The Birds of Ecuador, Volume I: Status, Distribution, and Taxonomy. Volume II: Field Guide.—Robert S. Ridgely and Paul J. Greenfield. 2001. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York. Volume I: xvi+848 pp. Paper. ISBN 0-8014-8720-X. $70.00. Volume II: xvi+740 pp. Paper. ISBN 0-8014-8721-8. $50.00. Slipcased two-volume set, $110.—Representing the culmination of a massive amount of research and more than 20 years of data collection to clarify and conserve one of the richest avifaunas on earth, this work stands as a spectacular achievement. Research libraries are duty-bound to shelve it, most Neotropical ornithologists have probably already added it to their core collections, and every serious birder either living in or traveling to Ecuador should carry it—at least part of it. Without question, both volumes are indispensable for all students of Ecuadorian birds. Available in a boxed set or individually, each volume is approximately the size of Hilty and Brown’s Birds of Colombia (1986), with volume I serving as a reference and volume II serving, nominally, as a field guide.

When faced with the problem of producing a work covering such a vast array of species (nearly 1,600), the authors wisely decided on writing two books, thinking that would silence those critics who demand a volume that is both comprehensive and portable. They have arrived at a novel compromise that will more than do but is less than ideal. Does the format problem lie in an unreasonable demand for portability in the field or in the conception of authors? Perhaps a second edition—and surely there will be one for what shall long reign as the definitive work—will profit from the pesky criticisms of those readers and users and from the model of other works on avifaunas yet to come.

Volume I provides—in relaxed, conversational prose—information on the status and distribution of each species in Ecuador, a taxonomic discussion, where pertinent, of all relevant taxa occurring in Ecuador (with few exceptions), rationales for the authors’ changing of English names (a preoccupation of the senior author), and each species’ world range. This delightful volume also includes a valuable gazetteer (complete with coordinates) and a passionate conservation section. The gazetteer is not intended to replace Paynter (1993); rather it builds on it, chiefly citing localities that provide the post-1960 distributional data for the volume. The conservation status of each threatened species is given additional coverage in the text, and all the subspecies known to occur in Ecuador are noted, making this volume a baseline for future research, as well as a useful conservation tool. The primary accomplishment of volume I is that it constitutes the best treatment of distribution—at both species and subspecies level—for any South American country. It is truly extraordinary. For the minority of ornithologists who have years of experience in Ecuador, and for those making a study of the avifauna, this volume will be the more exciting and the one consulted the more often. Yet far more than a tome to consult, it is a genuine pleasure to read. Due to the inevitable amassing of data—indeed this work will stimulate its further accumulation—this is the volume that will age more quickly, its historical nature becoming more evident as time passes. Even so, the naturalist’s pleasures of its presentation will remain open for a long time to come, not unavailable to future readers.

Among the bemusing pleasures for Spanish readers will be the numerous bird names that have been coined by the authors and their collaborators in a noble effort to standardize Spanish names throughout South America. Whereas this may be welcome in many quarters, local traditions are likely to frustrate systemization for the time being. What’s more, assigning Spanish names is no substitute for a Spanish rendering of the text itself (one can only hope that a translation is in the works) and for scientific names when referring to bird taxa cross-culturally. The authors would no doubt agree with this but would stress the hope that Spanish names will make the volumes more appealing to a popular audience.

Both Spanish and English readers unfamiliar with