

Southern Ecuador: Birding & Nature With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



November 6 – 19, 2017

866.900.1146

800.426.7781

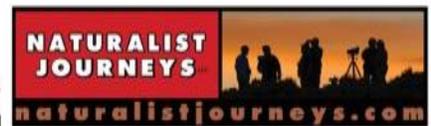
520.558.1146

naturalistjourneys@gmail.com

www.naturalistjourneys.com

or find us on Facebook at

Naturalist Journeys, LLC



Naturalist Journeys, LLC / Caligo Ventures PO Box 16545 Portal, AZ 85632 PH: 520.558.1146 / 800.426.7781
Fax 650.471.7667 naturalistjourneys.com / caligo.com info@caligo.com / naturalistjourneys@gmail.com

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The Andes Mountains of Southern Ecuador are highly complex, providing a great variety of habitats within a small geographic area. For decades, birders have recognized the region's rich biodiversity; now lodgings at the Jocotoco Foundation Reserves make it possible to stay in incredible places with nature close at hand.

We stay in two Jocotoco Foundation reserves, at Buenaventura, in the foothills of the western side of the Andes, and at Tapichalaca, adjacent to the magnificent Podocarpus National Park. Delightful Copalinga Lodge affords us access to the lower reaches of Podocarpus National Park. Enjoy the windswept paramo of Cajas National Park, and the beautiful colonial city of Cuenca, with time to visit local markets and to examine some of the architectural and cultural wonders.

At Buenaventura we have the chance to see the beautiful El Oro Parakeet, only discovered in 1980! Here we can also find the elusive and iconic Umbrellabird. At Tapichalaca Reserve we look for Jocotoco Antpitta, discovered by Robert Ridgely and others as recently as 1997. We should see large mixed flocks of some of the most colorful tanagers on the continent. Peppered among the flocks are manakins, flycatchers, fruiteaters, becards and more. Expansive Podocarpus National Park protects the largest remaining patches of Polylepis forest in Ecuador, as well as the high terrain of the paramo. Perhaps (with luck) we find the cloudforest-dwelling Spectacled Bear!

Hospitality in Ecuador is as memorable as the birding and natural history. Communities we visit in Southern Ecuador retain their traditional culture, a delightful aspect of our trip that rivals the natural wonders. Between Loja and Cuenca we visit a handicraft market of the indigenous Andean people known as the Saraguros. In Cuenca we have a guided morning tour of the city with an emphasis on history, architecture, and culture.



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Tour Highlights

- Enjoy a lovely stay at the Puembo Birding Garden in Quito at the beginning and end of the tour
- Bird Arenillas National Park for Tumbesian endemics, including White-tailed Jay, Collared Antshrike, and Peruvian Pygmy Owl
- Explore the Jocotoco Foundation's Buenaventura Reserve looking for the highly local El Oro Parakeet and the elusive Long-wattled Umbrellabird
- Search Tapichalaca Reserve for Jocotoco Antpitta, Golden-Plumed Parakeet, White-capped Tanager, and Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan
- Explore the cloudforests of Podocarpus National Park in search of Giant Conebill, Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan, the endemic Bearded Guan, Purple-throated Sunangel, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker and several tanagers
- Relax in private casitas at Cabinas Ecologicas Copalinga, with hummingbird feeding frenzies right outside your door
- Spend time in the 500-year-old city of Loja, enjoying time at the local art museum and walking through the park-like squares
- Visit Cajas National Park near Cuenca, where the high paramo is dotted with over 250 lakes



Tour Summary

14-Day / 13-Night Ecuadorian Birding & Nature Tour with
Xavier Muñuz
\$4490, from Quito
Airport is Airport is Mariscal Sucre International (UIO)

Itinerary

Mon., Nov. 6 Arrivals in Quito

Welcome to Ecuador! You are met on arrival in Quito for a short drive to our cozy B&B, known for its lovely birdy gardens, and its convenience to the airport. Most flights arrive in the evening; many have dinner on the plane tonight, but if you arrive earlier in the day there are restaurants nearby.

Accommodations at Puembo Birding Garden

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Tues., Nov. 7

Flight to Santa Rosa / Arenillas National Park / Buenaventura Reserve

We are up early to enjoy the birds in our hotel's gardens before setting out for the airport to catch our midday flight to Santa Rosa. Once we land and load up, we have lunch at a very nice sea food restaurant. After lunch we spend the remainder of the afternoon birding dry forest in Arenillas National Park. This 32,000+-acre national park is home to Tumbesian endemic birds, including White-tailed Jay, Collared Antshrike, Peruvian Pygmy Owl, and more. Once we've had our fill at Arenillas, we drive a few minutes to La Tembladera Pond to see other birds like Purple Gallinule, Wood Stork, Horned Screamer, Masked Water Tyrant, Peruvian Meadowlark, and others.

Watch for Savannah Hawk and Peruvian Meadowlark in agricultural areas before reaching the lush forests of the Buenaventura Reserve, which is best known for its nesting, rare, and highly local El Oro Parakeet.



This evening we check the gardens and feeders on the property, which attract an array of hummingbirds that includes Green Thorntail, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Emerald-bellied Woodnymph, both Baron's and White-whiskered Hermits and the impressive Violet-tailed Sylph. At close range you can enjoy these colorful creatures to your heart's content!

Our lodgings are comfortable private rooms with bath, with just five cottages on the property. We love supporting the Jocotoco Foundation with our stay, and find the lush forest a prime location that compensates for any lack of luxury. Our stay also benefits important work of the reserve, a place that you are sure to treasure.

Accommodations at the Jocotoco Foundation's Umbrellabird Lodge, Buenaventura Reserve (B,L,D)



Please note: This lodge has just five rooms, so our tour is limited to 9 people plus our host throughout; at this one location there may be no single rooms available. At other locations of the tour there are be singles available.

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Wed., Nov. 8 Umbrella Lodge / Buenaventura Reserve

Today we enjoy a full day birding at Umbrellabird Lodge in Choco-Tumbesian forest. We enjoy a walk on a beautiful trail looking for the iconic Umbrella Bird; there is a lek on this trail and we take the time to understand more about the ecology and behavior of this endangered bird. We then enjoy a delicious local breakfast and all the activity at the fruit and hummingbird feeders. There are nice fruit trees around the main building where we can easily admire nearly 30 different species. Once the activity slows down for the morning, we have a chance to bird the main entrance to the reserve.

We then break for lunch at the reserve before taking a bit of time to relax or even siesta. This reserve was established in 2000, and through diligent efforts by the Jocotoco Foundation, has grown to protect almost 4000 acres of cloud forest on the western slope of the Andes. The botanists among us marvel at the rich array of plants and their attendant butterflies. Birding at this location is truly amazing — some of the best in South America.

While walking trails here we should find spectacular birds, including Golden-headed Quetzal, the endemic Guayaquil Woodpecker, Bronze-winged Parrot, the endemic Pale-mandibled Aracari, Red-headed Barbet, and Scaled Fruiteater. We have ample time to watch the behavior of colorful and unusual species, including birds performing at their leks; with luck we may see courtship behavior of Club-winged Manakin or the startling Long-wattled Umbrellabird.

Meals are served graciously at this small lodge; day's end provides a chance to relax with fellow travelers and to catalog our finds.

Accommodations at Umbrellabird Lodge, (B,L,D)



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Thurs., Nov. 9 Buenaventura Reserve

Today we spend another full day birding at Buenaventura, looking for El Oro Parakeet, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, and others. We visit the last property of the reserve, where we learn about a conservation project focused on El Oro Parakeet; this endemic bird almost went extinct a few years ago. The Jocotoco Foundation has put up artificial nesting boxes, successfully increasing the reserve's population and allowing for increased study of this endangered endemic. Other birds to admire here include Gray-backed Hawk, Choco Toucan, Barred Becard, and Velvet-purple Coronet.

After breakfast, driving between Buenaventura and Vilcabamba, we spend time exploring the more arid habitat of the Catamayo Valley near Loja. Here we hope to find Pacific Parrotlet among the scrub forest and agricultural fields, along with several members of the finch family: Parrot-billed and Dull-colored Seedeaters, Collared Warbling-Finch, Band-tailed Sierra Finch, and the endemic Tumbes Sparrow. Another highlight is the unique Elegant Crescent-chest Tapaculo.



We spend the night in Vilcabamba, a scenic place named for the Kichwa word for Sacred Valley; at 5000 feet above sea level, it hosts an idyllic climate. Its residents seem to thrive — Vilcabamba is known for its numerous residents who reach 100 years of age and more! Pure air and water contribute to longevity — or perhaps it's the waters of the local hot springs! Two rivers join here to form the Vilcabamba River; the Chambo and the Yambala.

Birders know Vilcabamba as a place to search for Plumbeous Rail, often found in wet areas close to the road. The lower valley provides a picturesque mosaic of corn and sugar cane fields, interspersed with fruit orchards, greenhouses for growing flowers, and cattle pastures. Higher reaches of the valley continue into Podocarpus National Park, where on an afternoon outing we may find Plumbeous-backed Thrush and White-tailed Jay. You are sure to enjoy exploring this delightful and small city; perhaps you even want to relax a bit and try the waters yourself.

Accommodations in Vilcabamba (B,L,D)

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Fri., Nov. 10 Travel Day to Tapichalaca Reserve / Birding at the Cerro Toledo Entrance to Podocarpus National Park

We set off this morning for Tapichalaca, taking our time and birding along the way. We travel about 165 miles, crossing the eastern slopes of the Andes. Birding at the Cerro Toledo entrance gives us great access to elfin forest habitat close to a road.

En route, we explore a river where we may find Sunbittern and Fasciated Tiger Heron; in lush forest vegetation, mixed flocks reveal a host of colorful tanagers and wrens feeding alongside Pacific Tuftedcheek, Barred Puffbird, and Choco Toucan.

In time we arrive at the reserve, where over the next few days we search for Jocotoco Antpitta, Golden-Plumed Parakeet, White-capped Tanager, and Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan. We work our way up from about 3,300 feet to 7,200 feet in upper montane forest, exploring new habitat from our first days. A few years ago, the Jocotoco Antpitta was discovered here; the Jocotoco Foundation decided to preserve this area and bird. We also search for Grey-cheeked Parakeet, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Tumbes Sparrow, Elegant Crescentchest, Fasciated Wren, Amazilia Hummingbird, and many others.

Tapichalaca is situated on eastern Andean slopes where it gains the influence of Amazonia (Marañon) species. On trails, we search for Golden-plumed Parakeet, Chestnut-crested Cotinga, Dusky Pija, Marañon Thrush, and, with luck, a mixed flock of tanagers that includes Paradise, Silver-backed, and White-capped. Hummingbird feeders surround us, as does the temperate cloud forest. With sunny weather, a kaleidoscope of butterflies may emerge. This tour supports conservation, and we are pleased that our use of the lodge benefits the reserve.

Our lodge is on the reserve, in a two-story home with rooms and private baths. Dinner is a treat. Xavier Muñoz of Neblina Forest tells us that the chef here used to work at a French restaurant in Quito; he shows his expertise in every meal as he combines exotic tropical flavors with French techniques.

Accommodations at Casa Simpson, Tapichalaca Reserve (B,L,D)



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Sat., Nov. 11 Tapichalaca Reserve

We explore trails today at the Tapichalaca Reserve, with a special effort to see the Jocotoco Antpitta. The local reserve guards feed this amazing bird every morning around 8:00 AM; we congregate in a hide and watch this very unique bird as it feeds. We also have the chance to watch Chestnut-naped Antpitta here among others, like Rufous and Slate-crowned Antpittas. The trail to the blind is not difficult and well worth the walk. Other nice birds today include Golden-plumed Parakeet, White-capped Tanager, Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan, Turquoise Jay, Black-throated Tody-tyrant, Grass-green Tanager, Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager, and others.

Lunch today is at the reserve, and then in the afternoon we try one of the trails searching for more birds like Chusquea Tapaculo, Golden-crowned Tanager, and Undulated Antpitta. We explore the lower part of the reserve, where we look for Tumbesian endemics such as Black-faced Tanager, Marañón Thrush, Straw-backed Tanager, Olivaceous Siskin, Blue-necked Tanager, and more.

Accommodations at Casa Simpson, Tapichalaca Reserve (B,L,D)

Sun., Nov. 12 Valladolid Valley / Tapichalaca Reserve

At dawn, sounds of the forest lure you from bed; the hummingbird feeders are active and we have the chance to see Rainbow-bearded and Rufous-capped Thornbill, Amethyst-throated and Flame-throated Sunangel, and of course the bossy Chestnut-breasted Coronet. A favorite of many, though wide-spread throughout Ecuador, is the incredible Long-tailed Sylph.

Enjoy good Ecuadorian coffee from our porch with a spectacular view of the valley below. Perhaps a pair of Maroon-chested Ground Dove come into view; near the lodge we find Orange-banded Flycatcher,



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Barred Antthrush, and a host of other species. Plant life around the lodge is fascinating as well; with luck, several species of orchids and bromeliads are in bloom.

This morning we venture lower in elevation to explore the Valladolid Valley, about 12 km. south of Tapichalaca towards the Peruvian border. This area, with several patches of woodland and scrub to explore, gives us access to a number of species not found elsewhere in Ecuador, most notably the Marañon Thrush.

In the afternoon, we venture to higher reaches of neighboring Podocarpus National Park, learning more about the unique Polylepis forest and spending time in the often-windswept paramo. The Giant Conebill is closely tied to this habitat type by its habit of feeding on cones. We also look for Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan, the endemic Bearded Guan, Purple-throated Sunangel (a high elevation hummingbird), Crimson-mantled Woodpecker and several tanagers including Lacrimose Mountain Tanager, Plushcap, Red-hooded Tanager, Golden-crowned Tanager, and Black-headed Hemispingus.

At dusk, we watch for Swallow-tailed Nightjar, which appears as a quetzal of the night as it displays its extravagant tail in flight. In this remote location, listen for the eerie call of Andean Potoo, and if it's a clear night, enjoy a sky of a thousand stars.

Accommodations at Casa Simpson, Tapichalaca Reserve (B,L,D)



Mon., Nov. 13 Zamora / Copalinga

This morning we drive to the Zamora-Chinchiipe province of Ecuador, located at the southeastern end of Amazonia and known for its bountiful biodiversity. Zamora is unique to our trip for adding tropical elements that extend into the foothills — both botanical and avian additions. The lodge at Copalinga is situated in more open second-growth habitat with gardens; trails nearby take us into lush forests.

Our individual casitas are surrounded by gardens and feature private baths and balconies. At a comfortable 3000 feet in elevation, we can explore trails right out our door to see orchids, bromeliads, and a host of colorful birds of the tropical sub montane humid forest. Tanagers are particularly abundant; we look for Green and Gold, Blue-necked, Golden, Orange-eared, and Spotted Tanagers. There are also mixed flocks of the complex Funarid clan: the spinetails, foliage-gleaners, and xenops.

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After a group dinner, enjoy the starry skies and revel in the peace and quiet of this unique part of the country.

Accommodations at *Cabinas Ecologicas Copalinga*, adjacent to *Podocarpus NP* (www.copalinga.com) (B,L,D)



Tues., Nov. 14

Zamora / Bombuscaro-Podocarpus National Park / Copalinga

With coffee on the porch before breakfast, we find new hummingbirds right before our eyes. These include Wire-crested Thorntail, Sparkling Violetear, Green Hermit, Black-eared Fairy, and Violet-fronted Brilliant. Breakfast is served within view of the birds.

This morning we walk trails in the Bombuscaro section of Podocarpus National Park. We look for two range-restricted species: The Coppery-chested Jacamar and Ecuadorian Piedtail. Highland Motmot is the largest of its clan, and with luck we find Black-billed Treehunter probing on moss- and lichen-clad tree limbs.

Along a rushing stream we may find White-capped Dipper or possibly a pair of Torrent Duck. In lush forests, Black-streaked Puffbird and Lanceolated Monklet are sit-and-wait insect predators; with luck we might find one of earth's more bizarre species: the Amazonia Umbrellabird.

In the afternoon we gather to discuss some of the geology of the Andes, the foundation of the region's rich biodiversity. Sunset finds us gathering in the common area, sharing delights of the day, tales of other journeys, and yes, counting up our species! Enjoy a dinner of fresh local foods prepared by our hosts.

Accommodations at *Cabinas Ecologicas Copalinga*, adjacent to *Podocarpus NP* (B,L,D)



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Wed., Nov. 15

Old Zamora-Loja Road / La Toma / Loja

Our drive to Loja is beautiful as we take in scenic vistas of the convoluted ridges of the Andes. Along the way we explore the Old Zamora-Loja Road, legendary among birders for several decades, and still providing quality habitat for us to find specialties such as the endemic White-breasted Parakeet and Chestnut-tipped Toucanet. We may add Vermilion or Metallic-green Tanagers to our

list, and we watch for Cliff Flycatcher in appropriate habitat. We cross a 9000-foot pass en route, entering the paramo habitat and then descending into a drier region and then Loja city. At higher elevation, we look for Paramo Seedeater, Mouse-colored Thistle-tail, and Marble-faced Bristle-tyrant.



Exploring the more arid habitat of the Catamayo Valley near Loja we should find Pacific Parrotlet among the scrub forest and agricultural fields, along with several members of the finch family: Parrot-billed and Dull-colored Seedeaters, Collared Warbling-Finch, Band-tailed Sierra Finch, and the endemic Tumbes Sparrow. Another highlight is the unique Elegant Crescent-chest Tapaculo.

In the afternoon, we enjoy some free time to explore this five-hundred-year-old city. Downtown there are several cathedrals and other historic buildings of note, surrounding several park-like squares. The Entrada a la Ciudad is a striking, almost medieval looking building that houses an art museum we can explore. Loja is capital of the province of the same name, and is a major economic center for the Southern Andes.

Accommodations at El Libertador, Loja

www.tripadvisor.com/Hotels-Loja-Hotels(B,L,D)



Thurs., Nov. 16 Loja to Cuenca

The drive between Loja and Cuenca is scenic, and along the way we stop for beautiful vistas, and to explore areas of biological interest. In the dry valley of Ona, about halfway between Loja and Cuenca, we see a variety of bromeliads. Tillandsias grow on the small trees, but we see terrestrial varieties, too. Perhaps we have a chance to try *repe* during lunch, a green banana soup made from a local

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type of banana and an area specialty.

An interesting cultural aspect of this region is that it is home to the indigenous Andean people known as the Saraguros. For hundreds of years they traditionally lived in the Andean mountain highlands, but now primarily reside in tropical forest areas. Among their many crafts is beautiful beadwork and musical instruments, including wooden flutes called *antara*.

We arrive with time to settle in and stretch our legs, exploring a bit of colonial Cuenca. Dinner tonight is at the hotel so you can relax after a day of travel through the Andes.

Accommodations at the Inca Real, Cuenca (B,L,D)

Fri., Nov. 17 Cajas National Park / Cuenca

Today we visit Cajas National Park, a 70,000-acre protected area established in 1996 just west of Cuenca. Here the high paramo habitat is dotted by over 250 lakes. Local people visit the park to honor the Virgen del Cajas who is believed to have made an appearance here. There is also an ancient Inca Road crossing the park, still visible after several centuries. In the extensive highlands, we search for magnificent free-flying Andean Condor, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Puna Hawk, Carunculated Caracara, and high elevation hummingbirds such as Violet-throated (endemic) and Veridean Metaltails, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Shining Sunbeam, Chimborazo Hillstar, and Sparkling Violet-ear.

On picturesque lakes, we hope to find Andean Gull, Yellow-billed Pintail, and Speckled Teal. We take time to examine the unique vegetation of the paramo; at this time of year many of the shrubs should be in bloom. Other plants grow close to the ground, exhibiting hairs and other adaptations to the often cold



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and wet climate. Spires of Puyo Bromeliads make perfect perches for Black-tailed Trainbearer, Giant Hummingbird, Stout-billed Cincloides, and Paramo Ground Tyrant. Several patches of Polylepis forest occur here as well, so if we've missed any specialties of this habitat earlier in the trip, we have another chance to find them today. This is a great area to bird and hike — atop the world of the Andes.

In the late afternoon, we return to Cuenca, where we choose a local restaurant to sample some specialty dishes of the region.

Accommodations at the Inca Real, Cuenca (B,L,D)

Sat., Nov. 18 Flight to Quito

We plan an afternoon flight back to Quito, so you can spend the morning visiting local markets, one or more of the many museums, or local areas of interest such as Pumapungo, an Inca palace. It is hard to leave this beautiful city surrounded by the Andes — indeed if anyone wants to stay on to explore in more detail, we can help you make those arrangements!

For those of us departing, we return to Quito this afternoon where we enjoy a farewell dinner at a favorite local restaurant. Likewise, if anyone is new to Quito and would like additional time here, this is easy to arrange, too.

Our final evening is at the Puembo Birding Garden where we enjoy a farewell dinner and celebrate our adventures in Ecuador. You can leave on a late flight (several depart before or after midnight) or go out the following day.

Accommodations at Puembo Birding Garden or similar (B,L,D)

Sun., Nov. 19 Departures

Departures from the International airport at a time convenient for you. (B)



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Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Offset your carbon footprint on one of the many online programs. Show us the receipt and we'll take 50% — up to \$50.00 — of your carbon offset fee off your final payment!

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the tour, from Quito, Ecuador, is \$4490 per person, DBL / \$4895 SGL. Tour price includes: 13 nights' accommodations, airport transfers, professional guide services of expert guide Xavier Muñoz. It includes internal flights and transportation within Ecuador, park and reserve entrance fees, pre-departure information and services, miscellaneous program expenses, accommodation and meals at all lodges, private transport, and private bilingual bird/naturalist guide.

The tour cost does not include items of a personal nature such as beverages from the bar, portage, laundry, phone calls, or gift items. We also recommend a gratuity for maid service, and for our local drivers and guides, which is left to your discretion.

Travel Information

Plan to arrive in Quito, Ecuador, to the Mariscal Sucre International Airport (UIO), on November 6, 2017. For your departure, you return to Quito on the tour's last day, November 18. You may book one of the several flights that leave just before or after midnight, but be very careful: If the flight is just after midnight, you book the November 19 departure. If just ahead of midnight, that is the November 18 departure. If you prefer a daytime flight, it is easy to take you to the airport from Puenbo Birding Garden, but we suggest a flight after 9:00 AM on November 19, since it is suggested that you need to be at the airport three hours ahead of your flight, thus something like 6:00 AM is a very awkward time.

Photo Credits

Choco Toucan, Peg Abbott (PA); Cuenca Market, PA; Slate-crowned Antpitta, Greg Smith (GS); Long-tailed Sylph GS; Orchid, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Spectacled Bear, neblinaforest.com; Spices at Market, PA; Blue-gray Tanager, PA; Bromeliads, NJS; Purple Gallinule, Tom Dove; Wood Stork, PA; Purple-bibbed Whitetip, PA; Song Wren, PA; Garden Birding, Woody Wheeler (WW); Red-headed Barbet, PA; Chestnut-breasted Coronet, PA; Choco Toucan, PA; Immature Tiger-Heron, NJS; Sunbittern, Xavier Munoz; Guide Xavier Munoz, PA; Slate-crowned Antpitta, Greg Smith (GS); Rufous Antpitta, PA; Long-tailed Sylph GS; Bromeliads, PA; Copalinga Casita, courtesy of the lodge website; Sparkling Violetear, PA; Copalinga Casita 2, courtesy of the lodge website; White-capped Dipper, PA; Bromeliads, NJS; Paramo drive, PA; Paramo bloom, PA; Cuenca Market, PA; Andean Condor, Howard Topoff; Paramo flower, PA; Antisana Volcano, PA; Green Honeycreeper, NJS; Bromeliads, NJS.