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REVIEW

South American Birds — A Photographic Aid to Identification.
John Dunning, 1987. Harrowood Books, 351 pp. rrp cloth \$US 47.50, paper \$US 35.00

Though published as a first edition, this book is essentially a second and revised edition of John Dunning's earlier photographic aid to the identification of South American land birds. The earlier work was in two parts: the first with photographs, descriptions and distribution maps of some 1,000 species and the second with only brief descriptions and maps of most of the remaining land birds on the continent. The present work has approximately 1,400 species illustrated with photographs, and all species, whether illustrated or only described, are arranged in systematic order and still accompanied by a distribution map.

As before, the vast majority of photographs are of birds that have been mist-netted in the field, placed in a special holding area for photography and subsequently released. The scale of the work involved is hard to grasp until one leafs through the work and reads the author's description of his methods and apparatus.

This edition includes many more 'non-land' birds with photographs of, for example, flamingoes, herons, shorebirds, ducks, swans and geese. Some useful additions to the present work are a list of birds, grouped in size categories, in which the males appear all or mostly black in the field (79 species) and a section on learning to identify South American birds. The latter includes black and white drawings of the major passerine and some non-passerine groups to familiarize the observer with the shape and posture of many species. Omitted from this edition is the list of localities of where the photographs were taken.

Noted ornithologist Robert Ridgely has helped in the identification of the plates, and a note has been included where his views differ from those of Dunning. (Ah, yes, the joys of identifying birds in a land where the experts even publish their different opinions of the photographs in a field guide — it's wonderful stuff!) The only error I have picked up in my casual reading of the book is that the scientific name of the Blue-headed Macaw on page 44 should be *Ara couloni* not *Cyanopsitta spixii*.

I found the earlier edition of this book to be of great value in the field, especially when used in conjunction with de Schauensee and Phelps's 'Guide to the Birds of Venezuela'. Its usefulness has been enhanced greatly not just by having more species illustrated, but specifically by the inclusion of photographs of some of the species endemic to southern Chile and Argentina. Photos of these were notable by their absence in the previous edition, and the same species seem to have hitherto been illustrated almost only in Claes Olrog's 'Las Aves Argentinas', a book of dubious value. Conversely, the eventual publication of the four volume guide to all South American birds being prepared by Robert Ridgely and Guy Tudor (Volume 1 of which is now available though I have not seen it at the time of writing) may mitigate against the usefulness of Dunning's work. However, when one travels in South America, as anywhere, weight of baggage is a major concern and the fewer field guides the better. The birdwatcher or ornithologist about to visit South America will have to consider the merits of taking Ridgely and Tudor's four volumes against Dunning's one volume with fewer species. This could well be done in the light of the time one is planning to spend in South America and in what habitats, and indeed whether some groups interest one more than others. For these types of reasons it is not as easy for me to unconditionally recommend the purchase of Dunning's book as I would otherwise be inclined to do. For those with a strong interest in South American birds but who do not have the earlier edition, and for librarians of ornithological groups, it is certainly worth purchasing.

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