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Birds of Western Ecuador: A Photographic Guide

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BOOK REVIEW

Birds of Western Ecuador: A Photographic Guide

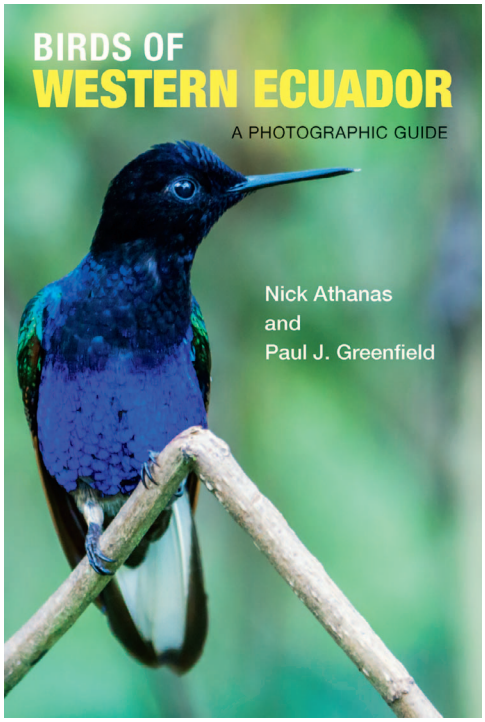
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Birds of Western Ecuador: A Photographic Guide by Nick Athanas and Paul J. Greenfield. 2016. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, USA. 448 pp., ~1,500 color photographs. $45 (softcover). ISBN 9781400880706.

My many fond memories of exploring Ecuador's incredible avifauna during the 1990s are marred only by the difficulties I faced in correctly identifying my sightings. As a novice birder without a comprehensive field guide for the country, I was lucky enough to have traveling companions such as Paul Coopmans, Niels Krabbe, Mitch Lysinger, and other bird gurus, who were patient enough to share their wealth of knowledge. Nevertheless, the arrival of the two volumes of *Birds of Ecuador* by Robert S. Ridgely and Paul J. Greenfield (2001) was a welcome reprieve. Now, as I return with my copy of *Birds of Western Ecuador* from its maiden voyage to Mindo (Pichincha) and Jorupe Birding Reserve (Loja), I am once again grateful to have had such a useful reference by my side.



It will come as no surprise, to anyone familiar with the photographic experience of Nick Athanas (see http://antpitta.com), that the photos in this guide are both complete and beautiful. Several are included for many of the species, illustrating sex, age, or seasonal plumage variation, the photos of Athanas supplemented with those of several other skilled photographers (Iain Campbell, Pablo Cervantes Daza, Andrew Spencer, and Sam Woods). Most facing pages cover four to six species, the photos accompanied by a range map and brief but well-organized and informative text. As expected in a guide of this type, the species are organized taxonomically, presented so as to conform to the many taxonomic rearrangements that have occurred since the publication of *Birds of Ecuador*. Despite the many fine paintings in other field guides, I can say that, as a naturalist who still struggles with the plumage subtleties that separate many species of flycatchers and female hummingbirds (among others), the photos in this book are a very useful and welcome tool.

The text, though necessarily brief considering the number of species involved, is well written and helpful. Each species' altitudinal range is provided, along with concise notes on behavior, habitat, and plumage. In addition to usually being the go-to place to narrow down the list of species observed, the text includes interesting and informative information that reflects the depth of experience that both authors have with Neotropical bird identification. The range maps depict each species' entire Ecuadorian range, which is useful if one should wander into eastern Ecuador. The maps are current and accurate but are printed quite small (again understandably). I found them generally useful, but they may be of only limited utility for someone unfamiliar with Ecuadorian geography. Given the geographic focus of the book, however, I would have preferred slightly larger maps that depicted only the species' range within western Ecuador.

In summary, *Birds of Western Ecuador* is a welcome addition to the growing number of guides to Ecuador's megadiverse avifauna. The high-quality photos, represent-

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ing a mind-blowing number of field-hours, are excellent identification tools because they show the birds in natural postures in their natural habitat (i.e., how you are likely to see them). Identification is further aided by brief but high-quality text that will prove indispensable for confirming (or rejecting) your initial identification based on first impressions. For those of you interested in South American birds, particularly the Ecuadorian avifauna, this book will make a valuable addition to your library and a relatively light addition to your daypack. Regardless of your itinerary in Ecuador, I recommend the following allocation of information/weight that I chose for my most recent trip: *Birds of Western Ecuador* and another of the recent Ecuador-wide guides, *Birds of Ecuador* (Freile and Restall 2018) in the day pack, and both volumes of Ridgely and Greenfield's guide (2001) back at camp for additional reference.

LITERATURE CITED

Freile, J., and R. Restall (2018). Birds of Ecuador. Bloomsbury, London, UK.

Ridgely, R. S., and P. J. Greenfield (2001). The Birds of Ecuador: Field Guide. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, USA.

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