



Book Review

Birds of Columbia

By S. L. Hilty

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605pp.

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Dr Steven Hilty attained his Ph.D. in Zoology from the University of Arizona and is currently a Research Associate in Ornithology at the Biodiversity Institute & Natural History Museum of the University of Kansas. He has previously authored guides to the birds of Columbia (Hilty *et al.* 1986) and Venezuela (Hilty 2002); both are frequently cited. He is eminently familiar with the region's avifauna.

This book is a comprehensive field guide to Columbian avifauna. It is an unusually heavy field-guide at 1.2 kg since it must present the most bird diverse country in the world with a fifth of the world's birds occurring there: 1965 species with 94 endemics are covered within this book.

The book is presented in the same style as the other guides in Lynx's series of guides with its systematics and taxonomy, colour illustrations and accompanying text taken from the *HBW and BirdLife International: illustrated checklist of the birds of the world* (del Hoyo and Collar 2014, 2016). However, the species accounts and illustrations have been updated to current thinking. The layout has the illustrations, maps and the explanatory text juxtaposed on the same pages; surely in an attempt to keep the weight down with so many species to cover. The introduction provides historical background, geographical scope and climate, plus useful accounts of the region's topography, vegetation and habitats. It concludes with a section on the conservation of the Columbian avifauna. The bulk of the book lies, as you would expect, in the species accounts. There are two indexes: English and scientific names are combined and followed by the Spanish names. QR codes are given for each species throughout the guide, which provide complimentary access to online resources at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The audience addressed is broad though mainly English speaking, although having the second index in Spanish

suggests that the South American audience was not completely overlooked. Overall, it is pitched as a field-guide for those who would put it into their backpack and go bird-watching in Columbia.

The strength of this book lies with its creators: Lynx's team of authors, editors and illustrators, and the editor/author Dr Steven Hilty. If there is a weakness it must be its weight – which is too great for my pocket. But, what else can be done when you have such a biodiverse assemblage of birds? This will be an important field-guide for this extensive avifauna. As it stands, it is the most up-to-date-guide and will likely remain so for some time. It identifies its 1965 species using 3600 colour illustrations. Given its scope and coverage, it is likely to be the field-guide of choice for many researchers. It is likely to encourage citizen scientists and professional researchers alike, thus informing and promoting further research into the Columbian avifauna.

The organisation of the text is, as usual, a strong point in the Lynx series of bird guides. It benefits from the huge team behind Lynx and BirdLife that has been built upon by the author Dr Steven Hilty. It is easy, quick and informative to read; I quite like having the text beside the illustrations on the same page. I suggest that this structure actually advances the book. The level of referencing is adequate, although so much of the original referencing in the Lynx/BirdLife is not reproduced. Yet the guide benefits from the previous work done.

The writing presented in the species accounts is clear and concise as you would expect. Its focus on identification is appropriately unwavering. I have no criticisms of this. The supplementary material would include the vinyl cover that you can confidently stand your coffee on or any other beverage you prefer. The vinyl cover will help keep the

guide dry in the field. There is a general colour topographic map on the inside covers that is probably not useful in the field, but can give you a quick glimpse of the whole country. The QR codes for every species that link you to complimentary material at the Cornell Lab add considerably to the usefulness of the guide so long as you can get phone reception in remote areas of Columbia.

On the whole this is a large field-guide, as it must be, given the breadth of the avifauna in Columbia and it will clearly fit into your back-pack but not into your pocket. Yet, its greatest value will be when you get it out of your back-pack, lay it on some damp moss and then confirm the identity of the species you thought you were looking at. I advise that you don't go hiking in Columbia without it. It will also be a very useful addition to many libraries.

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