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THE WHITE-EARED PUFFBIRD

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THE White-eared Puffbird (*Nystalus chacuru*) reaches Argentina only in the tropical northeastern Province of Misiones, where I observed and painted it. The species occurs also in Paraguay, Bolivia, and eastern Peru, with the bulk of its range in Brazil. In Misiones I encountered White-eared Puffbirds on some of those occasional provisioning trips, which brought us out of the forest where we were camped. Although arboreal, these birds appear to prefer the clearings. Indeed, I first saw a pair in a spreading tree along a village street. The birds seemed little concerned about the human activity around them, although they were entirely exposed on the bare branches that had not in mid-August begun to leaf. They were silent and characteristically sedentary, scarcely moving until finally one shifted to another branch and the other followed at a little distance. The sexes are alike.

A Guarani hunter brought a fresh specimen into camp late on the afternoon of 2 September 1959, and I seized the opportunity to make this portrait. At that season and at that elevation (about 500 meters), the nights can be surprisingly cold, and darkness comes suddenly. So the last strokes were added with chilled fingers and with the aid of a gas lantern, the lantern not only for light but for heat over which I could "toast" the washes of color that refused to dry in the damp air.

These puffbirds do not always appear so lax-plumaged as shown here or as their name suggests. When their feathers are compressed, the body has a leaner look, and the head seems smaller and flatter crowned. In such states of "tension" they often lean forward on their perch until body, head, and tail are more or less in line, staring ahead with an intense expression that might be construed as either fierceness or myopia.

Another member of the genus to reach Argentina, *Nystalus maculatus*, is more widely distributed in the northwestern provinces, where, in my experience, it is a bird of deciduous scrub forest. It occurs also in



WHITE-EARED PUFFBIRD, life-size, from a field painting in watercolor
by Don R. Eckelberry.

Brazil and Bolivia. A third member of the genus, *N. striolatus*, inhabits central and northeastern Brazil, Bolivia, and eastern Ecuador. The northernmost of the four, *N. radiatus*, ranges from Panama through Colombia to western Ecuador.

Babylon, Long Island, New York.



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