

## **Birds of Ecuador: Sounds and Photographs/ Aves de Ecuador: Sonidos y fotografías.**

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**Birds of Ecuador: Sounds and Photographs / Aves de Ecuador: Sonidos y fotografías.**—Niels Krabbe and Jonas Nilsson. 2003. DVD-ROM. Bird Songs International BV, The Netherlands ([www.birdsongs.com](http://www.birdsongs.com)). ISBN 90-75838-06-9. ~\$67.—This DVD-ROM contains 6,015 recordings of 1,184 species, roughly three-fourths of the birds of Ecuador (and an appreciable percentage of those on our planet); the percentage is higher for most forest-based groups (e.g. all the tinamous and ground antbirds). The recordings are quickly accessed by a simple set of menus and the labels include the species, length of the recording, geographic information, name of the recordist, and facts particular to each cut.

I would characterize this collection as the personal archive of two talented field ornithologists. Implicit in this characterization is my reaction that the recordings were probably made in the process of other scientific work, such as surveys or field studies, rather than as a focused effort to record the birds of Ecuador. Overall, the quality of the recordings is “average good” rather than superb, and the recordings are more variable in geographic coverage, species represented, and types of vocalizations represented than might be part of a more focused effort to record Ecuador’s birds. For instance, Andean species are, in general, better represented than lowland species (e.g. only 4 cuts for Plumbeous Antbird [*Myrmeciza hyperythra*] vs. 10 for Tyrannine Woodcreeper [*Dendrocincla tyrannina*]). Although there are recordings from other individuals, the authors have concentrated on presenting their own recordings rather than broadly including those of others.

I would next characterize this personal archive as an awesome resource. I speculate that Krabbe and Nilsson have endured 69 m of rain in the process of obtaining the 69 h of recordings on this disc, and now you can listen in the comfort of your home to much of what they have obtained. That there are 1,184 species represented perhaps tells you enough about the value of this archive, but I wish particularly to

stress that many rare or poorly known species are included on the disc, and that the authors have managed to visit most every topographic feature of the Ecuadorian Andes, so that the geographic coverage for many species is outstanding. Niels Krabbe is, of course, one of the world’s authorities on tapaculos (Rhinocryptidae), and they are especially well represented (e.g. 111 recordings of Blackish Tapaculo [*Scytalopus latrans*] from every part of Andean Ecuador), while the 18 recordings of the taxonomically interesting Masked–Highland Trogon (*Trogon personatus–temperatus*) complex are a further example of how this is a scientifically valuable archive as well as a simple tool for learning basic bird calls.

As a matter of personal taste, I appreciate what I might term the “honest presentation” of this archive, which particularly means openness, disclosure, and naturalness (and does not imply “dishonesty” in other products!). If there was uncertainty about the identity of the bird, this is shown, and recordings that were made in response to playback are so labeled. Recordings have generally not been scrubbed to remove the background noise of roosters, other birds, and some of the meters of falling rain (and when a recording was enhanced, that is indicated); nor have intervals been shortened without notice. Also, I prefer this product’s lack of voice annotations to introduce cuts, but of course many prefer otherwise. There are mistakes (so far about a dozen found by the authors and listeners), helpfully listed on an errata page of the publisher’s web site ([www.birdsongs.com/Ecuador/version1.0/errata\\_e.htm](http://www.birdsongs.com/Ecuador/version1.0/errata_e.htm)), which also includes a patch program that will correct these errors and make a few tiny changes to the basic program.

The DVD-ROM also includes 824 photographs of 469 species. As someone familiar with the avifauna, I found the photographs, many of them of birds captured in mist nets, unexciting, and a reference to which I am unlikely often to refer. However, because this title is an excellent value without the photographs, they make a fine “bonus,” and there is great potential for improvement of this aspect in the future.

A few technical notes are in order. This is a DVD-ROM, which means it runs in a DVD drive and not in a CD drive. It runs on Windows 98, ME, 2000, and XP; compatibility with Macs is not included. The disc also makes it easy to copy specific cuts (as WAV files) through other

software on your computer to other media, such as a CD or minidisc, or to play with them with sound-analysis software such as RAVEN (the material is under copyright, but the features of this DVD make it clear that the authors and publisher want the many legitimate uses to be easy, from the lab to the field). The program features the ability to open multiple windows at once (the better to compare similar recordings) and to construct playlists (e.g. as a learning tool). I found this DVD-ROM easy to use and to have many convenient features, but it should be emphasized that this is a computer product as opposed to a traditional home audio product. The DVD's box is in both English and Spanish, but while the minimal verbiage on the DVD is in English, 90% of it is bird names, geographic names, and technical terms that are so broadly international they are barely in a named language.

Comparison should be made with the audio CDs by John V. Moore et al. ([johnvmoorenature-recordings.com](http://johnvmoorenature-recordings.com)) that cover Ecuador. Moore's CDs are organized by geography and elevation (e.g. "Northwest Lowlands"); four published sets include 14 audio CDs, with another set of 5 soon to come, and more in development. The Moore products generally feature cleaner recordings, even more species, and more systematic presentation of the different types of vocalizations of each species. They are also collectively more expensive, are voice-annotated,

and present fewer and shorter recordings for many species. I suspect that the differences in medium (audio CDs vs. a DVD-ROM) will primarily influence consumer choice, but I add that Krabbe and Nilsson's *Birds of Ecuador* represents a "best buy" in the sense of *Consumer Reports*, whereas the Moore et al. CD sets can be individually a less expensive resource (for those who need recordings from only a limited area) or collectively a better choice for some, albeit a more expensive one. And, for around \$200, you can have it all, a staggering audio archive. Ecuador is fortunate, and we are fortunate, to have such choices to augment the recent *The Birds of Ecuador* by Robert Ridgely and Paul Greenfield (reviewed in *The Auk* 120:562–568).

I highly recommend this DVD to anyone interested in the vocalizations of South American birds, especially in the tropical Andes. It can well serve an individual who simply wishes to learn the typical vocalizations of more than 1,100 species, and it is essential for individuals and institutions with strong interests in the songs of South American birds, especially the taxonomic implications of geographic variation in vocalizations. It, and other collections published by Bird Songs International, should also inspire other recordists to consider the ways in which technological advances make it possible to provide personal archives to a broad public.—RICHARD E. WEBSTER, P.O. Box 16412, Portal, Arizona 85632, USA. E-mail: [merlin@vtc.net](mailto:merlin@vtc.net)