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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The birds of the
Amazon and the
science of São Paulo

Mariluce Moura

EDITOR IN CHIEF

The cover story on page 6 of this fourth 2013 international issue of the magazine *Pesquisa FAPESP* reports on the simultaneous description of 15 new species of birds in the Brazilian Amazon in scientific articles published in June, 2013 in a special volume of *Handbook of the birds of the world*, a fundamental reference work for professional and amateur ornithologists. The work represents an extremely important Brazilian contribution to the understanding of biodiversity and, at the same time, signifies the greatest discovery in Brazilian ornithology in at least 140 years. Eleven of the new species described are endemic to Brazil, and four of them are also found in Peru and Bolivia. Together, they represent a nearly 1% increase in the known biodiversity of birds in Brazil, today totaling almost 1,840 species of birds, a number second only to that of Colombia, which has approximately 1,900 species.

Usually, the scientific discovery of new species is published in specialized journals rather than in books. However, in this case, the importance and singularity of the body of information described led the authors to decide to gather their material together in the 17-volume collection *Handbook of the birds of the world*. Each species has been described in a scientific article identical to what would normally be published in a peer-reviewed academic journal. Although birds are the most studied vertebrates in biology, ornithologists say that there is still much to be learned about them. And Brazilian museums contain many specimens from different biomes including the Amazon forest that will certainly be described in the coming years.



One of the new species, a scythebill called the *arapaçu-de-bico-torto*

Those who like prospective studies, or just enjoy dreaming about the future, will find a wealth of raw materials from which to imagine possible scenarios in the panorama of scientific research in São Paulo over the next ten years, given the new list of 17 Research, Innovation and Dissemination Centers (RIDCs) announced by FAPESP in May 2013. Of course, there are always uncertainties and imponderable interventions— in addition to the possibility of economic and political changes—which would lead to unforeseen paths in the mists of what's to come. But, with this proviso, the \$680 million to be invested in these centers over the next 11 years, \$370 million of which will come from FAPESP and \$310 million will be provided in the form of salaries paid by the host institutions to the researchers and technical personnel involved, will without a doubt substantially contribute to the future structure and major thrust of scientific knowledge production in this state within a decade.

These centers focus on research in such diverse areas as neuromathematics and mathematics applied to industry, neuroscience and neurotechnology, the development of new drugs and cell therapies, inflammatory diseases and obesity, biomedicine, new glass and ceramic materials, optics and photonics, com-

putational science and engineering, studies of metropolitan areas and studies of violence, to name a few, all being developed in the decentralized, exciting research environment in the state of São Paulo. This creates a rich, multifaceted profile for the state's science and technology sector, in line with the major trends in international research, and simultaneously taking into account local idiosyncrasies that must be understood and overcome (such as the contemporary phenomenon of violence). All RIDCs must, first and foremost, work to remain at the cutting edge of knowledge. And, secondly, the centers must be intrinsically committed to creating knowledge, to generating innovations derived from this knowledge that can be effectively used by society, and to disseminating this knowledge and these innovations to society. This is the role of the RIDCs in the best policies to increase Brazil's scientific culture.

Note that these centers will initially hire 535 researchers from São Paulo and 69 other countries, a respectable team for a notable effort to increase and broaden the impact of Brazilian science developed in the state of São Paulo. More details are in the report that begins on page 28.

Enjoy!