

Neotropical Birding

THE BIRDING MAGAZINE OF THE NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB



Number 26 • Spring 2020



The Neotropical Bird Club aims to:

- foster an interest in the birds of the Neotropics amongst birdwatchers throughout the world
- increase awareness of the importance of support for conservation in the region
- mobilise the increasing number of enthusiastic birdwatchers active in the region to contribute to the conservation of Neotropical birds
- provide a forum for the publication of articles and notes about Neotropical birds, their identification and conservation and thus enhance information exchange in this subject area
- channel efforts towards priority species and sites, drawing attention to conservation needs
- publicise the activities of local groups and individuals, and improve liaison and collaboration between these same people and other birdwatchers

NBC publishes two issues of *Neotropical Birding* and one issue of *Cotinga* each year.

ISSN 1353-985X

UK Registered Charity
no. 1040130

Neotropical Birding

THE BIRDING MAGAZINE OF THE NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB

Senior Editor: James Lowen

Editorial Committee: Nacho Areta, David Fisher, Raymond Jeffers, Dan Lebbin, Alexander Lees, Robin Restall, Michael Retter and Rob Williams

Neotropical Bird Club (NBC)

COUNCIL: David Fisher (Chairman), Chris Balchin (Secretary and Advertising), Chris Collins (Treasurer), John Clark, Rob Clay (Conservation Awards), Mike Dawson, Carl Downing, Roberta Goodall, Manuel Sanchez Nivicela, Tom Stuart, John Thirtle, Charles Wilkins and Rob Williams (Representatives).

PATRONS: The NBC is delighted to be supported by the following patrons, well known for their contributions to Neotropical ornithology and conservation: Jon Fjeldså, Nancy Hilgert de Benavides and Robert S. Ridgely.

CORPORATE SUPPORTERS: Three options (conditions apply): **1** Half-page advert (£250); **2** Full-page advert or two half-page adverts (£400); **3** Full-page advert on back page (£450). For all Corporate Supporter enquiries please e-mail: ✉ advertising@neotropicalbirdclub.org

MEMBERSHIP: Membership of the NBC is open to all, includes a new digital option, and costs: **Ordinary** £26/\$48/€39 (journals in printed form) or £24/\$34/€30 (digital only); **Family** £32/\$60/€49 (printed) or £30/\$42/€36 (digital); **Supporting Member** – Ordinary plus a nominated Neotropical national or donation £45/\$80/€65 (printed) or £43/\$60/€52 (digital); **Resident Neotropical National** \$25 (digital only); **Five-year Ordinary Membership** £130/\$240/€195 (printed only); **Life Membership** £750/\$1400/€1140 (printed only); **Libraries & Academic Institutions** £55/\$100/€81 (printed only). To receive publications both digitally and in hard copy, please add the following costs to the relevant printed-form rate: £5/\$7/€6.

Secure payment can be made by credit card on the NBC website (see below). Alternatively, payments can also be made by cheque in either US Dollars or Sterling, payable to 'Neotropical Bird Club'. **Regrettably, we are unable to accept cheques in Euros.** Credit card payments must include the full number, type of card, expiry date, three digit security code and address that appears on the payer's statement. All payments outside Europe will be charged at US\$ rates (to cover extra postage). To join or for further details, please contact the Secretary, NBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK or NBC (Membership), Neotropical Bird Club, P.O. Box 1010, Brunswick, ME 04011, USA. E-mail enquiries to: ✉ secretary@neotropicalbirdclub.org

Website: <http://www.neotropicalbirdclub.org>

Advertise with NBC in *Neotropical Birding*

All adverts are printed in full colour. Advertising rates are as follows:

- Full page (14 x 21 cm) £450;
- Half-page (14 x 10 cm) £300;
- Quarter-page (7 x 10 cm) £200.

Deadlines for autumn issue are 15 Feb (booking space) and 15 May (copy). Deadlines for spring issue are 15 Nov (booking space) and 15 Jan (copy). Space is limited so book early! Adverts should be emailed as either .jpg or .pdf. All new advertisements must be prepaid, preferably via the NBC website. E-mail for details: ✉ advertising@neotropicalbirdclub.org

Please direct correspondence to: Neotropical Bird Club, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Beds. SG19 2DL, UK

Neotropical Birding

BIRDING MAGAZINE OF THE NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB • NUMBER 26 • SPRING 2020

EDITORIAL

- 2** Welcome to *Neotropical Birding* 26
JAMES LOWEN

BIRDING SITE

- 3** Birding the 'Montezuma Road',
central Colombia
JOHN CAHILL

FEATURE

- 15** Loved or loathed: what makes some
Neotropical birds more popular than
others?
ALEJANDRA ECHEVERRI, DANIEL KARP AND
JOSEPH TOBIAS

BIRDING SITE

- 23** Chasing Guatemala's gold
ROB RIPMA

FEATURE

- 30** Complexities of the Amazon bird trade
BERNARDO ORTIZ-VON HALLE

BIRDING AT THE CUTTING EDGE

- 35** Do you *really* want to see this one?
FABRICE SCHMITT

BIRDING SITE

- 42** A festival of birding at Lago de Yojoa,
Honduras
KATINKA DOMEN

BIRDING AT THE CUTTING EDGE

- 49** Providencia island in the Colombian
Caribbean: X marks the spot for a
treasure of endemic, migrant and
vagrant birds
THOMAS DONEGAN AND
BLANCAHUERTAS

SPLITS LUMPS AND SHUFFLES

- 56** Splits lumps and
shuffles
THOMAS S. SCHULENBERG

NEW BOOK

- 63** Mapping Chile's birds: South America's
first atlas of breeding birds
FERNANDO MEDRANO, RODRIGO BARROS,
HERALDO V. NORAMBUENA, RICARDO MATUS
AND FABRICE SCHMITT

PHOTOSPOT

- 69** Photospot: Crescent-faced Antpitta
NICK BRAY

REVIEWS

- 73** Birds of the West Indies
ROGER BARNES
- 74** Birds of Trinidad & Tobago
DAVID FISHER
- 75** Field guide to the birds of Colombia
and Guía ilustrada de la avifauna
colombiana
CHRIS SHARPE
- 76** Atlas de las aves nidificantes de Chile
JAMES LOWEN

NBC NOTICEBOARD

- 77** NBC Noticeboard
CHRIS BALCHIN

FRONT COVER

Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer
Diglossa gloriosissima, 'Montezuma
Road', Risaralda, Colombia,
November 2018 (James Lowen/
✉ jameslowen.com). Globally
Endangered, this bird is one of the stars
of John Cahill's article on birding the
'Montezuma Road' (page 3).



Another exciting bird at 'Montezuma Road' is the Critically Endangered Dusky Starfrontlet *Coeligena orina* ('Montezuma Road', Risaralda, Colombia, November 2018; John Cahill/✉ johncahillbirding.com).

Loved or loathed: what makes some Neotropical birds more popular than others?

**Alejandra Echeverri, Daniel Karp
and Joseph Tobias**

Some birds are popular, others not. But why? A team of ornithologists decided to find out, using birds in northwest Costa Rica as their case study.

Birds have fascinated people for centuries, inspiring a wealth of poetry, music and art. Picasso painted flamingos; Beethoven used cuckoo calls in his *Pastoral Symphony*; John Keats penned odes to the nightingale. Some species have been prized for their song, others for their beautiful plumage. Around 500 years ago, in Central America, the tail feathers of Resplendent Quetzal *Pharomachrus mocinno* (Fig. 1) were used to create an ornate headdress for the Aztec Emperor Moctezuma. Much later, in the late Victorian era, Europeans were importing exotic plumes from a wide range of species including egrets, hummingbirds and parrots to make flamboyant hats for fashionable women.

Birds inspire many of us to this day. As ornithologists and birdwatchers, we have spent much of our lives studying, observing and listening to birds. Some chase rare birds over thousands of miles, while others conduct scientific research on particular study-species, but we are also fascinated by birds themselves. In similar ways, farmers and city dwellers all over the world derive pleasure from watching and listening to birds. Yet birds are not all equally popular and it's not always obvious why. Why do some species seem to get all the attention while others are ignored? Why do people in rural communities seem to adore some species but consider others merely intruders and pests? More generally, what is it about birds that make them prone to be liked or disliked by different groups of people?

Unless otherwise stated, all photographs taken in Costa Rica by Daniel S. Karp.

1 Resplendent Quetzal *Pharomachrus mocinno*, Las Tablas, April 2012. The male's tail feathers were once used to create an ornate headdress for the Aztec Emperor Moctezuma.



Northwest Costa Rica possesses a variety of habitats including **2** forests, **3** grazing pastures and **4** agricultural fields.

Uniting psychology and ecology

For the past four years, we have studied birds in northwest Costa Rica, and canvassed public opinion to understand why some species are celebrated more than others. The region encompasses a rich mosaic of forests (Fig. 2), wetlands, cattle and other grazing pastures (Fig. 3), and agricultural fields (Fig. 4). The region is famous among birdwatchers for its iconic tropical dry forests and wetlands; visitors from all over the world descend annually on Parque Nacional Santa Rosa, Parque Nacional Palo Verde, and many private farms and lodges to search for species such as Black-headed Trogon *Trogon melanocephalus*, Mangrove Cuckoo *Coccyzus minor*, Yellow-naped Parrot *Amazona auropalliata* and Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria* (Fig. 5).

In 2017, we conducted more than 400 questionnaire surveys with international and local birdwatchers, as well as local farmers and urbanites, to evaluate which birds people liked and disliked. To recruit birdwatchers from North America, Central America, South America and Europe, we attended local Christmas bird counts and posted our survey on Neotropical birdwatching listservs. We also visited farms, public plazas, schools, and residential homes to survey local people (Fig. 6).

Our survey was designed using standard psychological approaches to measure people's perceptions of 199 bird species reported in the region (listed in the supporting information for Echeverri *et al.* 2019a, accessible from tinyurl.com/Echeverri-species). First, we presented survey participants with illustrations and songs/calls of every species. We then asked people



5

5 Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria*, Pelón de la Bajura, June 2017. An iconic wetland species that birdwatchers visiting northwest Costa Rica often wish to see.

6 Interviewing a local resident of Nicoya about his attitudes to birds of northwest Costa Rica, November 2017 (Alejandra Echeverri).



6

(blue, green) and warm colours (red, orange). We also noted whether each species had a crest or not. To characterise their songs and calls, we collected recordings and measured the range of their tones and rhythm. To characterise their ecological roles, we collected information on their diets and where they forage. Finally, to characterise their relative vulnerability, we collected information on their population size, distribution range, abundance and dependence on tropical forests.

Next, we combined our data on the public perceptions of birds with their ecological attributes and used advanced statistical methods to evaluate which characteristics made species more prone to be liked or disliked by birdwatchers and by farmers/urbanites. We evaluated each cultural service separately so that we could compare, for example, which species were more likely to be perceived as beautiful vs. those that were perceived as harmful and annoying. Our results were recently published as an article in the scientific journal *People and Nature* (Echeverri *et al.* 2019a).

to rate their perceptions of each presented species, prompting them to consider five different benefits they might derive from that species. Specifically, we asked whether they consider the species: (1) to be visually beautiful; (2) to sing beautifully; (3) to be worthy of scientific study or worth learning more about; (4) to be emblematic of northwest Costa Rica; and (5) to be worthy of conserving for future generations. We considered these five benefits to be ‘cultural services’ that birds may provide to local people and international visitors. Finally, we also asked people whether they disliked each species, viewing it as either harmful or annoying.

After compiling people’s rankings of the different cultural services associated with each bird, we then collected ecological information for all 199 species. To characterise their shape and size, we measured species’ wings, tails, tarsi, and beaks. To characterise their appearance, we categorised birds according to their patterns: spotted birds, striped birds, birds with cool colours

Some birds are loved

For birdwatchers, farmers and urbanites alike, the birds that were deemed most visually appealing and thus most important for recreation and birdwatching were species that had spotted plumage (such as Spotted Rail *Pardirallus maculatus*), striped plumage (such as Barred Antshrike *Thamnophilus doliatus*; Fig. 7) or were colourful (such as Scarlet Macaw *Ara macao*; Fig. 8). Forest-affiliated birds (such as Thicket Tinamou *Crypturellus cinnamomeus*) were also considered important for birdwatching (Fig. 9).

Birds that eat fruit and nectar were also perceived as beautiful, especially by local farmers and urbanites. Locals consistently pointed to hummingbirds as birds that they particularly enjoyed watching or hearing, in part due to their behaviour, uniqueness, beak shape and colour. The most iconic and beloved species in this region by far was Long-tailed Manakin *Chiroxiphia*



Birds considered most visually appealing (and thus most important for recreation and birdwatching) have spotted or striped plumage (e.g. **7** Barred Antshrike *Thamnophilus doliatus*, Tobago, December 2009) or are colourful (e.g. **8** Scarlet Macaw *Ara macao*, Osa Peninsula, June 2011). **9** Birdwatchers particularly appreciate northwest Costa Rica's forest-affiliated birds.



linearis, known locally as 'El Toledo' (Echeverri *et al.* 2019b). People often referred to its beautiful plumage and mentioned the complex dances that males perform to attract females. People also appreciated the nice pitch and melody of their songs and calls. If you visit northwest Costa Rica, you might encounter many murals and artwork depicting hummingbirds and Long-tailed Manakins (Fig. 10).

Beyond Long-tailed Manakin, farmers and urbanites also mentioned that they enjoy being woken up by the song of Clay-coloured Thrush

Turdus grayi. They reported being happy when they encountered macaws, toucans and motmots, all of which they considered to beautify the landscape. These birds are also often found in souvenir shops, depicted in local handicrafts, which might reinforce their positive image (Fig. 11).

Finally, many people reported that birds are fascinating to learn about and important for scientific studies. According to birdwatchers, the most interesting birds to study were those that had crests (e.g. the globally Vulnerable Great Curassow



10

10 Artwork of popular birds such as hummingbirds and Long-tailed Manakin *Chiroxiphia linearis* is a common sight in northwest Costa Rica (Alejandra Echeverri).

11 Wood carvings of macaws, toucans and motmots – all popular birds – are regularly found in the region’s souvenir shops (Alejandra Echeverri).

Crax rubra), colourful ones, or the evolutionarily distinct ones with few close relatives (such as Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*). Again, the birds that depended more on tropical forests were also considered to be more scientifically important.

Some birds are despised

Unsurprisingly, not all birds were viewed positively. One puzzling finding was that farmers and urbanites in northwest Costa Rica perceived carnivores and scavengers quite poorly. They often considered these species to be harmful to the crops and/or their livelihoods. Scavengers and carnivores were thought to be ugly and to have unpleasant songs. These species did not contribute to local and national identities. In fact, hawks, owls, falcons and vultures were the least liked birds in our study region. While drinking coffee with locals and listening to their stories, multiple people brought up the idea that owls are symbols of bad luck, perhaps because they are thought to announce the deaths of people in their families.

After evaluating responses to open-ended questions and commentaries in our surveys, we discovered one reason that birds of prey may be so disdained is that they are purported to induce human-wildlife conflict. Even though some people recognised that raptors prey upon unwanted rodents and snakes, farmers reported that raptors are problematic as they eat their chickens. Interestingly, while some raptors in the region, like



11

Raptors are disliked by farmers because they are perceived to eat their chickens. **12** Snail Kite *Rostrhamus sociabilis* (juvenile, Pelón de la Bajura, June 2016) was considered a ‘chicken-hunter’ even though it feeds on snails and other molluscs.

Surveys revealed northwest Costa Rica’s most disliked bird to be **13** Great-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus*, Nicoya, May 2016.



12

Grey Hawk *Buteo plagiatus* do eat rodents and small birds (perhaps including chickens), Snail Kite *Rostrhamus sociabilis* (Fig. 12), for example, was wrongfully considered a chicken predator, even though it feeds on snails and other molluscs.

Of all species, however, Great-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus* (Fig. 13), known locally as ‘El Zanate’, was by far the most despised. People described it as a delinquent, criminal, hunter or *narco* (narcotics trafficker) with the associated qualities one might imagine for such a type of person (unfriendly, repugnant, rude, aggressive). Farmers relayed stories about Great-tailed Grackles following farmers, eating maize seeds and seedlings as the crops were being planted. Despite being native, locals also perceived the grackles to be wrongful occupants of Costa Rica. They thought the birds were foreigners coming from Nicaragua to displace Costa Rican native birds (Dinat *et al.* 2019).

From perceptions to conservation

Understanding which birds people value is a key first step for motivating conservation. For example, appreciating which birds are perceived poorly, and why, can help identify good candidates for

13



conservation education campaigns. As noted, we found that scavengers and carnivores were particularly disliked. As such, even though raptors and scavengers are in decline in many parts of the world, conservation projects in Costa Rica that target scavengers and carnivores would not be likely to get support from local people. Our study thus suggests that much work needs to be done to raise awareness on the importance of carnivores and scavengers in ecosystems, particularly highlighting the critical roles they play in improving human health and rural livelihoods, including by removing carrion and consuming pest rodents (Echeverri *et al.* 2019a).

Conversely, our study also identified beloved species that could help motivate conservation actions. For the past four years, we have been conducting bird surveys on farms, privately owned patches of forests and nature reserves at 150 sites across the region to help inform local conservation and reforestation efforts. While we have found many species living on farms, the species we encountered on farms were quite distinct from the species that live in forests (Karp *et al.* 2019). We had initially guessed that people would prefer the species that frequent their farms and backyards, as these are species they interact with most. We were thus quite surprised when our findings showed that forest-affiliated birds like Long-tailed Manakin, Rufous-and-white Wren *Thryophilus rufalbus* and Northern-barred Woodcreeper *Dendrocolaptes sanctithomae* provided most cultural benefits.

Unfortunately, however, our ecological surveys indicate that forest-affiliated birds are also the most threatened. Endemic species with small geographic ranges are much more likely to be found in forests than on farms (Karp *et al.* 2019). Moreover, our work indicates that forest birds are more vulnerable to climate change than agricultural birds (Karp *et al.* 2018). Environmentalists often focus on threats to motivate conservation. Our work indicates that focusing on the benefits of conservation could be equally effective. For example, we have found that restoring small patches of forests on private farms – even if it is fragmented and regularly logged – can significantly benefit the most vulnerable forest birds in the region (Karp *et al.* 2019). Because forest-affiliated birds are culturally important, it is easy to envision how using forest birds like the Long-tailed Manakin as symbols of local reforestation efforts could help motivate public support.

REFERENCES

- Dinat, D., Echeverri, A., Chapman, M., Karp, D. S. & Satterfield, T. (2019) Eco-xenophobia among rural populations: the Great-tailed Grackle as a contested species in Guanacaste, Costa Rica. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 24: 332–348.
- Echeverri, A., Karp, D.S., Naidoo, R., Tobias, J. A., Zhao, J. & Chan, K. M. A. (2019a) Can avian functional traits predict cultural ecosystem services? *People and Nature* 1–14. DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10058
- Echeverri, A., Naidoo, R., Karp, D. S., Chan, K. M. & Zhao, J. (2019b) Iconic manakins and despicable grackles: Comparing cultural ecosystem services and disservices across stakeholders in Costa Rica. *Ecological Indicators* 106: 105454.
- Karp, D. S., Frishkoff, L. O., Echeverri, A., Zook, J., Juárez, P. & Chan, K. M. (2018) Agriculture erases climate-driven β -diversity in Neotropical bird communities. *Global Change Biology* 24: 338–349.
- Karp, D. S., Echeverri, A., Zook, J., Juárez, P., Ke, A., Krishnan, J., Chan, K. M. A. & Frishkoff, L. O. (2019) Remnant forest in Costa Rican working landscapes fosters bird communities that are indistinguishable from protected areas. *J. Applied Ecol.* 56: 1839–1849.

ALEJANDRA ECHEVERRI

Institute for Resources, Environment, and Sustainability, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

✉ alejandra.echeverri@alumni.ubc.ca

DANIEL S. KARP

Department of Wildlife, Fish, and Conservation Biology, University of California, Davis, CA, USA

✉ dkarp@ucdavis.edu

JOSEPH A. TOBIAS

Department of Life Sciences, Imperial College, London, UK

✉ j.tobias@imperial.ac.uk



Join the NBC community on social media

The Neotropical Bird Club is active on social media. The Neotropical Bird Club Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/31491408108/>) has more than 5,500 members, and new threads and images meeting the group's guidelines are posted daily. NBC's Twitter handle is @NeoBirdClub. We tweet NBC news and all things to do with birding, ornithology and bird conservation in the NBC region. Join us!