

Birds of Southern South America and Antarctica

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BOOK REVIEWS

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Birds of Southern South America and Antarctica.—Martin R. de la Peña and Maurice Rumboll. 1998. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 304 pp., 97 color plates, 5 black and white plates of raptors in flight, 1139 distribution maps. ISBN 0-691-09035-1. \$24.95 (paper).

This guide is an expansion of the senior author's *Guide to the Birds of Argentina* to include all species in Chile, southern Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, southern Brazil, and part of Antarctica. The volume is also a condensation of the prior work in that the text is reduced to the salient features necessary for field identification of species. Over 1100 species are described, and nearly all are illustrated. The book includes a brief introductory section, distribution maps, some local common names of each species, an index of scientific names, and an index of English common names. I used this guide extensively while traveling for 10 weeks in all six of the countries covered by the book (not in Antarctica, however). Like most field guides, it is not perfect; however, it is an excellent source to have on hand while birding in the southern cone of South America.

The shortcomings of the book are few and minor. Although the authors claim to have included all species within the region covered, they omitted the relatively common Grey Gull (*Larus modestus*). There are small problems with some of the illustrations. For example, the undertail coverts of the female Chestnut-bellied Euphonia (*Euphonia pectoralis*) are shown as olive-green instead of chestnut. These coverts are an important field mark, and are described in the text, thus producing a discrepancy between text and illustration. Also, individuals on a given plate are not always drawn to the same scale. This format would be fine if the authors noted when such was the case, but they do not, so the manakins of southern South America appear to be nearly the size of jays. The authors did not provide a legend for the distribution maps. One can decipher the meaning of the various symbols and the shades of gray, but a legend would have made everything clear.

The introductory material and the descriptions of species are necessarily brief given the emphasis on making the volume field-sized, but both could be better. The diagram of external bird anatomy is incompletely labeled, and some lines are imprecisely drawn. The description of each species includes a list of general habitat types in which the taxon is found, but these habitats are not defined anywhere. They are helpful in most cases; however, I was unfamiliar with the region and had trouble knowing what was meant by, for example, a “gallery forest.” The introduction should have included habitat definitions, as well as a map indicating general vegetation or climatic zones within

southern South America. Several species descriptions fail to note what appear to be diagnostic field marks in the illustrations. Most females of sexually dimorphic species are illustrated, and those that are not are usually described. However, some accounts of females are too vague to assist in field identification, and some accounts make no mention of females. Peña and Rumboll have done a better job than most authors in this respect, but I would like to see females of every species illustrated and described. Given the brevity of the guide, the user may need to supplement this book with more detailed volumes, especially for groups that are difficult to identify such as tyrannids and furnariids.

These minor criticisms aside, the guide is a good one. Even a beginning birder can identify most of the species in the field by using only this book. The guide is set up in the user-friendly format that most field books have adopted, with the text facing the plate on which a species is illustrated. The distribution maps and illustrations of raptors in flight are in the back of the book, but searching for a map or a soaring hawk is easy given the authors' numbering and lettering systems, respectively. The authors note when disagreement exists regarding the taxonomy of certain species, and their descriptions of species vocalizations (frequently a futile effort in field guides) are often helpful. The authors also add some spice to the blandness typical of field guides by splashing some colorful descriptions throughout the book. For example, they describe the voice of the Chaco Chachalaca (*Orientalis canicollis*) as “a loud and demented duet at dawn” and the Pearly-vented Tody-Tyrant (*Hemitriccus orbitatus*) as having a “wicked pale golden eye.”

The best feature of the guide is its size: it fits inside one's pocket. To cover so many species in so few pages is an admirable achievement. Yes, the book could use several small improvements, but hopefully these will be addressed in a subsequent edition. The bottom line is that if you plan to go birding in southern South America, you should take this book with you.—BRYAN L. SHARP, USGS Western Ecological Research Center, 5745 Kearny Villa Road, Suite M, San Diego, CA 92123, e-mail: bryan.sharp@backpacker.com