



Ash-throated Antwren (*Herpsilochmus parkeri*), painted by John P. O'Neill. The male, top right, has an ashy gray throat, while the female, bottom left, has a strikingly buffy breast. The bird was discovered by O'Neill and Tristan J. Davis.

TED PARKER'S ANTWREN

by John P. O'Neill

In 1983, Tristan J. Davis and I made an expedition into the isolated hills between the Mayo and Huallaga rivers in northern Peru. The area was chosen mainly because it was still unknown as far as the distribution of Peruvian birds was concerned. We also considered the degree of isolation of the area, and the elevations that could be reached. By talking to locals, we located an old mule trail from Mayobamba on the Río Mayo to Yurimaguas on the Río Huallaga, and determined that it should cross a ridge at 1200m or more. This was a good elevation for upper tropical zone birds.

What we did not expect was a mosaic of habitats, caused by the scattered exposure of poor quality quartz sand

soil that supported a seemingly xeric, somewhat stunted flora in an area of relatively high annual rainfall. In protected areas and along watercourses, there was good-quality soil supporting moderately to well-developed humid forest, with a canopy height of approximately 30 m, and a fairly well-developed covering of epiphytes.

One of the first birds Davis saw was a Sharpbill (*Oxyruncus cristatus*), always an indication that the elevation and habitat will support an interesting avifauna. In the drier, more stunted vegetation were Red-shouldered Tanagers (*Tachyphonus phoeniceus*), Royal Sunangels (*Heliangelus regalis*), Napo Sabrewings (*Campylopterus villaviscensio*), Wing-barred Wood-wrens (*Henicorhina leucp-*

tera), and other species special to poor-soil ridges. In the humid forest, the avifauna was more typical of humid upper tropical zone forest, with ovenbird/antbird flocks, *Tangara* tanager groups, and other birds commonly found in the habitat.

In the humid forest near the areas of stunted forest, we began to see small black-and-white birds that we identified as *Herpsilochmus* antwrens. Soon thereafter we collected specimens of buffy-breasted birds that had to be the females. A thorough study of the available books was not conclusive, but we were fairly certain that there was no *Herpsilochmus* antwren known from northern Peru, and no species in which the male had an ashy gray throat, and in which the female was so strikingly buffy on the breast.

Through the years we have learned to be careful when thinking that something might represent an undescribed species. But the thought was present. When we returned to the United States, we quickly made comparisons with material in the Louisiana State University Museum of

Natural Science collections, and looked at all available literature. Davis and I were then convinced that the bird did represent a new species.

We had the very highest regard and admiration for our good friend and colleague Ted Parker, and very easily and quickly decided that we would name the bird after him. It was even more appropriate, because Ted deeply loved antbirds! We prepared the manuscript and I painted a color plate for a frontispiece (part of which is reproduced here). The description of the Ash-throated Antwren (*Herpsilochmus parkeri*) was then published in the *Wilson Bulletin* (Vol. 98, No. 3, pp. 337–352) in 1986. Ted was very pleased with this honor, but we knew that he wanted to see the bird, make his own tape recordings, and compare the voice of all members of the genus before he could be 100 percent sure that the bird should be given full status. That was just the way he was.

Ted was never able to see “his” bird and make those comparisons. First, he became more and more involved in his passionate conservation work, and rarely had time to go off on his own or with friends to simply study birds.

And then the tragic plane accident occurred, that took his life and ended all of his dreams and desires. Both Tristan Davis and I are now very grateful that we did not hesitate to finish the description of this species and get it into print. Ted knew about his bird, and for this we are happy.

In the years to come, there will be up-and-coming young ornithologists who will study Neotropical birds, and birdwatchers who travel to the tropics. We hope they will enjoy birds in areas saved because of the influence of Theodore A. Parker III. We hope they know of his legacy, forever preserved in the name of the Ash-throated Antwren, *Herpsilochmus parkeri*.

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Theodore A. Parker III 1953–1993

by Kenn Kaufman

FORTY YEARS, FOUR MONTHS, and four days. That was all there was between his life's beginning, in Pennsylvania, and its abrupt ending against the side of an Ecuadorian mountain in August 1993. But in the achingly brief span between those two endpoints, he traced a high trajectory that no one else could match. His friends look back now at the bright arc of his passage, and we try to comprehend what we had in Ted Parker, and what the world has lost.

Throughout the late 1970s and the 1980s, Ted was rewriting our knowledge of South American birds.

It's even hard to know what to call him. Wasn't he a birder? Sure; he was a birder just like Jesus was a wandering preacher. In knowledge and understanding and skill, he towered above all the other “birders.” On the other hand, the term *ornithologist* could mislead—at least in this era, when ornithologists sit at desks and send out students to do heavy mathematics. Parker would not come in from the field, because the field was the source of all original knowledge. You can say he was a field ornithologist, then; and, if you accept the biased testimony of this close friend,

say he was the greatest field ornithologist of my generation.

Do not imagine that the preceding statement is just hyperbole inspired by grief. I would have written the same thing (though in a different tone) a month ago, before they brought us the news of the plane crash. Simply stated, Parker knew the birds of the Neotropics, the American tropics, far better than anyone else ever had; and the Neotropical region is by far the world's richest area for birds.

In the stretch between Texas and Tierra del Fuego, nearly half of all bird species are packed into one-sixth of the world's land area. A single square mile of Amazonian forest may harbor more than 500 bird species. The richest habitats are mostly dense forests, where the birds are often hard to see, and none of those birds can be named just on range or on assumptions: That skulker glimpsed in the undergrowth could easily be something unknown to science, or unknown within a thousand miles of here. In other words, the birds of the Neotropics are the most difficult, challenging birds on Earth. Ted Parker went to the Neotropics to seek out that challenge, and he came to know those birds more thoroughly than anyone else in history.

The knowledge of Neotropical birds, as late as the beginning of the 1970s, was still fairly primitive compared to any other part of the world. Reference works on the distribution