

# Araripe Manakin

## *Antilophia bokermanni*

Ciro Albano and Weber Girão

In another article to honour David Snow (in addition to Rob Clay's piece on pp. 12–15) we celebrate one of the most remarkable avian discoveries of the 1990s: a beautiful and Critically Endangered manakin in north-east Brazil.

Does beauty come at a price? Araripe Manakin *Antilophia bokermanni* is arguably the most stunning member of an attractive family (Pipridae: the manakins), the male's plumage being a visually arresting combination of white, crimson and black. But Araripe Manakin is also the most threatened manakin<sup>2,6</sup>, being classified as Critically Endangered mainly due to habitat loss and degradation<sup>1,2</sup> in its highly restricted range.

The Araripe's allure is further accentuated by it having entirely eluded ornithologists' attention until as recently as 1996, its discovery being generally lauded as one of the most staggering of all time. When described two years later, Araripe Manakin was allocated to the genus *Antilophia* which previously housed only Helmeted Manakin *A. galeata* (Fig. 12), a species of gallery forests bordering savannas in central South America<sup>5</sup>.

Araripe Manakin is endemic to an isolated moist forest enclave at Chapada do Araripe (Fig. 13), a plateau surrounded by semi-arid lowlands in the *caatinga* of Ceará state, north-east Brazil<sup>1,3,4</sup>. In its tiny range of 28 km<sup>2</sup>, the most recent surveys estimated a total population of c.800 individuals<sup>1,2</sup>.

### Plumage

The adult male Araripe Manakin is unmistakable. It has a bright red crest, crown and nape to upper back, with black flight feathers and tail contrasting with otherwise snow-white plumage (Figs. 1–2). A displaying male is a remarkable sight (Fig. 3). The female is olivaceous-green with a small frontal crest (Figs. 4–5). During its first year, the young male resembles the female, acquiring exuberant full adult (or definitive) plumage only in its second year<sup>1</sup>. Here we present a rare photo of an immature male in transitional plumage and thus probably between one and two years old (Fig. 6).

### Breeding

Manakins build their nests in strong synchrony with the rains and the timing thus varies from year to year. We present the first-ever photograph of a mating pair (Fig. 7), taken during January 2009. The nest is a small, open basket adorned with leaves and placed in a tree-fork above a stream. The clutch of two eggs (Fig. 8) is incubated exclusively by the female (Fig. 9), while the male vocally defends the territory (Fig. 10); vocal activity increases during the breeding season and, in 2002, peaked in September–October<sup>4</sup>. The nestlings are entirely green in plumage (Fig. 11)<sup>1</sup>.

### Conservation

Since 2002, the Brazilian NGO Aquasis has been studying the species under the auspices of the 'Araripe Manakin Conservation Project' and published a Conservation Plan<sup>1</sup> in 2006. The Plan lists 21 priority actions that, in the short term, seek to avoid the extinction of the species, and, in the medium to long term, aim to increase environmental quality and to promote recovery of the limited remaining habitat. Key actions include:

- creating a wholly protected area free from human use that incorporates remaining manakin habitat, surrounding areas with potential for recovery and a buffer zone. This initiative is now being sponsored by the BP Conservation Leadership Programme;
- helping integrate management of this protected area with that in existing protected areas where 'sustainable use' is permitted;
- conducting a recovery program for water resources on the slopes of the Araripe plateau, including protecting springs, and restoring both gallery forests and original water dynamics; and



All photos taken by [Ciro Albano/www.nebrazilbirding.com](http://www.nebrazilbirding.com). Figs. 1–11 relate to Araripe Manakin *Antilophia bokermanni*

Left, top to bottom:

Figures 1–2. The same adult male

Figure 3. Displaying male

Right, top to bottom:

Figures 4–5. Female: note the spider web used to build the nest in the bill of the bird of Fig. 4

Figure 6. Immature male in transitional plumage to adult. The white on the breast and red on the crest are emerging



Left, top to bottom:

Figure 7. The first-ever photo of a mating pair

Figure 8. Nest with two eggs, the standard clutch size

Figure 9. Female on the nest

Figure 10. Adult male vocalising while his partner incubates nearby

Right, top to bottom:

Figure 11. Nest with two chicks. The seed on the right side was probably regurgitated by one of the nestlings

Figure 12. Male Helmeted Manakin *Antilophia galeata*, formerly the only member of the genus

Figure 13. A vista towards the slopes of Chapada do Araripe, Araripe Manakin habitat

- improving existing tools to increase the participation of local stakeholders in the conservation process.

In 2008, the British Birdwatching Fair raised funds for the project by selecting Araripe Manakin as one of the flagship first beneficiaries of BirdLife International's 'Preventing Extinctions' initiative ([www.birdlife.org/extinction](http://www.birdlife.org/extinction)). Better still, world-famous broadcaster Sir David Attenborough became the 'Species Champion' for Araripe Manakin. (An article on the Neotropical dimension of BirdLife's Preventing Extinctions initiative is in preparation for a future issue of *Neotropical Birding*.)

## Seeing Araripe Manakin

Araripe Manakin is one of the target species for any birder visiting north-east Brazil. It occurs at many sites in the forests along the foothills of Chapada do Araripe between the municipalities of Crato and Missão Velha. However, the best-known and certainly one of the easier sites at which to enjoy and photograph this gorgeous creature is at the type locality, Arajara water park. Access to the park is easy and plentiful trails bring birders close to their quarry. The manakins appear unbothered by the presence of numerous (non-birding visitors), and such habituation makes it easy to get close views.

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## COTINGAS AND MANAKINS — A REQUEST FOR PHOTOGRAPHS

The long-awaited *Cotingas and manakins* by Graeme Green and (NBC's *Cotinga* editor) Guy Kirwan is nearing completion. Part of the renowned Helm Identification Guides series, the book covers 129 species in the Neotropical families Cotingidae, Oxyruncidae, Pipridae and Tityridae. The book will also include photographs to help illustrate the tremendous variety of plumages in these birds; the authors would like to invite submissions (preferably digital) from photographers and birders who have taken good photos in the wild (not in the hand). If you think you might be able to help, please send an email in the first instance to the project editor at A&C Black Publishers, Jim Martin. His address is [jmartin@acblack.com](mailto:jmartin@acblack.com)