

Ralph W. Schreiber Conservation Award, 2011

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Source: The Auk, 129(1) : 191-192

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2012.129.1.191>

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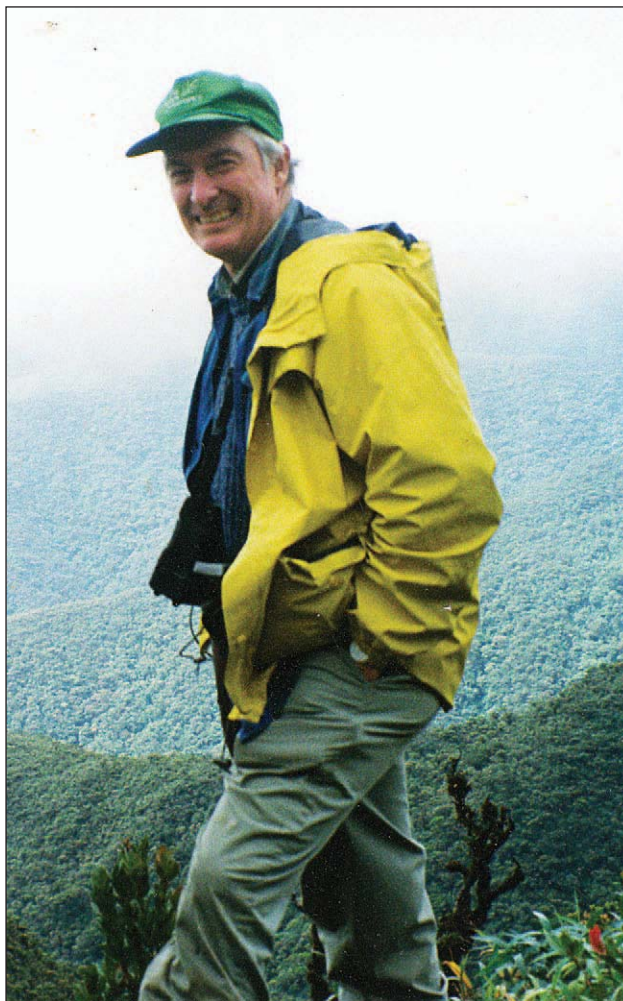
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The Auk 129(1):191–192, 2012
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Printed in USA.

RALPH W. SCHREIBER CONSERVATION AWARD, 2011

ROBERT RIDGELY



Robert Ridgely in the Ecuadoran Andes.

The 2011 Ralph W. Schreiber Conservation Award goes to Robert S. Ridgely for his outstanding contribution to the conservation of South American birds. Throughout his career, Dr. Ridgely has contributed significantly to the taxonomy and biology of South American birds and has made such information accessible to the public and to researchers through his books. His field guides and technical volumes provide important resources to enhance ecotourism (for birds), an important adjunct to conservation. However, it is his hands-on efforts to preserve and protect critical habitat for rare species in Ecuador that serve as a model for bird protection. Ridgely received a B.A. from Princeton (1971), an M.Sc. in zoology from Duke (1975), and a Ph.D. in forestry and

environmental studies from Yale (1981). Ridgely's Neotropical studies began in Panama, where intensive field work led him to produce *A Guide to the Birds of Panama* (1976, revised in 1989), the first richly and professionally illustrated field guide to birds of Central or South America. He subsequently spent a year traveling around South America to assess the status of endangered parrots and macaws. Thus began his dedication to the preservation of endangered Neotropical species. This was followed by a series of expeditions, particularly in Ecuador, where undisturbed habitat was shrinking at an alarming rate. Over the years his exploration of little-known regions has led to the discovery of seven new bird species, including the El Oro Parakeet (*Pyrrhura orcesi*),

Chestnut-bellied Cotinga (*Doliornis remseni*), and Jocotoco Antpitta (*Grallaria ridgelyi*). Peter Thayer conducted an interview with Ridgely (online at www.wildbirds.com) that provides an interesting and candid account of the discovery of the Jocotoco Antpitta.

A Guide to the Birds of Panama was an important model for subsequent field guides, and it played an important role in popularizing bird watching in Panama. The field guide was later followed by the first two volumes of Ridgely's magnum opus, *The Birds of South America* (1989, 1994), which he coauthored with artist Guy Tudor (vol. 3 is underway). In 2001 came the two-volume *Birds of Ecuador*, illustrated by Paul Greenfield; in their words: "We hope that with the publication of this book, the movement to protect Ecuador's magnificent birdlife will take a quantum leap." This proved to be an understatement, and Ridgely himself has worked tirelessly to improve conservation of Ecuador's birds. Ridgely, along with Tudor, is clearly the authority on South American birds. Their *Field Guide to the Songbirds of South America: The Passerines* was published in 2009.

All these books have served as introductions to Neotropical birds for students, scientists, and ecotourists. Their role as texts for budding ornithologists should not be underestimated, for multitudes of students have used these books to facilitate their research. They have also served to inform and encourage Central and South American ornithologists in the study and protection of their own birdlife. And they are valuable assets for encouraging conservation interest in South America. Ridgely's books have provided the tools to conserve and protect the avifauna of a very critical geographic area. Meanwhile, he has been sensitive to training young field ornithologists, particularly students from South America, devoting his time and expertise to taking them out into the field.

From 1982 to 2003, Ridgely worked at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia as its Neotropical bird expert, starting several conservation efforts there. He served as vice president

for endangered species in the American Bird Conservancy from 2003 to 2006 and then joined the World Land Trust–U.S. He has worked closely with the ICBP–IUCN Parrot Working Group and was on the Board of Directors for the Pan-American section of the International Council for Bird Conservation. He has also served on the Board of Trustees for Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania, and on local Nature Conservancy Boards.

His scholarly research base has placed him in a unique position to speak authoritatively, act responsibly, and work diligently with other scientists, local authorities, and the general public to conserve Ecuadorian birds. Most importantly, Ridgely practices what he teaches, giving his time and energy to hands-on conservation work in Ecuador. In 1998, Ridgely founded the *Fundacion de Conservacion Jocotoco*, a highly successful nongovernmental organization in Ecuador. He now heads this organization, which purchases land and now owns and manages eight nature reserves of critical importance to the birds of Ecuador.

For his writing, mentoring, and hands-on habitat protection, the AOU is proud to present the 2011 Ralph W. Schreiber Conservation Award to Robert Ridgely.

Award criteria.—The Ralph W. Schreiber Conservation Award recognizes extraordinary scientific contributions to the conservation, restoration, or preservation of birds and/or their habitats by an individual or small team (usually fewer than 10 people). Contributions from throughout the world and over any time course are eligible. Appropriate activities include (a) applied research, restoration, and educational actions that conserve birds or preserve significant bird habitats; (b) scientific examination of the principles of avian conservation and application of new insights into species restoration; and (c) scientific evaluation, guidance, creation, and oversight of avian recovery programs or habitat reserve–restoration programs. The award consists of a framed certificate and an honorarium.