
mingbirds and chickadees are “disturbed” by coming to bird feeders). We don’t want to overfeed them, and we hope to “train” another pair, but the others will be left totally alone, and tape playback for the Jocotoco Antpitta is now forbidden.

Tapichalaca Reserve hosts a wide variety of other rare Andean birds, and there’s a great place to stay where you can warm up and celebrate after your forays into some of the most beautiful montane forests around. Please come and enjoy our very special hospitality, and our very special birds. Especially the Jocotoco Antpitta!

Your contribution can help protect and secure critical threatened bird habitat for future generations. In making a contribu-

tion, you will also promote a community-based conservation model that can benefit birds and people the world over.

In the areas we have targeted, land is generally of marginal agricultural value and can be purchased for US \$250/ha (\$100/acre) or less. \$5,000 can add a significant block of forest to an existing reserve. \$25,000 can purchase a 250-acre farm with most of its habitat intact. US\$250,000 can secure the core area of a reserve.

We encourage you to contact us and become involved in this effort. For more information, please contact me at Mercedes@neblinaforest.com or 1-800-538-2149; in the US, write to info@worldlandtrust-us.org.

PETE’S TIPS: Pain in the Neck

BY PETE DUNNE

Her name was Mary. She was a lithe, young, intelligent, vibrant, granola-munching naturalist-living-on-a-shoe-string-budget, and she drove a vintage Chevy distinguished by a bumper sticker that read “Shoot the Bee Gees.”

Of course I loved her. Everybody did.

Her dowry included a pair of magnum-sized WWII binoculars that had probably been part of the accessory package that complemented Sherman tanks, and while most people carried their binoculars around their necks, Mary always toted hers in her hand.

“Why do you do that?” I asked one day.

“Hurts my neck to wear them,” she replied.

The shoelace that served as the instrument’s neck strap ensured that this was so. It went with the budget.

Hopes are that your current income bracket is several sizes larger than a granola-munching naturalist’s, but you may still be suffering from the same problem as Mary. Binoculars are, very literally, a pain in the neck, and many people find it impossible to wear their instruments in the classic fashion with the narrow straps often provided by the manufacturer. Here are some tips.

First, and most obvious, be conscious of the instrument’s mass. Binoculars vary in size and weight, with some weighing in at 50-plus ounces (i.e., over three pounds) and some weighing less than one pound. Most instruments these days seem to range between 24 and 28 ounces, which suits most people; but there are fine, and sometimes very fine, instruments that weigh less. If neck pain is one of your guiding concerns when choosing optics, it only stands to reason that where weight is concerned, less is more. Buy accordingly.

Wide straps distribute weight more broadly and comfortably. In general, binocular manufacturers have made neck straps wider in the past several decades or have designed straps to widen across the back of the neck. The very popular 1 1/2-inch-wide neoprene straps (which just about every birding organization embellishes with its logo) promise to make instruments feel 50% lighter,

and they do. But neoprene seems to trap heat and in hot, muggy climates—the kind of climate that many aspired-to birds (and chiggers) seem to favor—neoprene can feel uncomfortable.

Harness systems that take the weight off the neck and distribute it across the shoulders are popular. The downside is that they require a bit of dressing and undressing to get in and out of. The binocular harness and the old dress-in-layers system suggested for personal climate control are clearly concepts hatched on different planets.

Me? A bunch of years ago I discovered that wearing my binoculars bandolier-fashion (bins slung over one side of my neck and resting beneath the opposing arm, pocket-book style) keeps the weight off my neck and instruments at the ready. I got the idea back when I was banding songbirds and got tired of constantly disentangling my binoculars from nets. In time I learned the comfort benefits as well as the advantage of keeping binoculars under my arm when the skies conspired to foul my ocular lenses with rain and/or snow.

It also looks real rakish, in case you are one of those one-in-a-thousand birders who are vain about their appearance.

Some female birders advise me that the strap-across-the-chest method cuts across the comfort grain. OK. I can see that. Recently a detractor, and a harness-firster, confided to me that in addition to its weight-distribution advantages, the harness system “lifts and separates.”

I wonder if the manufacturers know this.

Pete Dunne is the Director of New Jersey Audubon’s Cape May Bird Observatory and the author of numerous books, including Pete Dunne on Bird Watching, Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Guide Companion, and The Art of Fishing. “Pete’s Tips” appears in each issue of Winging It.