hunch than on a detailed analysis. Enter Jordan *et al.* (2017), who extensively document that *whitii* and *nigrorufa* have different songs, and that each responds only to playback of its own population. Jordan *et al.* also document that the two differ in habitat preferences. Coupled with earlier work reporting a moderate level of genetic divergence between these two populations (Shultz & Burns 2013), one is left wondering why anyone *wouldn't* split these two. English names for each are well-established: *nigrorufa* remains Black-and-rufous Warbling Finch, and *whitii* is known as Black-and-chestnut Warbling Finch (Ridgely & Tudor 2009, del Hoyo & Collar 2016).

Rearranging the Arremon sparrows

Pectoral Sparrow *Arremon taciturnus* is a common bird of the understorey of humid forests, mostly in eastern South America. The English name refers to a black breast band that contrasts with white underparts, although this pectoral band is geographically variable: almost always complete in the Guianas and the Atlantic Forest region, incomplete or absent in southwestern Amazonia, and completely variable in central Amazonia. The truly different population is *axillaris*, which occurs at the base of the Andes in Colombia

and Venezuela, and which is geographically isolated from all other Pectoral Sparrows. It also differs by its mostly yellow (not black) bill, and more extensively yellow wing coverts. Buainain *et al.* (2017) suggest that *axillaris* therefore merits recognition as a separate species. They acknowledge that its vocalisations, however, are very similar to those of 'mainstream' Pectoral Sparrow, with the caveat that there are very few available recordings of its voice. These authors don't recommend an English name for *axillaris*; del Hoyo & Collar (2016) propose 'Yellow-mandibled Sparrow', which is a bit of a mouthful, but *is* descriptive.

Buainain and a slightly different set of collaborators also turned their attention to Saffron-billed Sparrow *A. flavirostris*, which occurs from Bolivia to eastern Brazil (Buainain *et al.* 2016). The relevant populations are green-backed *dorbignii* of the Andean foothills; grey-backed *polionotus* of eastern Bolivia to central Brazil; and green-backed *flavirostris*, of eastern Brazil. The two geographically separated green-backed forms apparently have different vocalisations. On the other hand, grey-backed *polionotus* and green-backed *flavirostris* sound similar to one another, but their distributions abut, apparently with no hybridisation.

Accordingly, Buainain and colleagues recommend recognising these as three species, but again, they do not suggest English names. del

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The geographically isolated population of **28** Pectoral Sparrow *Arremon taciturnus axillaris* (Norte de Santander, Colombia, August 2009; Hugo Loaiza: flickr.com/38074970@N04), called 'Yellow-mandibled Sparrow' by del Hoyo & Collar (2016), is a proposed split from **29** other Pectoral Sparrows (here subspecies *taciturnus*, Manaus, Amazonas, Brazil, April 2015; Anselmo d'Afonseca). The situation with Saffron-billed Sparrow *A. flavirostris* is less clear, with nobody yet bold enough to claim full-species status for any taxa, despite some differences in plumage and vocalisations. **30** Saffron-billed Sparrow *A. f. polionotus*, Esquina, Corrientes, Argentina, September 2012 (Cláudio Dias Timm: flickr.com/cdtimm). **31** Saffron-billed Sparrow *A. f. flavirostris*, Chapada dos Veadeiros, Goiás, Brazil, August 2011 (João Quental: flickr.com/jquental). **32** Saffron-billed Sparrow *A. f. dorbignii*, El Galpón, Salta, Argentina, October 2015 (Giselle Mangini).

Hoyo & Collar (2016) have not accepted these splits in Saffron-billed Sparrow but recognise three subspecies groups, with the names ‘Stripe-crowned Sparrow’ (*dorbignyi*), ‘Grey-backed Sparrow’ (*polionotus*), and ‘Saffron-billed Sparrow’ (*flavirostris*). (That said, they slightly hedge their bets by acknowledging that a more detailed review may elevate *dorbignyi*, and ‘perhaps also *polionotus*’, as full biological species.)

Note that a slightly different picture emerges from a genetic survey by a different group of researchers (Trujillo-Arias *et al.* 2017). This group confirmed a genetic divergence between *dorbignyi* and the eastern populations, but the molecular approach could not reliably distinguish *polionotus* from *flavirostris*. Trujillo-Arias and colleagues therefore recognise only two species in this group, *dorbignyi* and *flavirostris* (including *polionotus*). Experts disagree – who would have imagined?

The significance of different colours in the Unicolored Blackbird

Males of Unicolored Blackbird *Agelasticus cyanopus* are all black, hence the English name. The story is different in the female, however, in which, among other differences, the underparts may be bright yellow (Bolivia to southwestern Brazil and northeastern Argentina: *cyanopus*),

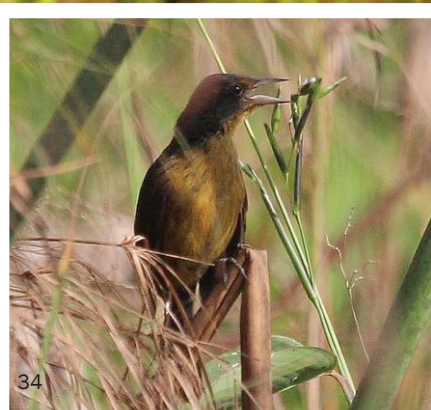
blackish, with an olive-yellow wash (northern and central Brazil: usually called *xenicus*, although the proper name for this subspecies may be *unicolor*); or simply olive-yellow (southeastern Brazil: *atroolivaceus*). Jaramillo & Burke (1999) suggested that Unicolored Blackbird could encompass more than one species, although they did not suggest how it might be split.

However, Lopes (2017) – a very busy, productive fellow this year! – undertook a comprehensive review of variation in this species. His conclusion is that it should be partitioned into a minimum of two species, a western *A. cyanopus* and an eastern *A. atroolivaceus* (including *unicolor*), based on differences in female pattern, and on the parapatric distributions of these two groups, with no evidence of hybridisation. Under a more relaxed species concept, with less importance placed on interbreeding, Lopes would consider each of the three groups to be a separate species. As so often is the case, Lopes does not recommend English names for these proposed new species. Perhaps Yellow-breasted Blackbird (for *A. cyanopus*) and Azara’s Blackbird (for *A. atroolivaceus*)? Suggestions welcome!

One is the loneliest number

Some of the greatest enigmas in avian taxonomy are species that continue to be known only from a single decades-old specimen. It becomes all too

Differences in female coloration supports the proposed split of Unicolored Blackbird *Agelasticus cyanopus* into at least two species: **33** the western *A. (c.) cyanopus* (Reserva El Bagual, Formosa, Argentina, October 2007; James Lowen/ jameslowen.com) and **34** the eastern *A. atroolivaceus* (here *xenicus*, Mazagão, Amapá, Brazil, October 2014; Alexander Lees: freewebs.com/alexlees). Suggestions for English names welcomed!



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easy to dismiss such singletons as representing an odd hybrid combination or just a freak oddball of a well-known species. Every so often, however, a mystery is solved when a zombie species comes roaring back to life, as with the 2001 rediscovery of the spectacular White-masked Antbird *Pithys castaneus* (Lane *et al.* 2006, Schmitt *et al.* 2017). On the other hand, Gary Graves has made a cottage industry out of pinpointing the hybrid parentage of many putative hummingbird ‘species’. One mystery hummingbird that Graves has not (yet?) examined, however, is Alfaro’s Hummingbird *Amazilia alfaroana*, known from a single specimen from northwestern Costa Rica.

Kirwan & Collar (2016) join Weller (2001) in advocating recognition of *alfaroana* as a species. Kirwan & Collar also raise the unpleasant prospect that *alfaroana* possibly may be extinct; few birders or ornithologists are aware of it, however, so we can hope that it simply has been overlooked. In contrast, the fate of Natterer’s Tanager *Tachyphonus nattereri* seems sealed. Known with certainty from a male specimen collected in Mato Grosso, Brazil, in 1825, ‘Natterer’s Tanager’ now is assessed as a hybrid between two widespread species, Flame-crested Tanager *T. cristatus* and White-shouldered Tanager *T. luctuosus* (Lopes & Piacentini 2017). A second specimen, sometimes also attributed to *nattereri*, is a female; Lopes & Piacentini consider this specimen to be a perfectly typical example of a female Flame-crested Tanager. And with that, Natterer’s Tanager is no more.

To be or not to be

Silva *et al.* (2017) describe a new species of parrot, Blue-winged Amazon *Amazona gomezgarzai*, from the Yucatán Peninsula. (For those who prefer to refer to all *Amazona* as ‘parrot’ rather than ‘amazon’, note that there already is a Blue-winged Parrot, *Neophema chrysostoma* of Australia and Tasmania.) This species is known from only two individuals, both now in captivity but captured in the wild; unfortunately there seem to be no photographs or other documentation of the free-flying individuals. Genetically Blue-winged is almost identical to White-fronted Parrot *A. albifrons* but differs vocally and has only red on the face, lacking blue and white. New species, or rare hybrid, or...? Let’s just take a ‘wait and see’ approach on this one.

It has been known for some time that there is of some kind of a yellow finch in the Sierra de la Ventana, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, but the identity of this bird has been unclear. Narosky *et al.* (1984) referred to it as Patagonian Yellow Finch *S.*

lebruni, of Patagonia, but Areta *et al.* (2012) regard it as Greater Yellow Finch *Sicalis auriventris*, which otherwise occurs in the Andes of eastern Chile and western Argentina. López-Lanus (2017) begs to differ with all! He describes this isolate as a new species, Ventania Yellow Finch *Sicalis holmbergi*; the scientific name honors Eduardo Ladislao Holmberg, who apparently encountered this yellow finch as early as 1884 (but whose critical specimen now is lost). The diagnosis of Ventania Yellow Finch acknowledges that it is essentially identical to Greater in plumage, and although it is said to be larger, the size difference is very small. Much hinges, then, on the vocal differences that López-Lanus describes between Ventania and other yellow finches. Another ‘wait and see’, perhaps?

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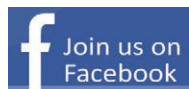
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