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

November 10 – 23, 2019
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The Andes Mountains of Southern Ecuador are a highly complex system of mountain-ridges and valleys, 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 on the upper montane from eastern Ecuador. The delightful Copalinga Lodge affords us access to the subtropical areas of Podocarpus National Park. Finally, we enjoy the windswept paramos of Cajas National Park.

At Buenaventura we have the chance to see the beautiful and scarce El Oro Parakeet, only discovered in 1980. Here we can also find the elusive and iconic Long-wattled Umbrellabird. At Tapichalaca Reserve we look for the stunning Jocotoco Antpitta, discovered only in 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. The extension of Podocarpus National Park protects the largest remaining patches of Polylepis forest in south Ecuador, as well as the high terrain of the paramo. Perhaps (with luck) we find Spectacled Bear!

Tour Highlights

- Enjoy a lovely stay in Quito at the beginning and end of the tour. Here the feathered specialties are Scrub Tanager and Purple-collared Woodstar
- Visit Cajas National Park near Cuenca, where the upper paramo is dotted with over 250 lakes and patches of montane vegetation
- Explore the Jocotoco Foundation’s Buenaventura Reserve looking for the Ecuadorian endemic, El Oro Parakeet and the elusive Long-wattled Umbrellabird, as well as several other Chocoan and Tumbesian specialties
- Visit Tapichalaca Reserve looking for Jocotoco Antpitta, Golden-plumed Parakeet, White-capped Tanager, and Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan
- Explore the upper cloudforests of Podocarpus National Park in search of Giant Conebill, the endemic Bearded Guan, Rufous-capped Thornbill, and several Mountain-Tanagers
- Relax and enjoy great birding at Cabinas Ecologicas Copalinga, with hummingbird feeding frenzies right outside the dining room
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Tour Summary
14-Day / 13-Night Ecuadorian Birding & Nature Tour with Andrea Molina and with 7+, Bob Meinke
$4690, from Quito
Airport is Airport is Mariscal Sucre International (UIO)

Itinerary

Sun., Nov. 10  Arrivals in Quito
Welcome to Ecuador! You are met by one of our local operator’s staff on your arrival in Quito for a short drive to our cozy B&B, the San Jose Garden Hotel (or similar). It is known for its lovely birding gardens and its convenient distance to the airport. Most flights arrive in the evening; many have dinner on the plane before landing, but if you arrive earlier, you can have a tasty homemade dinner at our hotel.

Accommodations at San Jose Garden Hotel or similar*

Mon., Nov. 11  Flight to Cuenca | Dos Chorrereas Lodge | Cajas National Park
After breakfast and birding on PBG’s grounds, we are taken to the airport to our short flight to Cuenca. Upon landing, our driver is waiting to transport us to our lodge, Dos Chorreras, at the buffer area of Cajas National Park (+11,000 feet). Last year our group stopped here for lunch, and loved it so much we just had to add it to our accommodations for this tour!

After arriving at Dos Chorreras, we have a chance to stretch our legs and check the lodge’s for some feathered friends of the upper montane forests. We enjoy lunch at Dos Chorreras and then in the afternoon we have our first drive to the upper montane forest and paramos of Llaviucu on Cajas National Park. We begin to see some of the specialties as we make the climb, including the globally threatened Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan and the Ecuadorian endemic and globally endangered Violet-throated Metaltail. We also see wetland birds like Andean
Ruddy-Duck and Ecuadorian Rail. After our first introduction to the forests and paramos of southern Ecuador, we head back to our cozy lodge for dinner and to go over our list for the day before turning in for the night.  
*Accommodations at Dos Chorreras Lodge (B,L,D)*

**Tues., Nov. 12  Cajas National Park | Dos Chorreras**

Today we visit a different section of Cajas National Park. This 70,000 acre protected area, established in 1996 and just west of Cuenca, is dotted by over 250 lakes. In this extensive paramo’s grasslands and patches of Polypelis trees, we search for magnificent Tit-like Dacnis, Giant Conebill, Variable Hawk, Carunculated Caracara, and high elevation hummingbirds such as Rainbow Starfrontlet, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Shining Sunbeam, and Ecuadorian Hillstar.

On the picturesque lakes, we hope to find Andean Ruddy-Duck, Yellow-billed Pintail, and Andean 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 and wet climate. Spires of “Puya” bromeliads make perfect perches for Black-tailed Trainbearer, Giant Hummingbird, Stout-billed Cinclodes, and Paramo Ground-Tyrant. Several patches of Polylepis forest occur here as well, so we look for specialities of this habitat. This is a great area to bird and hike — atop the world of the southern Andes.

We lunch at Dos Chorreras again, then in the afternoon we can have the chance to visit Cajas National Park again to search for any specialities we may have missed this the morning. Dinner tonight is at Dos Chorreras.  
*Accommodations at Dos Chorreras Lodge (B,L,D)*

**Wed., Nov. 13  Cajas National Park to Vilcabamba**

After breakfast, we start our drive from Cajas National Park to Vilcabamba on the Catamayo dry valley. We break of the drive with several birding stops along the way. Here we hope to find Pacific Parrotlet among the scrub forest and agricultural fields, along with Parrot-billed and Dull-colored Seedeaters, Collared Warbling-Finch, Band-tailed Sierra-Finch, and the endemic Tumbes Sparrow, the unique Elegant Crescentchest, and Three-banded Warbler. We enjoy a picnic lunch in the field.

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 a perfect, warm climate. Its residents seem to thrive — Vilcabamba is known for its many 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. You are sure to enjoy a bit of free time exploring this delightful and small town. On our afternoon driving in the outskirts of Vilcabamba, we may find Ecuadorian Piculet and Collared Antshrike on vegetation patches. We enjoy dinner at the lodge tonight.

Accommodations in Vilcabamba (B,L,D)

Thurs., Nov. 14   Travel Day to Tapichalaca Reserve | Birding en Route to Podocarpus National Park

After breakfast, we set off this morning for Tapichalaca, taking our time and birding along the way to try for more endemic birds on the dry Vilcabamba Valley, including Pacific Pygmy-Owl and Tawny-crowned Pygmy-Tyrant. We travel about 165 miles, crossing the eastern slopes of the Andes, visiting elfin forest and upper montane forest habitats. En route, we explore a river where we may find Plumbeous Rail. On the upper parts, tanagers like Golden-crowned Tanager and Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager are our goals and we keep our eyes peeled for more hummingbirds like Glowing Puffleg, Rufous-capped Thornbill, and Neblina Metaltail.

We arrive at the reserve and over the next few days we search for Jocotoco Antpitta, Golden-Plumed Parakeet, and White-capped Tanager. Tapichalaca is situated on eastern Andean slopes where it gains the influence of Amazonia (Marañon) species. On trails, we search for Golden-plumed Parakeet, the extremely rare Chestnut-crested Cotinga, and the uncommon Dusky Piha. Hummingbird feeders surround the main house, as does 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 a two-story home with rooms and private baths.

Accommodations at Casa Simpson, Tapichalaca Reserve (B,L,D)
Fri., Nov. 15  Tapichalaca Reserve
Today 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. Just a few years ago, the Jocotoco Antpitta was discovered here; the Jocotoco Foundation was created to preserve this pristine area and its birds. The local reserve rangers feed this amazing bird every morning around 8:00 AM; we congregate in a special place designated to watch this very unique bird as it feeds. We also have the chance to watch other antpittas, like Chestnut-naped, Rufous, and Slate-crowned Antpittas. The trail to the antpitta feeding station 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 Orange-banded Flycatcher.

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

Sat., Nov. 16  Valladolid Valley | Tapichalaca Reserve
At dawn, sounds of the forest lure you from bed; the hummingbird feeders are abuzz and we have the chance to see Collared Inca, 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 the porch with a spectacular view of the valley below. Plant life around the lodge is fascinating as well; with luck, several species of orchids and bromeliads are in bloom. This morning we venture to lower elevations to explore the Valladolid Valley, about seven and a half miles 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, notably: Black-faced Tanager, Marañón Thrush, Straw-backed Tanager, and more.

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 elusive Giant Conebill is
closely tied to this type of habitat. The endemic Bearded Guan and several tanagers, including Plushcap, Red-hooded Tanager, and Black-headed Hemis pingus, are some of the montane birds to look for. At dusk, we watch for some nocturnal birds, including Swallow-tailed Nightjar. In this remote location, listening for the eerie call of Andean Potoo is a treat, and if it’s a clear night, enjoy a sky of ten thousand stars.

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

Sun., Nov. 17  Tapichalaca | Cajanuma | Zamora | Copalinga
After breakfast we drive towards the western side of Zamora-Chinchipe province. We take our time and make several birding stops en route. We enjoy a picnic lunch in the field at the upper part of Podocarpus National Park in the area named Cajanuma (+11000 feet).

After lunch we continue driving to Loja, adding birding stops on the old Loja-Zamora road. Here, we have the chance to spot birds like Paradise Tanager, Cliff Flycatcher, and Andean Cock-of-the-rock. Zamora county is the capital of the province; this region is key to our trip for adding tropical elements that extend into the Amazonian foothills. Copalinga Lodge, nestled in at 3000 feet above sea level here, is strategically situated in more open second-growth habitat with gardens and near the forest of the lower areas of Podocarpus National Park.

Our cabins are surrounded by gardens and feature private baths and balconies. At a comfortable elevation, we can explore trails right out our door to see orchids, bromeliads, and a host of colorful birds of the subtropical 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 Furnarid clan: spinetails, foliage-gleaners, woodcreepers, and xenops. After a group dinner, enjoy the starry skies and revel in the peace and quiet of this unique part of the country.

Accommodation at Cabañas Ecológicas Copalinga, adjacent to Podocarpus NP (B,L,D)

Mon., Nov. 18  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, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Green Hermit, and Black-throated and Violet-fronted Brilliants. Breakfast is served within view of the birds. This morning we walk trails in the Bombuscaro section of
Podocarpus National Park looking for two range-restricted species: The Coppery-chested Jacamar and Foothill Elaenia. 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, as well as fruiteaters and manakins.

In the afternoon we gather to discuss some the region’s rich biodiversity. On the afternoon we can pay a visit to neighborhood areas near Zamora to pick-up more Amazonian birds. Sunset finds us gathering in the common area of our lodge, 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 Cabañas Ecológicas Copalinga (B,L,D)**

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**Tues., Nov. 19**

**Old Zamora-Loja Road | Catamayo Valley | Buenaventura Reserve**

After an early breakfast we have to hit the road towards the cloudforest of southwestern Ecuador. We make several stops en route on the eastern slope while driving to Loja, plus stops on the dry valley towards El Oro province mountains. Lunch today is in the field. This long ride is well worth it; we have the chance to pick up Tumbesian endemics like Gray-cheeked Parakeet, Black-cowled Saltator, and Chapman’s Antshrike, and Chocoan endemics like Choco Toucan and Club-winged Manakin.

We arrive in the late afternoon to the Umbrella Bird Lodge and Buenaventura Reserve. This evening we check the gardens and feeders on the property, which attract an array of hummingbirds that includes Green Thorntail, Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Emerald-bellied Woodnymph, White-necked Jacobin, and Green-fronted Brilliant. We enjoy these colorful creatures at close range!
Our lodgings are comfortable private rooms with private facilities. 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.

Tonight we enjoy dinner at the Umbrellabird Lodge.

**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 10 people plus our host throughout; at this one location there may be no single rooms available. At other locations of the tour there are singles available.

**Wed., Nov. 20  Umbrellabird Lodge | Buenaventura Reserve**

Today we enjoy a full day birding at Umbrellabird Lodge. This lodge it is located at the union of two endemic bird areas, Choco and Tumbes. We enjoy a walk on a beautiful trail looking for the iconic Choco endemic and endangered, Long-wattled Umbrellabird; 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 fruit trees around the main building where we can spot several species when feeding in a mixed flock.

This reserve was established in 2000, and through major efforts by the Jocotoco Foundation, it has grown to almost 4000 acres of cloudforest in this endangered region on the western Andean slope. 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 and Red-masked Parakeet, Red-headed Barbet, and Scaled Fruiteater. We are sure to make time to watch the unusual behavior at the leks of Club-winged Manakin and the Long-wattled Umbrellabird.

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

**Thurs., Nov. 21  Upper Buenaventura Reserve**

Today we look for birds on the upper areas of the reserve. Our goals today are two Ecuadorian endemic and rare birds, El Oro Tapaculo and El Oro Parakeet. Additionally, we watch for other birds like Violet-tailed Sylph, Brown Inca, and Gorgeted Sunangel. This area is also the habitat for montane birds like Pacific Tuftedcheek, Flame-faced Tanager, Chocó Brushfinch, Ochre-breasted Tanager, and rare and endangered raptors like Gray-backed Hawk and Ornate Hawk-Eagle.
After lunch we look for birds of the lower areas of the reserve, like Ecuadorian Plumeleteer, Gartered Trogon, and Ochraceous Attila.

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

Fri., Nov. 22  Drive to Guayaquil | Flight to Quito
We are up early this morning, grabbing breakfast by 5:00 AM. We drive today to Guayaquil for flights back to Quito, and want as much time as we can to bird the lowlands and wetlands of western Ecuador along the way. The wetlands of La Tembladera are our main stop to look for birds like Horned Screamer, Pinnated Bittern, and Comb Duck among other wetland related birds and some Tumbesian endemics. After our wetlands stop, we drive to the mangroves and forests to Manglares-Churute Ecological Reserve. We enjoy a picnic lunch in the field at the reserve, then keep looking for birds like Jet Antbird, Humboldt’s Sapphire, and Ecuadorian Trogon. After this last stop we drive into Guayaquil City for our flight to Quito in the afternoon.

We return to Quito by 7:00 PM and enjoy a farewell dinner at our hotel. If anyone is new to Quito and would like additional time here, this is easy to arrange and we are happy to make recommendations. Our final evening is at the our hotel’s restaurant, where we enjoy a farewell dinner and celebrate our adventures in Ecuador. You can leave on a late flight tonight (several depart before or after midnight) or an early flight tomorrow.

Accommodations at San Jose Garden Hotel or similar (B,L,D)

Sat., Nov. 23  Departures or Antisana Day Trip
Departures from the International airport at a time convenient for you and end of services. (B)

If you depart late today, we can arrange a day trip for you to Antisana National Park for an additional cost. Please let us know if this is of interest to you. After an early breakfast, we hit the road again for an introduction to the northern Andean paramos on Antisana Ecological Reserve. Here, we look for birds like Paramo Pipit and Many-striped and Streak-backed Canasteros, among others. Bonuses are the Andean Condor, Silvery Grebe, and Aplomado Falcon. Also, the localized and endangered Andean Ibis is one of the key species we watch for today.

We enjoy a delicious lunch at Tambocondor, a small local farm with a great view of the rock walls were Andean Condors roost and nest. This place offers the chance to spot Giant Hummingbird, too!

After lunch, we head back to our hotel. Here we can arrange a day room for you to use prior to your flight; enjoy dinner at PBG before your transfer to the airport. If necessary, we can drop you directly at the airport on the way back from our Antisana outing. (B,L,D)
Plan Ahead!
Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey
Cost of the tour, from Quito, Ecuador, is $4690 DBL / $4950 SGL. Tour price includes: 13 nights’ accommodations, airport transfers, and professional guide services of expert local guide Andrea Molina. It includes land 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.

Cost of the November 23 Antisana day trip is $180 per person and includes meals, guide, park fees, and airport transfer. If four or more people are interested in this option, the price drops to $140 per person.

It does not include your international flights to Quito or your internal flights in Ecuador (Guayaquil to Quito), though we do book the internal flight for you. This fee will not exceed $260 per person and if a saving occurs it will be passed on to you. The tour cost does not include items of a personal nature such as beverages from the bar, porterage, 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
Please plan to arrive in Quito, Ecuador, to the Mariscal Sucre International Airport (UIO), on Nov. 10, 2019. For your departure, you return to Quito on the tour’s last day, Nov. 22, 2019. 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 Nov. 23 departure. If just ahead of midnight, that is the Nov. 22 departure. If you prefer a daytime flight, it is easy to take you to the airport from the hotel, but we suggest a flight after 9:00 AM on Nov. 23, since it is suggested that you be at the airport three hours ahead of your flight, thus something like 6:00 AM is a very awkward time. The hotel room on the night of November 22 is included in the cost of the tour.

*Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.*

Photo Credits
Andean Cock-of-the-rock, Greg Smith (GS); Choco Toucan, Peg Abbott (PA); Orchids, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Market Day, PA; Jocotoco Antpitta, Carlos Sanchez (CS); Spectacled Bear, courtesy Neblina Forest; Butterflies, CS; Slate-crowned Antpitta, GS; Green Honeycreeper, NJS; Naturalist Journeys Group in Ecuador, NJS; Dos Chorreras Grounds, courtesy hosteriadoschorreras.com; Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, NJS; Giant Hummingbird, CS; Bromeliads, NJS; Dos Chorreras Dining Room, courtesy hosteriadoschorreras.com; Plumbeous Rail, PA; Jocotoco Antpitta, CS; Butterfly, CS; Andean Scenic, courtesy Neblina Forest; Grass-green Tanager, PA; Chestnut-breasted Coronet; Chestnut-crowned Antpitta, GS; Andean Potoo, Miguel Lezama, courtesy Neblina Forest; Andean Cock-of-the-rock, Miguel Lezama, courtesy Neblina Forest; Violet-headed Hummingbird, PA; Torrent Duck, PA; Choco Toucan, PA; Coati, CS; White-necked Jacobins, Sandy Sorkin; Horned Screamer, PA; Pinnated Bittern, Dave Ramdass.