

1986 *A Guide to the Birds
of Colombia*

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Steven L. Hilty and

William L. Brown

Colombia is perhaps the world's most species-rich country, and yet it has become virtually inaccessible to international birders because of its ongoing civil war. Hilty and Brown's outstanding guide only compounds that irony, tempting readers with its marvelous illustrations

and precise and informative text. Robert Ridgely and John Gwynne's *Guide to the Birds of Panama* (see p. 97) had set the standard for Neotropical bird books a decade earlier, but building upon years of field- and museum work, Hilty and Brown's epic contribution managed to raise the bar still further. Indeed it could be argued that in terms of overall quality this guide has yet to be surpassed by any field guide to any region.

A Guide to the Birds of Colombia treats close to 1,700 species, more than half of all the birds found in South America. The sheer number of species, and relative paucity of information for many of them, presented the authors with staggering obstacles. Brown had begun research in Colombia in the 1960s, while Hilty's brilliant field skills were first brought to bear on the Colombian avifauna in 1971. The richly informative text and stunning artwork of wildlife artist and ornithologist Guy Tudor (who later received a MacArthur "genius" award) proved an irresistible combination. Moreover, the book covered many species found in contiguous countries Venezuela, Ecuador, and Brazil, for which there were no guides.

