

EXPLORER FINDS RARE BIRDS IN WILDERNESS OF PERU

BY EMMET R. BLAKE
CURATOR OF BIRDS

THE BOX of birdskins delivered to my office that August day in 1955 bore the return address of a collector in Cusco, Peru. Such shipments are received from various sources around the world every year and may comprise a single specimen or total as many as several thousand. Often the processing of these collections is merely a routine matter of accessioning, identifying, and cataloguing the specimens preparatory to filing them away in laboratory cabinets for convenient reference as the need arises, sometimes months or even years later.

But this shipment was exceptional. Although totaling fewer than one hundred birdskins, these were the first to be taken in Departamento Madre de Dios, a heavily

led to the intensive study of maps and all pertinent literature, and to correspondence with individuals who might have information of value, and ultimately to my trip into the Amazonian forests of southeastern Peru.

Such was the genesis of the Museum's Conover Peru Expedition* which returned to Chicago late in 1958 after the successful conclusion of its field work. For me it had been a memorable experience that began shortly after dawn on June 1 when Panagra's crack airliner, *El Pacifico*, just twelve hours out of Miami, coasted through Lima's perpetually overcast sky and abandoned me to the courteous but enterprising attentions of the Peruvian customs officers.

INEVITABLE RED TAPE

The formalities were quickly finished and I was plunged almost at once into a seemingly endless round of conferences with governmental officials and others relative to the freeing of my guns, ammunition and other equipment from customs in the port of Callao. Days lengthened into weeks, frustration followed frustration, and my folio began literally to bulge with documents, but finally I was granted the freedom of the country. Fortunately, life in the "bush" offers few experiences as arduous as those which usually confront the leader of a scientific expedition entering a tropical American country. The field work that follows, be it light or ever so strenuous, seems a haven of repose by comparison.

I planned a leisurely canoe trip down Rio Madre de Dios from its turbulent headwaters to Puerto Maldonado. My specimens would be collected along the way and hunting camps in key localities might be occupied for as long as three weeks. Thus I could blanket much of Madre de Dios and in a single dry season bring together a collection that would be representative of the entire region.

Cusco, storied capital of the old Inca Empire and now a mecca for tourists, became for a time the base of my operations. The two-hour flight from Lima crosses the Andes at an altitude of 20,000 feet, permit-

ting breath-taking glimpses both of towering peaks capped with ice and of the great arid *alto plano* of the interior. But once in Cusco there was little time for sightseeing. While awaiting the arrival of my equipment by rail, it was necessary to pack field supplies and arrange for transportation to the eastern lowlands. Most important of all I needed to find and develop useful local "contacts." Among the latter was Dr. Ismael Ceballos, a young mammalogist and zoology professor of the University of Cusco, who agreed to assist me during the early stages of my field work near the sources of the Alto Madre de Dios.

Hacienda Villa Carmen, my first collecting station, is bounded by the Tono and Piña Piña rivers, tributaries of the stream I hoped to descend. Nearby, a dozen crude huts, one by courtesy designated a hotel, comprise the village of Pilcopata. Traveling by truck we reached the isolated community in a single day via a narrow dirt road that much of the way clings precariously to the sides of gorges. At several points battered remains of vehicles far below bore witness to the frequency of landslides. Happily the route was interesting and the scenery surpassingly beautiful. In a matter of hours we had the experience of descending from barren highlands, through luxuriant "cloud forests,"

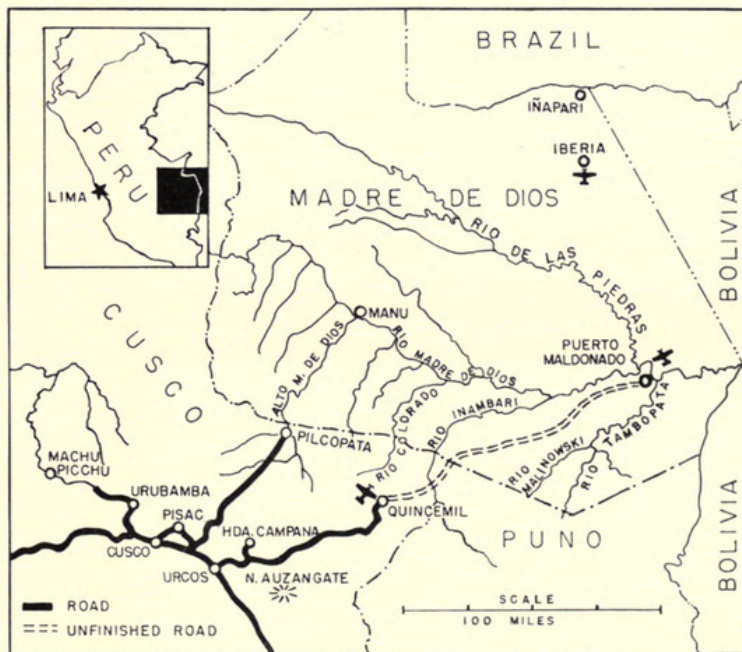


SEVEN-DAY WORK WEEK

And expedition toil often continues far into the night as well. Curator Blake here is seen preparing bird specimens in camp near mouth of Rio Inambari.

forested and largely unexplored region that extends from the Andean foothills eastward to the Brazilian and Bolivian frontiers. Several of the birds represented interesting extensions of range, others were forms new to our collections, and one obscurely-colored specimen, a member of the antbird family, I have since described as a distinct new species (*Formicarius rufifrons*).

I was especially pleased to find that many of the birds, including the new species, had been collected at the mouth of the Rio Colorado, a tributary of Rio Madre de Dios and home of the nomadic Mashco Indians of unsavory reputation. Obviously, these tribesmen were not so truculent as had been supposed, and indications were that a collecting trip through the heart of Madre de Dios might now be feasible. If a small collection so rich in novelties could be made almost at random by several natives traveling on a balsa raft, what might not be accomplished in the same region by a properly equipped Museum expedition? These heady thoughts



AREA IN SOUTHEAST PERU WHERE EXPEDITION OPERATED

to the humid lowlands. And with each marked change in vegetation there was a corresponding change in bird life that I always find fascinating.

Don Miguel Palomino, the owner of Villa Carmen, was for three weeks my genial host. He supervised our passage over the gorge of Rio Tono on a swaying platform

(Continued on page 6, column 1)

* Named for the late Boardman Conover, a Benefactor and former Trustee of the Museum, whose generous bequest made the Peruvian field work possible.



1. Mother suckling child



2. Woman with wrap-around skirt



3. Seated woman

Photographs by John A. ...

ANCIENT ART OF

By DONALD COLLIER, *Curator of S...*

TWO recently installed exhibits in Hall 8 (Ancient and Modern) of pre-Columbian clay sculpture from the Mexican states of Colima and Jalisco. Since our logical knowledge of western Mexico is meager, there are excellent examples of these sculptures from tombs in the area by pot-hunters. These sculptures, grouped roughly into the Nayarit style, found in Nayarit and Colima and Jalisco. These two styles had their beginnings in the late Pre-Christ and continued to flourish until about A.D. 700.

Nayarit sculpture (see cover and illustrations numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100) and sometimes the human figures appear to be caricatures.



8. Man with musical rasp

9. Kneeling woman



10. Woman with long hair



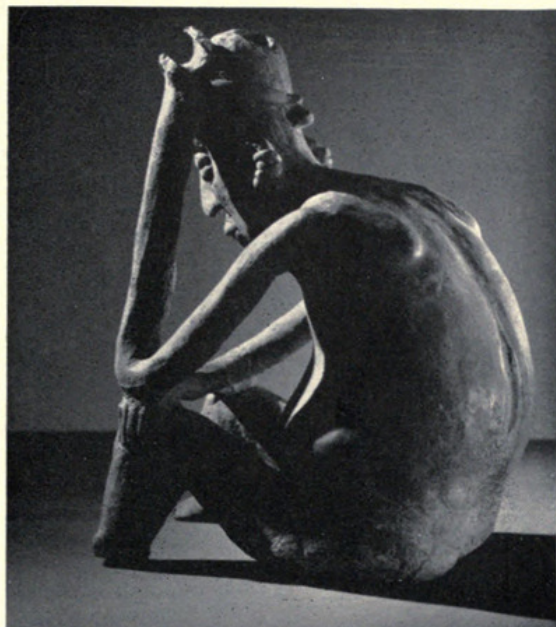
11. Seated woman





ig dog

and Homer V. Holdren



4. Thinking man



5. Warrior with armor and club

WESTERN MEXICO

American Archaeology and Ethnology

Indians of Mexico and Central America) display examples of Nayarit, Jalisco and Colima. Although systematic archaeological private and museum collections of art objects removed which range from a few inches to two feet in height, can be the adjoining part of Jalisco, and the Colima style, found in during the Archaic or Formative stage several centuries before

(8, 9, 11) is characterized by simplification and exaggeration, men and women are depicted, engaged in workaday, ceremonial, or warlike activities. Their clothing, ornaments and body painting are shown by modeling, incising, and both positive and negative (resist) painting. A good example of this depiction of detail is the warrior shown at the right (No. 5) who wears armor of basketry and quilted cotton and carries a stone-headed club. The larger figures are hollow and have an opening at the top of the head.

Colima-style figures (illustrations 2, 3, 6, 7, 10) are naturalistic, refined and elegant. Instead of the mat, polychrome-painted surfaces of Nayarit sculpture, they have highly burnished red, brown, or black surfaces without textural or painted elaboration. The women have strong, tranquil faces and a pleasant solidity. The Colima sculptors also depicted mammals, birds, reptiles, fish and shellfish. Their favorite animal was the dog, of which they made a great variety of hollow effigies. Dogs were raised by the ancient Mexicans both for food and sacrificial offerings. It is not clear whether the Colima clay dogs were placed in tombs as food offerings or to represent dogs sacrificed at the funerals to assist their masters in the difficult journey to the land of the dead.



6. Hairless dog

7. Seated man



IN PERUVIAN WILDERNESS—

(Continued from page 3)

suspended beneath a cable. As we dangled high above the cataracts, I was relieved to learn that even a dismantled truck had once made the same trip in safety. We were soon installed in our quarters—the entire second



READY FOR VOYAGE ON RIVER THROUGH JUNGLE

Members of the expedition aboard launch. Curator Blake is the one wearing hat. Juan Neuenschwander is seen at his left.

story of Casa Palomino. The breezeway became my laboratory through which was channeled an endless flow of birds that required my prompt attention. Shooting birds is only the first and often the easiest step in preparation of museum specimens. To become of any use to science they must also be skinned and stuffed, labeled, catalogued, dried, and finally packed for shipment. There are doubtless easier ways to pass one's time in the glamorous tropics.

A typical work day—and there are seven to the week for bird collectors—begins at dawn and continues until the last specimen has been cared for. Birds are most active during the early morning hours and a successful hunt usually provides work that may continue into the nights. At Villa Carmen, and later in Madre de Dios, I went hunting as time permitted, but largely depended upon the prowess of two local Indians, who were provided with guns and ammunition. Separately, we scoured the plantation itself and roamed the wooded hills in a relentless search for birds of widest variety.

The collection grew rapidly. It soon filled to overflowing my specimen trunks, and in the space of several weeks came to include all of the common species and many of the rarer ones. Some of the birds were brilliantly colored and others drab, some large and some small. When studied in its entirety, so representative a collection from an area of transition between mountains and lowlands will almost certainly throw new light on problems of distribution.

My carefully weighed plan to descend the

river by canoe had to be abandoned when Don Miguel announced that rapids of the headwaters would be impassable until the October rains. By way of humoring my disbelief he took me on a short cruise from which I returned wiser, as well as drenched, shaken and considerably chastened. The necessity of "playing it by ear" as circumstances dictate often becomes standard procedure in the field. Although disappointed, I hastened back to Cusco to work out plans for an attempt on the Madre de Dios from the lower, or Puerto Maldonado end.

The chance remark of a casual acquaintance led me to Señor Juan Neuenschwander, a man whose personal qualifications and boat equipment based at Puerto Maldonado virtually assured the success of my subsequent field work. We came to an agreement as to costs and procedures, hastily packed two months' supplies, and set out for the capital of Madre de Dios. The first half of the journey was overland by a one-way road that attains an altitude of 18,000 feet before plunging into the lowlands. A brief airplane flight from Quincemil to our destination offered a birdseye view of the unbroken tropical forest that would be our home for many weeks.

A FLOATING LAB

Neuenschwander's boat, the *Neutron*, was a 35-foot steel-hulled launch powered by an ancient Buick engine of uncertain temperament. The small cabin for'ard served as a floating laboratory where I worked when under way. We also towed a large canoe fitted with a powerful outboard motor for use in rapids, and for collecting on smaller streams.

The *Neutron*'s crew included two veteran rivermen who doubled as hunters—among the best I've ever known. The "motorista" also cooked, served meals, washed clothes and cared for the expedition mascots. In time these came to include a brace of baby peccaries, a large tortoise, several parakeets, a young white-faced night monkey and a testy red howler. The latter was a most ungrateful beast that bit hands, gorged on our last plantains, and deserted us at the first opportunity.

A preliminary shakedown cruise seemed in order before undertaking the long and difficult trip up the Madre de Dios. For this I selected a large tributary stream, Rio

Tambopata, where valuable collections might be made. Our days on the river were much alike. Breakfast was finished and camp broken by the time the sun was melting away the river mist; but not before enough birds had been shot to keep me busy at the skinning-table until well into the afternoon. As I worked, the motor strained against the current hour after hour, for as much as ten hours a day. Usually the noon meal was eaten aboard while under way. Finally, just before dark, we tied up at a convenient sandbank where supper was quickly cooked. Sometimes we went out later to jacklight owls and nightjars, or to fish. But more often the fire was dead and the camp stilled by 8 P.M.

Our highest point on Rio Tambopata, and main collecting locality, was at the furthestmost civilized habitation, a rubber hunter's site a little below the mouth of Rio Malinowski. Here we found several miles of forest trails that were ideal for hunting purposes. I commandeered one of the three thatch huts and set up shop on a porch overlooking a magnificent sweep of the river.

Collpa was a place of much activity from the pre-dawn hours until nightfall. Outlying rubber hunters and their families drifted in and out at intervals and the yard seemed always overflowing with puppies, chickens, and dusky, beady-eyed children. The heat was often unbearable, the insects insufferable, and the curiosity of the natives insatiable. But the area teemed with game, and with birdlife of such astonishing abundance and variety that I regretted the necessity of returning to Puerto Maldonado after a visit of only three weeks.

INTO REAL WILDERNESS

The distance by river between Puerto Maldonado and the Piro Indian village of Manu is roughly twice that as a macaw flies. The trip can be made in little more than a week by motorized canoe, but we stretched it out for a month in order to collect along the way. On leaving Puerto Maldonado, plantations soon drop behind and the region beyond is virtually uninhabited, even by Indians.

Game was everywhere plentiful. We saw no jaguars, but their tracks and those of tapir, peccary, capybara, and deer were conspicuous on almost every mudbank. As we plowed somewhat noisily upstream, flocks of large-billed terns and skimmers rose from the gleaming *playas* in fright and often the boat was paced by heavily-winged herons of several varieties. From time to time green and blue kingfishers, some little larger than sparrows, darted across our bow. Flocks of screeching parrots and raucous-voiced bright-plumed macaws streamed high overhead toward distant fruiting trees. At almost every turn in the river we flushed cormorants, anhingas, ducks, crested screamers, wood ibises, and jabirus. And now and again we

caught brief glimpses of more retiring birds—sungrebes, sunbitterns, tanagers and others.

Established camps are essential to serious bird collecting. While ascending the Madre de Dios we occupied several for as much as ten days each. The daily routine at these bases was much like that at Collpa, on Rio Tambopata, but I preferred to work and to sleep ashore under a large tarpaulin erected on the wooded embankment. There, in the absence of local natives, interruptions were at a minimum. As our time ran out, the pressure of collecting increased and it was a rare day when the growing collection was

area supported a population numbered in thousands. Today there remain fewer than two dozen scattered thatch huts, the homes of phlegmatic Piro Indians. Fortunately, the single industry, a primitive sawmill, afforded me both shelter and a base of operations. The mill shed was small and littered, but space for my hammock and skinning table was found on either side of the shuttling log carriage. As I worked, the shrieking buzz-saw at my elbow presumably drowned out any opinions I may have voiced relating to the rain, the heat, the insects—and the noise.



ASCENDING RIO MADRE DE DIOS

The course of the expedition boat was flanked by unbroken walls of tropical forest.

not enhanced by the addition of at least several new species. One, a partridge-like tinamou, is undoubtedly new to science, and several others may yet prove to be so.

The dry season, affording optimum collecting conditions, held through September and into October. But, as the weeks slipped by, angry black thunderheads began to form in the hills far to the westward, lightning scored the skies at night, and showers became increasingly a daily occurrence. Then came the seasonal rains, the almost continuous drizzle punctuated by cloudbursts of torrential proportions that would continue through February, raise the rivers by as much as twenty feet, and inundate most of the region.

Our sheltered camp near the mouth of Rio Colorado was almost swamped out by the first storm and we were never dry thereafter. Hunting continued, but birds became difficult to find in the dim, dripping woods and the finished specimens almost impossible to dry. We remained for a week longer, but finally accepted the inevitable and pushed on to Manu. There I remained to round out the collection after releasing the *Neutron* and its crew for a speedy return home on the crest of the flood.

Tradition has it that fifty years ago, at the height of the rubber boom, the Manu

Field work of the Conover Peru Expedition was concluded at Manu toward the end of October. By a stroke of good fortune I found passage up the Alto Madre de Dios to Hacienda Villa Carmen, head of navigation, as supercargo in a mammoth dugout canoe powered by an outboard. For us the usual three-day trip required a week—a week that I'll long remember as a period of minor vexations, physical discomfort, short rations (for in time even monkey stew becomes disenchanting as a steady diet), and occasional near catastrophe in the swollen waters. But arrive we did, to be welcomed appropriately by Señor Palomino. That same night I crossed the now raging Rio Tono, bag and baggage, by cable platform during a driving rainstorm and boarded a truck for the long climb back to Cusco.

All in all it had been a varied and interesting field trip, though largely routine as such things go. The scientific results will not be known for some time to come. First, the thousand-odd birds must be identified and catalogued, the new forms described and named, and the entire collection studied critically as steps in the preparation of the final technical report. In this manner, little by little, slowly and sometimes painfully, we learn more about the world around us, and of the myriad creatures that inhabit it.

CURATOR TO MAKE STUDY IN BELGIAN CONGO

On February 8, Dr. Robert F. Inger, Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles, and his wife, Mary Lee, will leave for the Belgian Congo. Dr. and Mrs. Inger are going at the request of the Institut des Parcs Nationaux du Congo Belge in conjunction with a study of amphibians from the Parc National de la Garamba. This park is located in the northeastern portion of the Belgian Congo. The principal objectives of the field work are a survey of amphibian habitats and the collection and rearing of tadpoles.

In collaboration with the late Dr. Karl P. Schmidt who was Curator Emeritus of Zoology, Dr. Inger prepared a report on amphibians from another national park in the Belgian Congo, the Parc National de l'Upemba. It was as an outgrowth of the Upemba study that the Institut des Parcs Nationaux asked Dr. Inger to work on the amphibians of the Garamba.

ANIMALS AT NIGHT IN AUDUBON FILM

The first film of its kind—"Animals at Night in Color"—will be shown by the Illinois Audubon Society in the fourth of its current series of screen-tours on Sunday afternoons in the James Simpson Theatre of the Museum. This unique film will be accompanied by a lecture by Howard Cleaves. The movie, made by means of special techniques which Cleaves developed for the purpose, will be presented on February 22 at 2:30 P.M. Cleaves stalked and captured in color pictures the wildlife of Horicon Marsh in Wisconsin, the Okefenokee Swamp of Georgia, and other localities rich in animal inhabitants. Under the spell of strong beams of light employed by Cleaves, many timid birds and other animals became transfixed. Among those which appear in the film are grebes, plover, green-winged teal, chimney swifts, gray foxes, skunks, deer, alligators, raccoons, ospreys, coots and great blue herons.

Members of the Museum and their guests are cordially invited to attend the lecture.

Attendance Exceeds a Million for 32nd Year in a Row

The number of visitors received at the Museum during 1958 was 1,049,401, marking the 32nd successive year in which attendance has exceeded a million. As always, the great majority of visitors were admitted free of charge. There were 887,808 or more than 84 per cent in this group, which includes those coming on the free days (Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays), and children, teachers and students who are admitted free on all days.



Reynoso, Alvaro. 1959. "Explorer Finds Rare Birds in Wilderness of Peru."
Bulletin 30(2), 3-7.

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