

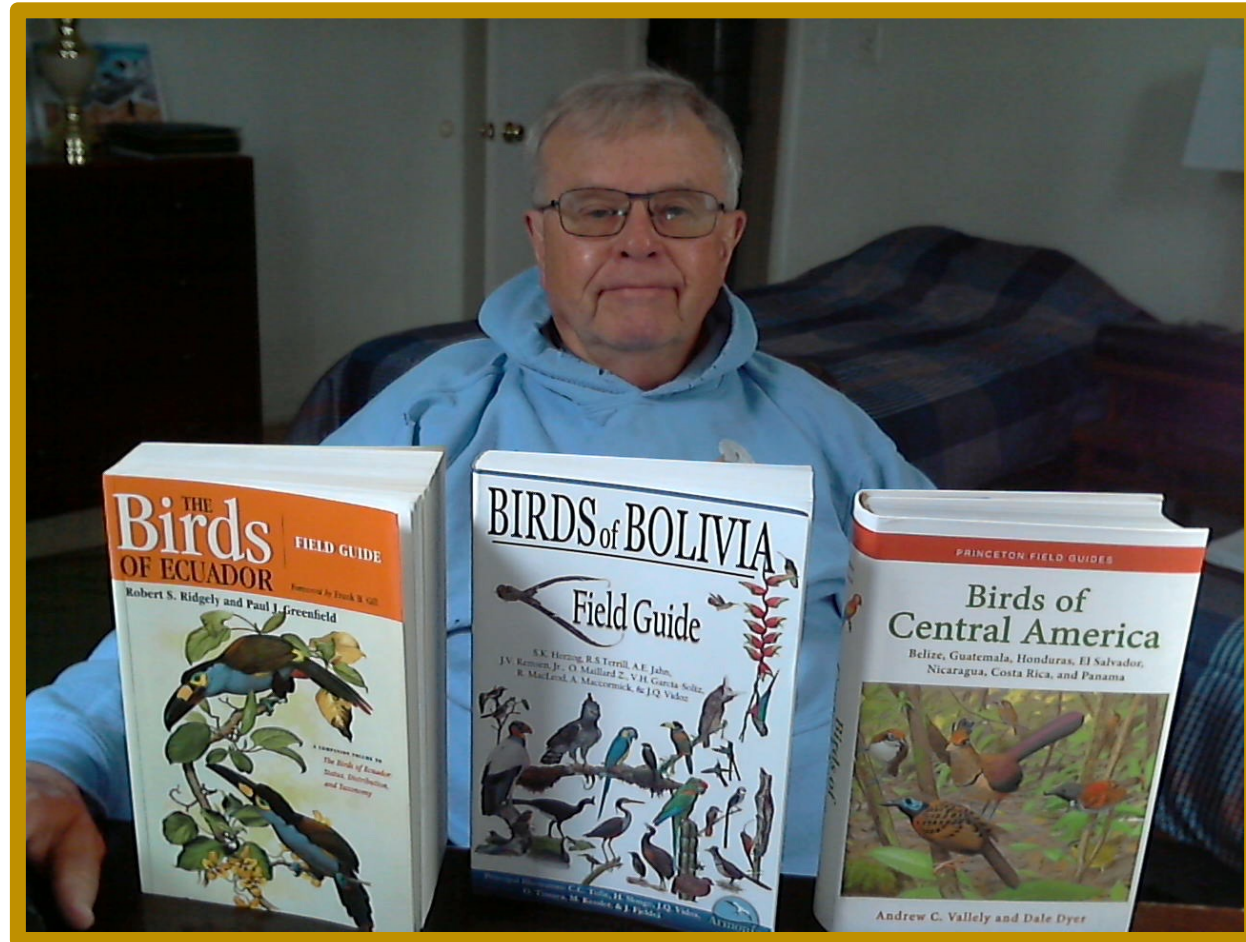
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[Preparing to Bird Central and South America](#)

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# So Why Central and South America ?





# A Quick Glance at My Life List in North America

- ❑ **Over 1020 bird species have been documented in the Continental U.S. and Canada**
  - ✓ According to the National Geographic Field Guide to Birds of North America
  - ✓ They consist of resident and migrant breeders with some vagrants
- ❑ **I have travelled extensively throughout this area**
  - ✓ And have seen 732 of these species
  - ✓ The last life bird being a Red-throated Pipit observed in Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, in September 2019



# Compare to South America

- South America boasts almost 3500 species**
  - ✓ Three and a half times the number found in the U.S. and Canada
- Of these, 2500 are endemic**
  - ✓ Meaning that they are found only in South America
- Some others migrate to North America to breed**
  - ✓ And then return in the fall to escape the North American winter





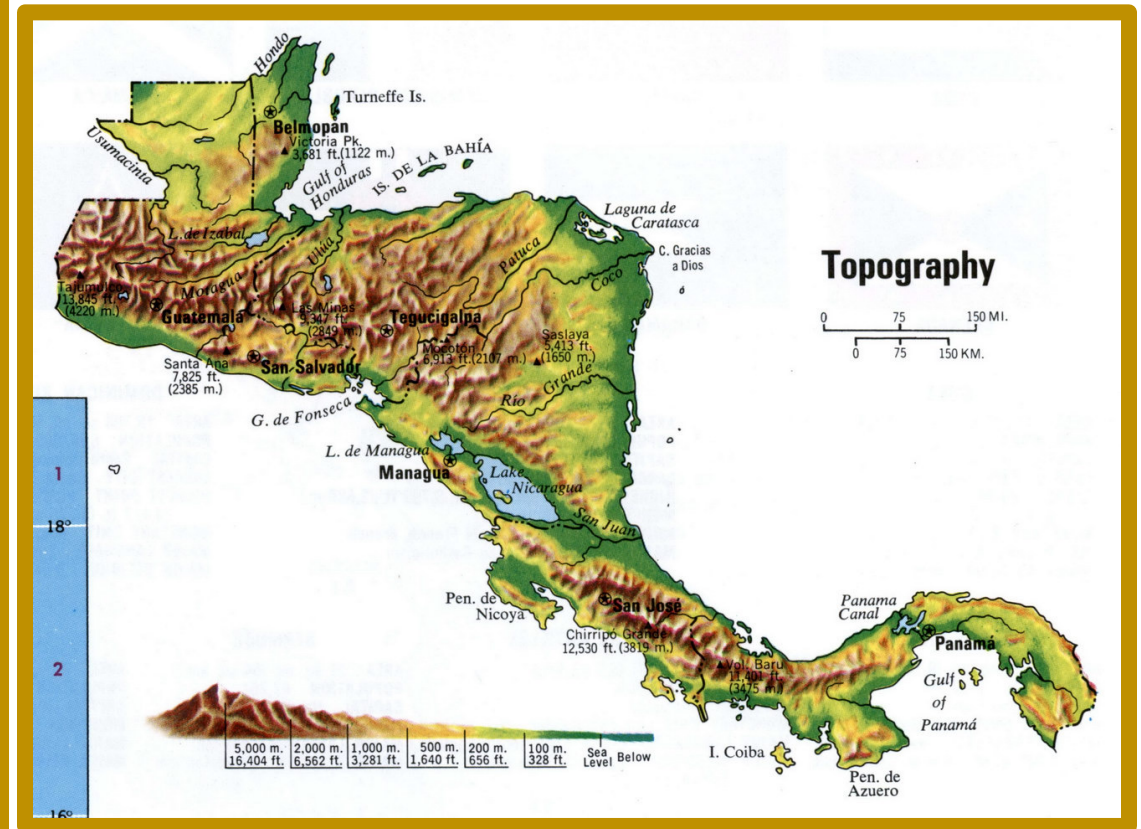
# The Role of Topography in Species Density

- ❑ Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil all host over 1800 avian species
- ❑ All four countries are within the Amazon River Basin
  - ✓ In which half of the world's remaining rain forests are located
- ❑ The topography in Ecuador, Peru, and Columbia also changes radically
  - ✓ From Coastal Plain to the Andes to the Amazon Basin in a small geographic area
  - ✓ Creating a great diversity of habitats and bird species



# Central America has Impressive Concentrations of Birds

- ❑ The seven countries comprising Central America are small
  - ✓ But have a vast variety of habitats in coastal areas, forests, and highlands
- ❑ Almost 1200 species can be found in Central America
  - ✓ That's more than have been recorded in the Continental U.S. and Canada
  - ✓ And nearly the same as in Mexico
- ❑ Central America is a mixing bowl
  - ✓ Combining representative species from both North and South America



# Range and Habitat Limitations for some Species

- ❑ **A dazzling array of species can be found in Ecuador and Peru**
  - ✓ But some have quite restricted ranges
  - ✓ Another product of topography
- ❑ **Take the Blue-mantled Thornbill**
- ❑ **This species is found in upland meadows or “paramo” in the Andes**
  - ✓ Between 11,800 and 13,700 feet
  - ✓ Where it inhabits small patches of woodland and scrub
  - ✓ Especially along steep and rocky areas



**The range of the Blue-mantled Thornbill is confined to high altitude meadows in the northern Andes Mountains**



# The Cotingas: Birds with a Latin Flair

- ❑ **Cotingas are a diverse family (Cotingidae) comprising 65 species**
  - ✓ Unique to Central and South America
- ❑ **They occupy a wide range of habitats**
  - ✓ And the various species often share little resemblance to each other
  - ✓ Some are stunningly beautiful and others quite bizarre
- ❑ **A gorgeous representative of the family is the Spangled Cotinga**
  - ✓ A common and widespread inhabitant of the forests of Amazonia



# The Beautiful Side of the Cotinga Family

The Pompadour Cotinga lives in lowland forests in Columbia, Venezuela, and the Guianas south to central Amazonia



While the Andean Cock-of-the-rock calls the cloud forests of the northern Andes Mountains home





## And the Absolutely Bizarre Side

**The White Bellbird with its single wattle, is restricted to the tall forests of the Guianas**



**And the Long-wattled Umbrellabird lives in lowland forests west of the Andes in Columbia and Ecuador.**





## And There Are Beautiful Manakins

- ❑ **The Manakins are a family (Pipridae) of small primarily fruit eating birds**
  - ✓ Consisting of 53 species
  - ✓ Ranging from Central America to northern Argentina and Chile
- ❑ **Males can be quite colorful while the females are drab and cryptic**
- ❑ **A dazzling example of this family of birds is the Swallow-tailed Manakin**
  - ✓ That resides in the Atlantic Forest of Southeastern Brazil and Paraguay



**A brilliant blue male Swallow-tailed Manakin**

## And Magnificent Trogons and Quetzals

- ❑ **Trogon and Quetzals (family Trogonidae) comprise 43 species**
- ❑ **They are berry and insect consuming birds found in a wide range of forest types**
  - ✓ In Central and South America, Africa, and Asia
- ❑ **The plumage often consists of vibrant greens, blues, reds, and yellows**
- ❑ **The Resplendent Quetzal lives in the Central American cloud forests**
  - ✓ And is a highly sought prize among birders



**A male Resplendent Quetzal in flight. This species plays a major role in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican mythology and is the national bird of Guatemala.**

# And a Host of Hummingbirds

- ❑ **The Hummingbird family (Trochilidae) is confined to the Western Hemisphere**
  - ✓ The vast majority of the nearly 350 species live in Central and South America
- ❑ **Hummingbird species are present in many habitat types**
  - ✓ From lowland deserts to high mountains
  - ✓ Feeding on nectar and small insects
- ❑ **The Booted Racket-tail occupies mid-elevation forests on both Andean slopes**
  - ✓ Ranging in subtropical and temperate zones from 5200 to 7200 feet

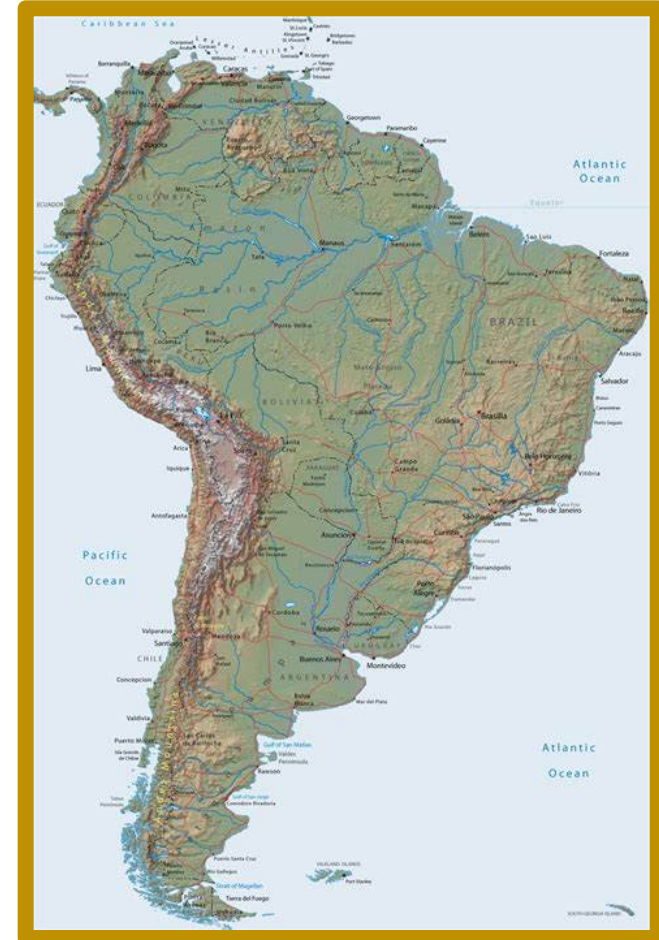


There are other hummingbird species besides Booted Racket-tail where the male has elongated tail feathers tipped with racket or club-shaped discs



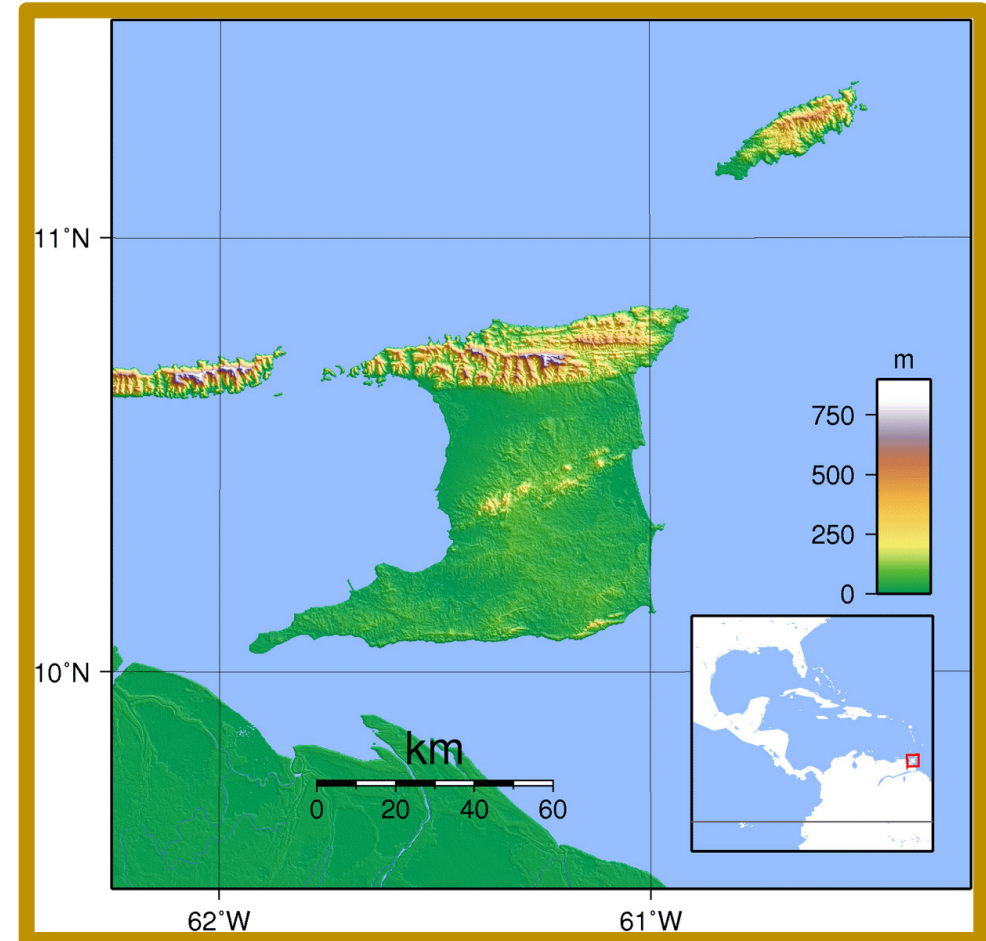
# Where to Make My First Visit

- Where the most birds are, I first thought**
  - ✓ Like the headwaters of the Amazon in Ecuador and Columbia with a side trip to the Andes
  - ✓ Or right to Amazonia in Brazil
  - ✓ There's the Cloud forests of the Central American highlands
- And I decided no**
  - ✓ Many sources talk about the sensory overload of too many birds on a first visit
  - ✓ The solution is to start with an “introductory” country and avoid being overwhelmed



# My First Choice Is Trinidad and Tobago

- ❑ A nation consisting of two continental islands off the Venezuelan coast
- ❑ Trinidad, the largest island, comprises 1850 square miles with
  - ✓ Three upland areas with the Northern Range hosting a cloud forest at 3100 feet
  - ✓ Lowland rainforests and seasonal forests
  - ✓ And a variety of wetlands, including mangrove swamps, and coastal mudflats
- ❑ Tobago, 22 miles northeast of Trinidad, contains a land area of 120 square miles
  - ✓ With both upland and flat terrain



# Your Gateway Country to Latin American Birding

- ❑ **Nearly 500 bird species have been documented in Trinidad and Tobago**
  - ✓ Many of which also occupy the nearby mainland
- ❑ **Here is the opportunity to become acquainted with the local avifauna**
  - ✓ Without being inundated with more species than you can process
- ❑ **And here you will encounter the famous Scarlet Ibis**
  - ✓ A permanent resident of mangrove swamps primarily in western Trinidad





# The Asa Wright Nature Center

- ❑ **The Nature Center is located at 1200 feet in the Northern Range**
  - ✓ And encompasses nearly 200 acres of tropical rain forest
- ❑ **Asa Wright is the most famous preserve in Trinidad and Tobago**
  - ✓ My visit is planned for February 2022 during the winter dry season
- ❑ **The Nature Center checklist totals over 160 bird species**
  - ✓ Representing some families that we have already discussed in this lecture

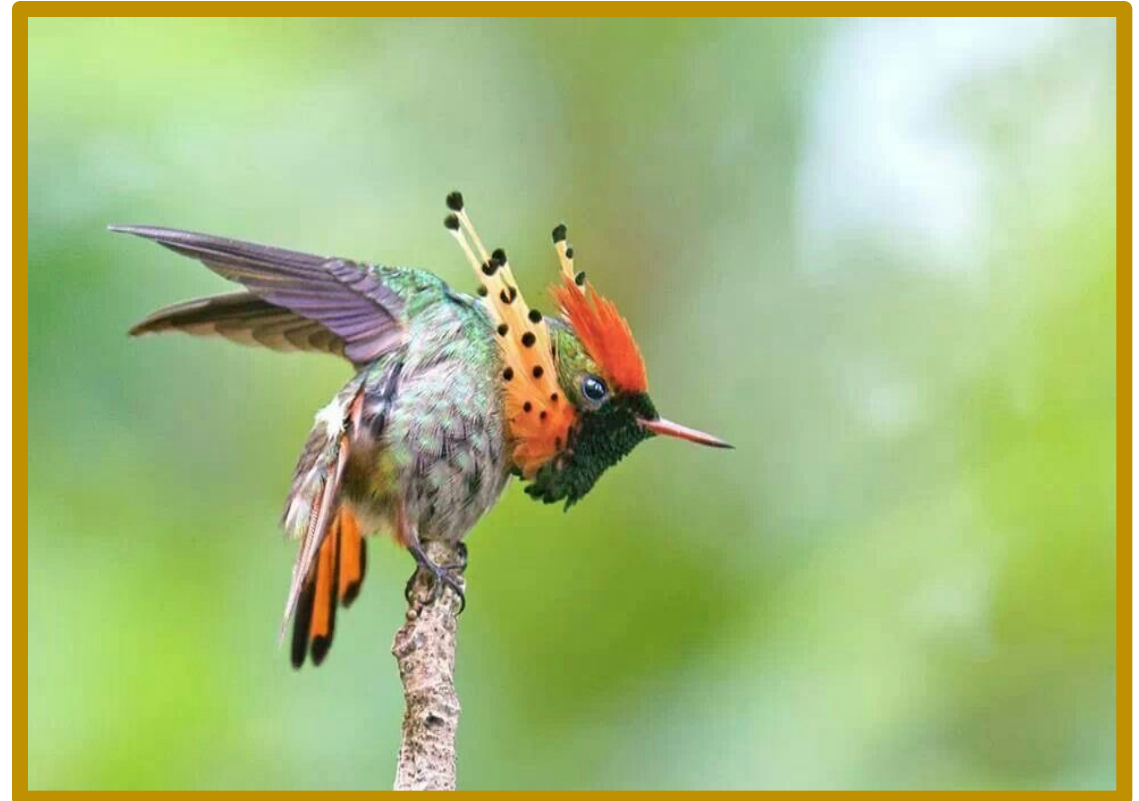


# The Birds of Asa Wright Include

**My first ever Cotinga, the Bearded Bellbird, named for all those wattles on the throat**



**And new hummingbirds to my delight, like the Tufted Coquette here, a colorful male**





And There Is the Stunning Ruby-topaz Hummingbird





# Asa Wright has A Toucan and The Oilbird

Asa Wright may be the easiest place in South America to find the fruit eating Channel-billed Toucan



The Oilbird nests in a nearby cave at Asa Wright. It is the only nocturnal fruit eating bird species in the entire world





# There Are Two Adorable Manakins on Trinidad

**The White-bearded Manakin, named for the fluffy white throat feathers that appear on the male**



**And the Golden-headed Manakin, named for the male's bright yellow hood**



## And a Third on Tobago

- In many cases, species found on one island are absent from the other
  - ✓ Like the nation's three Manakin species
- Trinidad hosts the White-bearded and Golden-headed Manakins
  - ✓ But neither are present on Tobago
- While the Blue-backed Manakin lives in drier lowland forests on Tobago
  - ✓ But is not resident on Trinidad
- Seems odd, since all three can be seen in Venezuela





## And Another Tobago Beauty

- ❑ **Although locally common in the central highland in Tobago**
  - ✓ As well as mountains in some areas of Venezuela
  - ✓ The White-tailed Sabrewing is not recorded on Trinidad
- ❑ **Like many birds on Trinidad and Tobago, the Sabrewing is easier to find on Tobago than Venezuela**
  - ✓ Another sound reason to make Trinidad and Tobago your first birding destination in Central or South America



# Destination Two is Paraguay

- ❑ A surprise perhaps because it's not a popular birding destination
  - ✓ And lacks the developed infrastructure of some of its neighbors
- ❑ Although none are endemic, Paraguay claims over 500 avian species
- ❑ Paraguay has two quite different ecosystems
  - ✓ One is the extension of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest into Paraguay
  - ✓ And the other is the semiarid Chaco that it shares with Brazil and Bolivia





# The Sampling of Two Worlds

**The Atlantic Forest is mostly composed of seasonal broad-leaf tropical forests, tropical grasslands, and scrub**



**While the Chaco is drier, has low human population density, but is rich in wildlife**





# Birds of the Atlantic Forest

- ❑ **The Short-tailed Antthrush is a widespread species**
  - ✓ Including a denizen of the Atlantic Forest lowlands of Paraguay and Brazil
- ❑ **Central and South America has many birds with ant as part of the name**
  - ✓ Antbird, Antwren, Antpitta, Antshrike, Antvireo, and Antthrush
  - ✓ All in different families
- ❑ **Many, but not all, follow army ants around snagging fleeing insects**



# The Tanagers of the Atlantic Forest

- The Green-headed Tanager brightens the upper tree canopy**
  - ✓ Where it dines on insects and fruit
  - ✓ But will happily forage at lower levels of second-growth trees or forest edge
- It often travels in small flocks**
  - ✓ With its own and other avian species, including other tanagers
- The entire range of the species lies within the Atlantic Forest**



## And the Beauty Continues

- The Red-necked Tanager is another Atlantic Forest dazzler**
- Its diet and foraging habits are nearly identical to other tanagers**
  - ✓ As it consumes insects and fruit taken from the lower tree canopy or below
- The ranges of the Red-necked and Green-headed Tanager overlap**
  - ✓ And frequently the two species can be seen in mixed species flocks
  - ✓ Which can be a real delight for birders in the Atlantic Forest of Brazil and Paraguay





# Rare and Unusual Nightjars

- ❑ **Paraguay has its share of nocturnal birds called nightjars**
  - ✓ Which are not restricted to either the Atlantic Forest or the Chaco
  - ✓ Or even to Paraguay
  - ✓ But Paraguay is a great place to see them
- ❑ **The White-winged Nightjar is a bird of open grasslands, a common habitat**
  - ✓ But seen in only four small locations in Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay
  - ✓ And the most reliable location to find them may be eastern Paraguay



# Odd Wings and Long Tails

The Sickle-winged Nightjar has a restricted range that includes southeastern Paraguay. Note the unusual wing shape on the male



The Scissor-tailed Nightjar has a large range that includes all of Paraguay. The male of this scrub dweller species has quite a long tail





# The Birds of the Chaco

- ❑ **The Chaco Eagle occupies open grassland habitat mixed with trees**
  - ✓ In central South America, including the Paraguayan Chaco
- ❑ **It is an impressively large bird over 2.5 feet long and weighing 13 pounds**
- ❑ **Prey items include a variety of mammals, especially armadillos**
- ❑ **The Chaco Eagle is a highly desirable bird to see**
  - ✓ But is endangered and declining





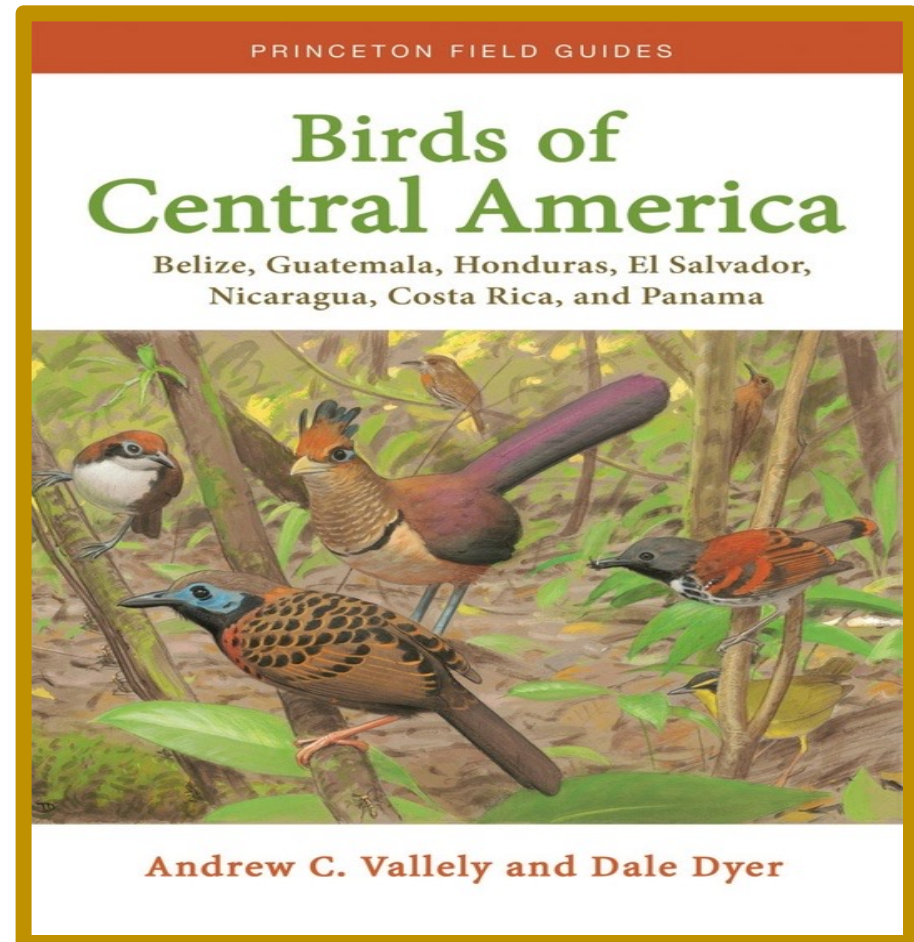
## And Don't Forget the Parrots

- Central and South America are known for its parrots**
  - ✓ That occupy a variety of habitats
- A particular attractive bird is the Nanday Parakeet**
  - ✓ That dwells in deciduous woodlands and palm stands
  - ✓ In the Brazilian Pantanal and the Paraguayan Chaco
  - ✓ Consuming seeds, nuts, fruits, and berries
- A feral population of this species is established in Florida**



## On to Destination Three

- ❑ So now I've planned for two introductory countries
  - ✓ With Trinidad and Tobago visited frequently by birders
  - ✓ And Paraguay not so much
- ❑ For my next destination I initially thought of Columbia, Ecuador, or Peru
- ❑ Then decided on Central America
  - ✓ Either Costa Rica or Panama would be the most popular choice
  - ✓ But I'm not always influenced by popularity





# I Finally Decide on Honduras

- ❑ Honduras is a small country of 43,250 square miles
  - ✓ But has recorded 770 bird species
- ❑ Just over 80 per cent of the country is mountainous with a temperate climate
  - ✓ With the highest peak at 9,000 feet hosting a cloud forest
  - ✓ And valleys of all sizes nestled between the mountains
- ❑ Coastal areas to the north and south have a tropical environment



# Why I Chose Honduras

- ❑ Honduras has a geological feature called the Honduran Depression
  - ✓ Depicted on the map with a blue line
- ❑ It is not a contiguous geological formation
  - ✓ But a composite of geological breaks in the landscape
- ❑ The feature has significance for birders visiting Central America
  - ✓ Because it defines either the western or eastern range limit of many regional endemic species





# The Honduran Depression and Hummingbirds

The beautiful Wine-throated Hummingbird is a restricted range bird inhabiting humid forests, forest edge, and scrub in Central America



The adorable little Snowcap fancies Central American forest living as well, including open wooded areas and second growth



# Notice the Ranges of these Two Hummingbirds

**The range of the Wine-throated Hummingbird extends from southern Mexico to the Honduran Depression**



**While the range of the Snowcap lies completely east of the Honduran Depression**





## A Second Hummingbird Example

The Green-throated Mountain-gem is found in humid forest habitat at higher elevations

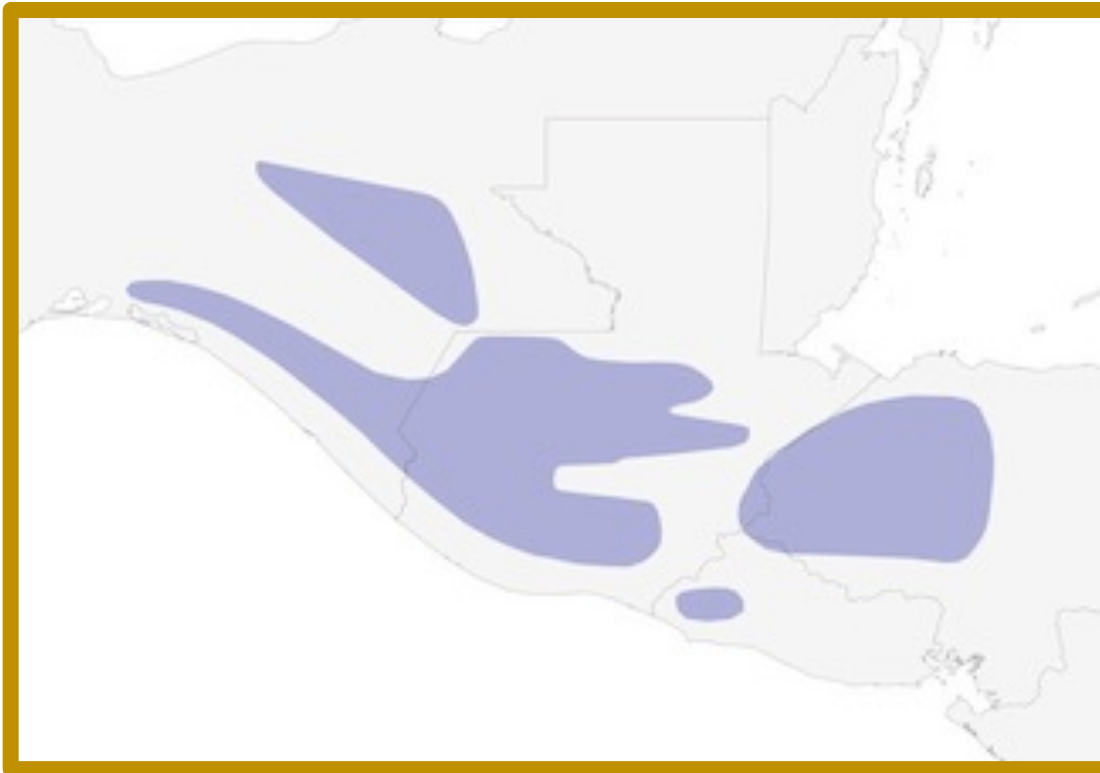
Which are like the habitat requirements favored by the closely related Green-breasted Mountain-gem





## And Their Ranges

The Green-throated Mountain-gem, like the Wine-throated Hummingbird, has a range entirely west of the Honduran Depression



While the extremely restricted range of the Green-breasted Mountain-gem is completely east of the Honduran Depression



# Chachalacas as a Final Example

**Plain Chachalacas are boisterous flock birds found in open forest, forest edge, and scrub. I saw them in south Texas**



**Gray-headed Chachalacas are also social birds favoring similar habitat as Plain Chachalacas, but with one difference**



## And that Difference is the Range

**Plain Chachalacas are found from southern Texas to western Honduras and northwestern Nicaragua**



**While its Gray-headed counterpart occupies an area from eastern Honduras to northwestern Columbia**





# The Honduran Appeal

- ❑ **I can find species in eastern Honduras different than the west**
  - ✓ In a short period of time by crossing the Honduran Depression
  - ✓ And Honduras hosts more species than Trinidad and Tobago or Paraguay
  - ✓ My Central and South American birding experience is becoming advanced
- ❑ **And Honduras has wondrous birds to behold even without the depression**
  - ✓ Like the Lovely Cotinga that dwells in the tropical lowlands



## And After That, Who Knows

- Probably Peru or Ecuador and the Andes
- Hmm, maybe Costa Rica or Panama
- Yea, but Guyana and Suriname has a bunch of neat cotingas
- And what about Patagonia in Argentina and Magellanic Penguins
- But I don't want to miss the Amazon
- Well, I just have more planning to

do



# It's Showtime

- Before we go to questions, let this male Red-capped Manakin from Ecuador entertain you with his [courtship dance](#)
- Male manakins are famous in Central and Latin America for their elaborate courtship performances
- And females decide what male they will breed with primarily based on the quality of the dance
- This sparked the idea for my next lecture
- SEXUAL SELECTION IN BIRDS**



# Questions?

