

## BOOK REVIEW

**Birds of Ecuador.** Juan Freile & Robin Restall. 2018. Christopher Helm, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, UK. Softcover, 656 pp, 291 color plates. Print-ISBN-13: 9781408105337, E- ISBN-13: 9781472925657. Cost: US \$35.00

Three-quarters of a century after Frank Chapman's (1926) seminal work on the Ecuadorian avifauna, birdwatchers and researchers alike were thrilled to receive Ridgely & Greenfield's (2001) two-volume, comprehensive treatment of one of the most diverse avifaunas on the planet. Since then, however, the ornithological literature has seen a nearly exponential expansion of contributions on Ecuadorian birds (Freile et al. 2014). In addition, with modern advances in molecular genetics, significant rearrangements have been made in the taxonomy of birds, from the specific and generic levels to the composition and arrangement of families (e.g., Barker et al. 2013, Burns et al 2014). These taxonomic shifts, including a myriad of altered vernacular names, left the phylogeny and names used by Ridgely & Greenfield (2001) largely obsolete. In short, an updated summary of the status, distribution, and taxonomy of Ecuador's avifauna is sorely needed.

Thankfully, the new *Birds of Ecuador* (2018) by Juan Freile and Robin Restall not only fills this need, but has arrived in the form of a single volume field guide that will soon become the go-to reference for field researchers and maniacal twitchers alike. To refer to a 656-page field guide as "compact" would perhaps stretch the meaning to some degree, but one can hardly cast blame anywhere except on the list of 1640 species of birds living on mainland Ecuador. This number excludes species endemic to the Galapagos (not covered in the book), but includes over fifty species that still require concrete evidence of their presence in Ecuador. Similarly, among the 1636 species illustrated are several of uncertain status in the country. The inclusion of these "dubious" records is far from being a spurious addition to the guide, as these records are clearly marked and serve as an excellent call for information and contributions by users of the guide. Although the weighty volumes of Ridgely & Greenfield (2001) remain essential components of the libraries of anyone involved in Ecuadorian ornithology, they can now be left at home in favor of this updated, 1.2 kg (2.8 lb), single-volume work, which fits easily (if not lightly) into your day pack, or even the cargo pocket of your field pants.

The first thirty or so pages include, in addition to the standard "how-to-use" this field guide text, a nice overview of conservation in Ecuador and a map of protected areas. The following 581 pages include the 291 plates (on the right), with the facing pages occupied by corresponding text and maps of each species' distribution in Ecuador. The text is necessarily rather brief, but nonetheless covers all the essentials to complement the plates and facilitate identification: overall length, geographic and elevational distribution, plumage descriptions (with key field marks in bold italics), preferred habitat, vocalizations, and key differences from similar species. In addition, if applicable, the subspecies occurring in Ecuador are given, as well as the species' status (i.e., relative abundance) within the country. In many cases, particularly where relevant to identification, information on behavior is also provided. The plates themselves serve their intended purpose quite well and are a nice complement to the text. For species where males and female differ, both sexes are illustrated. In some cases, where a species is commonly seen in flight (most diurnal raptors) or where in-flight views are particularly helpful for identification (e.g., Buff-tailed Coronet, plate 111), both perched and flying individuals are illustrated. Occasionally (e.g., Yellow Warbler, plate 244), a variety of subspecific and/or immature plumages are included. The attention to detail in each illustration, particularly with respect to plumage coloration and pattern, would be commendable even for an artist illustrating only a handful of species. For one covering over 1600, however, the inferred dedication and time commitment is almost beyond comprehension. To my eyes, the primary way in which the plates might fall short would be with respect to shape, particularly as it relates to stance and bill shape, two characters that are often quite useful for identification following a brief view. Such misrepresentations of species' natural postures or proportions might prove to be difficult obstacles for inexperienced observers, but less-so for those more familiar with the overall characteristics of bird genera, particularly tropical groups.

As a natural historian, who views the gaps in knowledge pointed out in any field guide as exciting challenges and immensely valuable contributions to the literature, I was particularly glad to see amongst the final 40 pages a list of species that might occur in Ecuador (p. 616, Appendix 1). Following this is a check list of the species currently considered to inhabit mainland Ecuador (with at least a reasonable degree of certainty). Species which still lack undisputable evidence of their presence in Ecuador (e.g., specimens, recordings, clear photographs) are marked with an asterisk, providing another excellent reference for those looking to contribute to Ecuadorian ornithology. The text is wrapped up with a bibliography and a very handy index to both scientific and English vernacular names. Although I was somewhat disappointed to find only a 2-page bibliography, I freely admit that I am among the very few field guide users who often heads directly to this section when a new guide arrives. Ameliorating my consternation, however, is the knowledge that a more complete listing would have significantly increased the weight bumping against my leg as I toil up muddy Andean trails. Furthermore, the necessarily incomplete bibliography is an

unspoken testament to the quantity and quality knowledge that comes directly from the first author's impressive experience with the Ecuadorian avifauna, as well as the contributions made by the fully acknowledged (pp. 8–10) list of talented ornithologists that lent their considerable knowledge to the development of the text.

In conclusion, the new *Birds of Ecuador* is a must-have for anyone with a desire to study and explore this part of the world. It is compact, informative, and user friendly. Perhaps most importantly, it provides a much-needed update to the distribution and identification Ecuador's fascinating avian menagerie, as well as a guide to what the heck their current names are!

**Harold F. Greeney**, Yanayacu Biological Station & Center for Creative Studies, Via las Caucheras, Km 5, Cosanga, Napo, Ecuador. E-mail: revmmoss@yahoo.com

#### REFERENCES

Barker, FK, KJ Burns, J Klicka, SM Lanyon & IJ Lovette (2013) Going to extremes: Contrasting rates of diversification in a recent radiation of New World passerine birds. *Systematic Biology* 62: 298–320.

Burns, KJ, AJ Shultz, PO Title, NA Mason, FK Barker, J Klicka, SM Lanyon & IJ Lovette (2014) Phylogenetics and diversification of tanagers (Passeriformes: Thraupidae), the largest radiation of Neotropical songbirds. *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 75: 41–77.

Chapman, FM (1926) The distribution of bird-life in Ecuador. *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* 40: 1–784.

Freile, JF, HF Greeney & E Bonaccorso (2014) Current neotropical ornithology: Research progress 1996-2007. *Condor: Ornithological Applications* 116: 84–96.

Ridgely, RS & PJ Greenfield (2001) *Birds of Ecuador*. Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca, New York, USA.