

BOOK REVIEWS—RESEÑAS DE LIBROS—RESENHAS DE LIVROS

Edited by John G. Blake

(To whom books for review should be sent)

Birds of Peru.—Thomas S. Schulenberg, Douglas F. Stotz, Daniel F. Lane, John P. O’Neill, and Theodore P. Parker III. 2007. Princeton Field Guides. ISBN 9780691049151 (Hardcover); Helm Field Guides. ISBN 13: 9780713686739 (Softcover). 656 pp., 304 color plates, 1805 maps (Size: 21.3 x 15.2 x 4.3 cm; Weight: 1.3 kg).

“Birds of Peru” was first conceived by Ted Parker and J. P. O’Neill in the 1970s, and after nearly 35 years in the making, T. S. Schulenberg, D. F. Stotz, D. F. Lane and J. P. O’Neill have accomplished the monumental task of condensing a massive amount of information on nearly 1800 bird species (20% of birds in the world have been recorded in Peru) into a field guide destined to become an indispensable tool for Neotropical ornithologists.

The highlights of the “Birds of Peru” are the artwork and the distribution information provided. Thirteen world-recognized artists have contributed to “Birds of Peru” and their work is nothing less than outstanding. It includes nearly 4000 drawings grouped in 304 plates that portray 1792 bird species. The drawings depict distinct plumages, subspecies, sexes, age classes, and morphs of birds accurately characterized by their posture and shape. Perhaps the only source of concern in the artwork is in the arrangement of plates due to differences in the scale of drawings that, in some plates, give the impression of inefficient use of space. The pages opposite the plates include species descrip-

tions and color distribution maps. Species descriptions are concise and include key identification features to discriminate similar species, information on distribution, elevation range (critical for the Andean region), habitat preferences, abundances and population status, vocal descriptions, and notes regarding taxonomic status (when more than one species are likely involved). The taxonomical arrangement follows the South American Classification Committee (SACC) which may be a source of discussion among bird specialists.

The distribution information in the text and the maps of “Birds of Peru” are the primary accomplishment and contribution to Peruvian ornithology. Maps show topography, rivers, location of protected areas and political units. Colors represent the distributions of resident species as well as boreal and austral migrants. Maps are accurate and useful, although I should say that, for species with restricted distribution ranges, the sites depicted have no context to the country as a whole, making it difficult to follow particularly for someone unfamiliar with Peru’s geography.

Authors facing the challenge of addressing such a vast array of species needed to produce a volume that is both comprehensive and portable for carrying in the field. “Birds of Peru” comes in a format about as compact as it can be to cover nearly every single bird species ever recorded in the country. Some users may find the font type too small or that

BOOK REVIEWS

some information is missing [a gazetteer that builds on Stephens & Traylor (1983) could have been great!], but the editorial choices made by the authors have managed to keep the book remarkably portable.

“Birds of Peru” is a leap forward in Peruvian ornithology and will be valuable for anyone interested in birds of the Amazon basin or any South American country. I can hardly wait to see the Spanish version that I hope will include the new bird species recently

described for the country.— Grace P. Servat, Presidente, Unión Ornitológica del Perú (UNOP), Av. San Luis 2773, San Borja, Lima, Lima 41, Perú (*E-mail*: grace.servat@gmail.com).

REFERENCE

Stephens, L., & M. A. Traylor. 1983. Ornithological gazetteer of Peru. Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Cambridge, USA.