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Birds of Peru

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Birds of Peru.—Thomas S. Schulenberg, Douglas F. Stotz, Daniel F. Lane, John P. O'Neill, and Theodore A. Parker III. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 656 pp., 304 color plates, 6 text figures. ISBN 13: 978-0-691-04915-1. Cloth, $35.00.—Rarely in the history of tropical ornithology have so many waited so long and so eagerly for a field guide to appear. When I was last in the field with the late Ted Parker in 1987, he showed me photos of some of Larry McQueen's magnificent plates for the new field guide and expressed hopes that completion was only a few years away. Unfortunately, with Ted's untimely death, publication of the book was delayed another two decades and was made possible only by the willingness of the new authors to take up the huge task remaining.

The end result of this long process is a spectacular addition to the literature on South American birds. The plates are superb, the guide is easy to use in the field, the range maps are informative and accurate, and the text is concise while still including essential information on diagnostic features, abundance, habitat, elevational distribution, and vocalizations. I used the field guide with great success on a recent trip to northern Peru. With the exception of the binding, which is clearly not up to the standards required for extensive use in the field, it is effectively designed for use while actually identifying birds in the field. It is not a combination field guide–reference volume in the tradition of guides for Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador. *Birds of Peru* is amazingly compact, given that it covers more than 1,700 species. The guide uses the facing-page format, in which all the information on each species can be viewed at the same time, a format I far prefer to having all the plates clustered together in the middle of the book.

The text is a model of brevity throughout. The introduction is brief but contains the essential maps of the region along with descriptions of the major habitats. The text associated with each species does not waste space on bird descriptions that are unnecessary, given that the paintings of the birds themselves can be viewed at the same time; rather, the text focuses on key distinguishing features and on descriptions of vocalizations. The maps are too small to provide locations of specimens but are, nevertheless, extremely detailed and accurate. Indeed, the range maps were a revelation to me. Even though I have traveled extensively in Peru, I had no real idea of just how complex the country is topographically and just how many species have very small ranges tied to odd plant communities and specific geological features (e.g., the Huallaga–Mayo valley deciduous forests in north-central Peru, the small patch of humid forest in the otherwise very dry Tumbesian region, and the many outlying ridges of the Andes, such as the Cordillera Azul). Startlingly, no range maps at all are provided for a few species where the available information is sketchy or uncertain (e.g., Gray-bellied Hawk [*Accipiter poliogaster*], a species with a wide geographic distribution). I found almost no typos, even after extensive reading.

The taxonomy follows the South American Check-list Committee (SACC) and does not anticipate future splits as has been the custom in many other field guides to South American birds. Some Peruvians I met during my recent trip were disappointed that the authors followed the more "conservative" SACC because it meant that Peru no longer had a list of more than 1,800; they feared that Peru may have fallen behind Colombia in the race to have the longest bird list in the world. Of course, Colombia's list would also shrink if the same standards were used. The text clearly mentions well-defined races, many of which will undoubtedly be split in the near future, and even occasionally mentions when "several species may be involved." Therefore, there is enough information for listers and conservationists concerned with range-restricted races to anticipate future splits.

All the plates are good enough to facilitate identification of the birds in the field, and some are breathtaking. Most of the flycatcher plates, for example, are so good that they made me wonder

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why I had often found flycatchers rather dull in real life. On some plates, the heads appear to be disproportionately small (e.g., some tanagers), and other plates include birds of such varying sizes (all drawn more-or-less to scale) that the paintings of the smaller species are extremely small (e.g., plates 233 and 234). A few plates have a very high percentage of blank space, with small individual paintings (e.g., plates 245 and 261). All plates, however, are extremely accurate and include essentially all the distinctive races and plumages.

The binding of my field guide started to come apart after only a few days in the field. I have no doubt that I will have to tape it together before my next trip to Peru. This is disappointing, given that the European paperback edition that someone in our research group brought seemed to have a much more durable binding. The price of the guide, however, is so reasonable that this is a minor problem.

In many respects, this guide could not have appeared at a better time. Peru is now wide open for scientific investigation and for ecotourism. Peru has more to offer the birdwatcher than just about any country in the world. Indeed, Peru right now is an ecotourist's, and a scientist's, dream. New parks are being created at an extraordinary rate, and not just small preserves. The Alto Purus National Park, for example, is only three years old and is more than 2.5 million ha. New lodges are opening regularly, and ecotourism is booming. There are now many fine lodges that provide access to such ornithological paradises as the Manu Road and the Abra Patricia. If the field guide had appeared when Ted intended, in the 1980s, it would have come during a period of intense terrorist activity and hyperinflation, when traveling in Peru was often difficult and chancy. Now, travel is comparatively easy, and the government welcomes scientists. This guide is just what is needed to make the bird community in Peru as accessible as those in Central America, where most of the ecotourists currently go for their tropical birding experience. There have been so many ornithological discoveries since the early 1980s that a new edition would have been necessary in any case, just to include spectacular recent discoveries such as the Scarlet-banded Barbet (*Capito wallacei*), which is featured on the cover page, and the entire suite of birds associated with nutrient-poor white-sand soils in Amazonia. All these new discoveries, including quite a few very recent ones that will have to be added to subsequent editions of the guide, add greatly to the excitement of visiting and conducting research in Peru.

I strongly recommend this guide. It is essential for anyone visiting Peru, Bolivia, or the western Amazon. I anticipate that it will add fuel to the boom in research and ecotourism in this magnificent country. It should be owned by all libraries, birdwatchers, serious ecotourists, and researchers who plan to visit Peru. It is a fitting monument to the work of all the authors, especially Ted Parker, who was responsible for so many of the fundamental insights into the natural history of the birds of this (possibly) most diverse of all countries.—Scott K. Robinson, *Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611, USA. E-mail: srobinson@flmnh.ufl.edu*

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