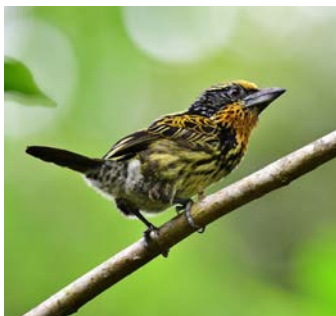


Amazon Rainforest Discovery: By Land & Water Trip Report | Nov. 4–14, 2023 | by Dave Mehlman



With guides César (Ceiba Tops); Usiel and Victor (La Perla), and Dave Mehlman, with participants: Beth, Bobbie, Henry, Judy, Michael, Mike, Moira, Phyllis, and Terri



Mon., Nov. 4

Arrivals in Lima

Everyone had come in at least a day early, so many in the group gathered at the nice breakfast buffet in the Wyndham Costa del Sol Lima Airport to plan some informal activities. Some struck off on their own while a small group spearheaded by Dave headed out together for various sites in Lima. We all took a large taxi from the hotel to the Huaca Pucllana archeological site in Miraflores where we took a tour of the large site (with Dave attempting, mostly futilely, to translate the local guide's rapid commentary). Of course, being a Naturalist Journeys tour, most of us were furtively (well, may not so furtively!) looking for birds in the area and we found some fun things that we were not to see later in the tour, such as the charming Croaking Ground Dove, Scrub Blackbird, Long-tailed Mockingbird, Amazilia Hummingbird, and a fly-over Harris's Hawk.

We then lucked onto another large taxi nearby and took it to the Miraflores Malecón overlooking the ocean at the aptly named Parque del Amor and spent about an hour and a half walking along the cliff edge. The paragliders flying back and forth put on quite the show (including one enthusiastic one who insisted on swooping by asking for five!). However, we were a bit more interested in the birds to be found over the ocean



and in the trees and we were not disappointed. On the jetties and flying by were many Peruvian Pelicans and Inca Terns and the lawns and trees of the parks yielded Eared Dove, Saffron Finch, Blue-gray Tanager, Saffron Finch, Bananaquit, a Cinereous Conebill, a Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, and Vermilion Flycatcher. Again, all of these are found in the arid coastal zone near Lima, not in the humid Amazon basin, so they added some nice avian diversity to the tour.

We then grabbed some street taxis, returned to the Wyndham, and met again for an informal kick-off dinner at the Wyndham's restaurant, which included a review of plans for the next day.

Sun., Nov. 5 Fly to Iquitos | Boat to Ceiba Tops Lodge

Everyone had breakfast at their leisure, enjoying the great buffet and plenty of delicious Peruvian coffee. At mid-morning, we all assembled in the lobby to meet the local tour representative, Robert, who handed out our boarding passes and luggage tags for the LATAM flight to Iquitos. He then walked us over to the airport and helped us navigate the check-in and got us to security—Lima airport is a busy place! Our flight left on time just before noon and landed uneventfully in Iquitos about an hour and a half later. On arrival, we were met by a luggage handler and César, our Ceiba Tops guide, all our gear was transferred to a bus, and we drove to the Explorama Depot by the Amazon River. After a short wait, we and our gear were loaded on to the boat (since the river was at about its lowest, we had a long stairway to climb down to get to the muddy river bank and the boat itself). We also got box lunches at this point and commenced our hour boat ride to the Ceiba Tops Lodge, located on the north bank of the Amazon River, downriver from Iquitos itself and near the town of Indiana.

Upon arrival, we were greeted with a welcome juice drink and César gave us an introductory briefing on the Lodge and our activities to come. We then all found our cabins and got busy reorganizing our gear to prepare for the many adventures to come. A few of the enthusiastic birders got out and about exploring the immediate area of the Lodge and the adjacent riverfront, finding the first of what would be regular sightings of species like Wattleed Jacana, Amazon Kingfisher, White-banded and White-winged Swallow, Yellow-headed Caracara, and Yellow-tufted Woodpecker. Some of the lucky ones also spotted Common and Purple Gallinules along the edge of the sandbar in front of the Lodge dock, which at low water like this was converted into a large rice field. We then had our first lovely dinner in the Lodge dining room and enjoyed the sounds of the Amazon rainforest as we ate. Then, we returned to our rooms along the lighted walkways for our first night in the Amazon.



Mon., Nov. 6

Ceiba Tops Lodge | Isla de los Monos | Yagua Community

We were up early today for a pre-breakfast walk with César on one of the trails at Ceiba Tops that led to the turtle pond. This walk was a great introduction to the local birds of the area, with the group spotting birds of the river edge from the boat landing, including Yellow-hooded Blackbird, White-headed Marsh Tyrant, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Yellow-headed and Black Caracara, and Drab Water Tyrant. Continuing into the forest, César spotted a roosting Great Potoo high in a tree after which we emerged at the pond. The pond itself was quite productive, with Tui Parakeets perched high in the surrounding trees, White-banded and Southern Rough-winged Swallows flying over the ponds, and a Pale-legged Hornero hopping around on the ground. But, the highlight of the morning, was that everyone got to release a newly hatched Yellow-spotted River Turtles (locally called *taricayas*) into the pond! The Lodge has a program to breed this declining species and reintroduce them into the wild in order to help restore their population in the area.

On the walk back from the pond, we kept on birding, obtaining fabulous views of Gilded Barbets (the first of many barbet sightings on this tour), Gray-headed Tanager, and Cream-colored Woodpecker. Returning to the Lodge, we then enjoyed a lovely breakfast in the screen-enclosed dining room. Reconvening a bit after breakfast, we met at the head of the boat ramp for a morning excursion to the Isla de los Monos across the river. Isla de los Monos is an island sanctuary for the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of monkeys from the region ([Rescue, rehabilitate and release | For the protection and preservation of monkeys | La Isla de Los Monos](#)). The visit involved a 20-minute boat ride from the Lodge and then about a quarter mile walk through the forest to reach the main buildings. Once there, we received an orientation and then went on a short walk through the grounds and surrounding forest to look for the various species of monkeys present. Indeed, as advertised, this was monkey island — there were monkeys about! The most common and approachable (as in, they approached us!) were Common (Brown) Woolly Monkeys, some of which made our immediate acquaintance. Other species we were introduced to included Red Howler Monkey, White-browed Titi (still in its quarantine penalty box), Saddle-backed Tamarin, Dusky Titi, Monk Saki, and Pygmy Marmoset. In addition to primates, we were treated to a surprising fly-over by a large flock of Wood Stork, Black-fronted Nunbird, Dusky-headed Parakeet, and Scarlet-crowned Barbet. After this educational visit, we returned via boat to the Lodge and a welcome lunch.



After a post-lunch siesta, we reconvened at the head of the boat dock again for our afternoon outing to the nearby Yagua Community. After about a 30-minute boat ride, we arrived on shore and scrambled up the steep ladder (caused by the low water conditions at this time of year). Some river birds seen during the boat trip included Large-billed and Yellow-billed Tern, Black Skimmer, and Amazon Kingfisher. At the top of the riverbank, we walked a short distance to the community's main house through various crop fields of rice, yuca, and corn. Entering the main house, we were invited to sit around the edge and the community performed several songs and dances for us, towards the end inviting all who cared to dance to join with them. Interestingly, one of the girls in the community had a pet sloth clinging to her. Following this, we went outside and learned the ancient art of how to make and use a blow gun. In fact, several of the group got up and tried to use the very long blow gun with varying degrees of success. To put it succinctly, our group appeared to pose little threat to the local wildlife! At the end of the blow gun demo, we admired the local products that the community put out and many of us bought a few souvenirs to support the local community and provide a memento of this wonderful visit. Of course, birds were spotted while there, including Plumbeous Kite, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Short-tailed and Blue-headed Parrot, and a Lesser Hornero on the path on the way back to the boat. We made the boat trip back, then reconvened a bit later after dark for some (optional) cold Cusqueñas, a lovely dinner, and then our daily bird list. We then wandered back to our cabins with great memories from an excellent day along the Amazon.

Tues., Nov. 7 ExplorNapo Lodge | Canopy Walkway

We were up early today since we had a full day ahead including longer travel from the Lodge than usual. Our destination today was the legendary Canopy Walkway at the Amazon Conservatory for Tropical Studies located near the ExplorNapo Lodge off the Rio Sucusari, a tributary of the Rio Napo. Due to the low water conditions, César had come up with an alternative method to get there as opposed to the very long boat trip normally done (down the Amazon and then up the Napo and Sucusari). After our early breakfast, we assembled at the boat dock (of course noting a few birds around the lodge such as Many-banded Aracari and Chestnut Woodpecker) and were off well before 7:00 AM.



The first leg of our multi-modal trip was a short skiff ride to the nearby town of Indiana, Peru (not to be confused, of course, with the town of Peru, Indiana!). Arriving there, we scrambled up the steep hillside leading to the plaza de armas (noting a few Chestnut-bellied Seedeaters along the way) and took a short walk past the small market to the enormous line of waiting motokars (aka, tuk-tuks). Boarding a small fleet of these (our group required 5) we drove what optimistically could be called a “paved road” about 15 minutes to the smaller town of Mazán on the banks of the Napo River. Once in Mazán, we got out of the motokars, thanked our drivers, then scrambled down the riverbank to a waiting Explorama boat. We then took this second boat about an hour down the Napo to the mouth of the Sucusari, which we motored up a short way to the ExplorNapó Lodge dock, discovering a lovely Capped Heron along the way. We disembarked there, climbed the stairs to the lodge’s main building, and readied our gear (and filled water bottles) for our excursion to the Canopy Walkway.

We began the trip with about an hour and a half hike through the beautiful forests surrounding ExplorNapó, part of the time in the (now dry) varzea (flooded) forest and the rest ascending slowly through terra firme (always dry) forest. César and Dave did their best to find birds, but most of the activity noted was a variety of songs, including Lawrence’s Thrush, Musician Wren, Double-banded Pygmy-Tyrant, and a Laughing Falcon. With a great deal of effort, everyone in the group was able to see a male Golden-headed Manakin, some Green-backed Trogons, and, in perhaps the best sighting of the day, César spotted a Yellow-crowned Brush-tailed Rat viewing the world warily from a cavity high in a tree.

Finally, about 11:00 AM, we arrived at the starting platform of the Canopy Walkway, one of the most well-known of these in the Americas. This walkway is 500 meters long, has 14 platforms, and at its highest is 35 meters above the ground! Climbing the first set of stairs to the start, we sat in a covered area and received a safety briefing before starting: no more than 3 people at a time on the walkways and no more than 4 at a time on any platform. With that, we slowly set off in small groups to explore the canopy from an eye-level perspective! Taking a bit over an hour, we all completed the walkway with a variety of wildlife noted during the walk, though activity was a bit slow due to the mid-day heat. Some of the finds included a Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth, Black-tailed Trogon, Paradise Jacamar, and calling White-throated Toucan and Screaming Piha—the latter being one of the characteristic bird sounds of the Amazon basin.

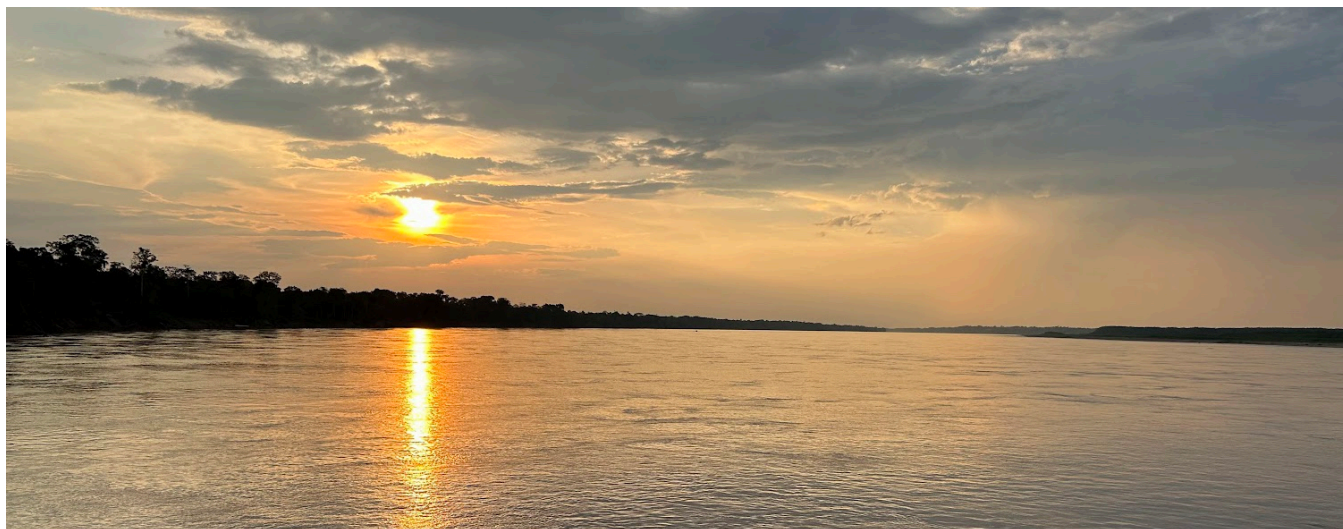


After everyone ended the canopy walk on the ending platform, we re-hydrated and returned on the trails back to the ExplorNapo Lodge for badly needed water refills and bathrooms. We then enjoyed a tasty lunch followed by a short talk from medicine man Don Guillermo, a charismatic speaker of Bora and Ocaina roots originally from a small town by the Río Putumayo on the border with Colombia. He imparted a small sampling of his deep knowledge of local plants and their uses for medicine. Perhaps most interesting were the *sacha ajo* (wild garlic; *Manosa alliacea*) which made a memorable impression on everyone's nasal passages and the *sacha jergón* (*Dracontium* sp.), whose bark has an incredible resemblance to the skin of the fer-de-lance and is used as an anti-venin by locals. At that point, it was time to head back, so we gathered our gear and went to the boat dock to retrace our steps back, including a long boat ride, the motokars (oddly, the road had not been improved in our absence), and a short skiff ride back to Ceiba Tops. After arrival, we had a bit of free time for a swim, Cusqueñas, dinner, and the bird list before turning it in for the evening.

Wed., Nov. 8 Ceiba Tops Lodge | Morphosapi Butterfly Farm | Iquitos | Nauta | Embark La Perla

We began our last day at Ceiba Tops with a pre-breakfast walk to the giant ceiba tree (which gives the lodge its name), followed by some in the group continuing by going back to the turtle pond. Some of the highlights of the morning included Chestnut-eared Aracari, Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, Scarlet-crowned Barbet, Black-tailed Tityra, Sulphury Flycatcher, Plumbeous Kite, and Bare-necked Fruitcrow (the latter two perched high up in the ceiba). We then returned for our final breakfast, settling our bills, and organizing our personal gear (our main luggage having been already put out). We then boarded the Ceiba Tops boat for one last trip, headed to Iquitos with a stop at the Morphosapi butterfly farm in the community of San Rafael.

We arrived at the tidy village of San Rafael a bit before 9:30 AM and walked from the boat dock, up the usual riverside ladder, across some boardwalks, through the town center and futbol field, and on to the butterfly farm. There, we met Pedro, one of the operators of the farm, who gave us a tour with César translating. Our first visit was the flight cage where free-flying adults of at least four species (2 owls [*Caligo* spp], a Morpho, and an *Archaeoprepona*) were present. Pedro also showed us the host plants, eggs, and caterpillars of each species.

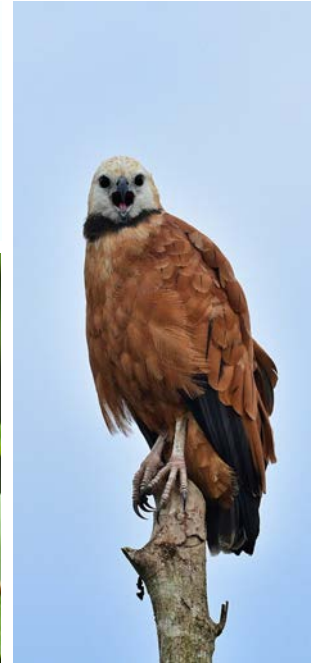


From there, we went into the rearing building, where the caterpillars are allowed to transform into chrysalises and then either the chrysalises shipped off to market or the pupated butterflies are reared to adulthood and re-released. As part of the program, most in the group got to release some of the adults in the wild which were ready to go. A fun and educational visit for the entire group.

We then left San Rafael for about a 30-minute boat ride back to the Explorama Depot on the Iquitos waterfront, where we and all our gear were loaded onto a bus and then driven to the Doubletree Hotel in downtown Iquitos. At the Doubletree, we met our two primary guides from La Perla, Victor and Usiel and then were loaded onto another, fancier bus. The first stop on the second bus, after it left town, was the Iquitos Airport, where we were to pick up another tour group from Conservancy Travel who would be accompanying us on the La Perla. Since we got there a bit early, some in our group braved the stifling heat at the airport to try to find Point-tailed Palmcreeper in the moriche palms ringing the airport parking lot. Although we could not find any palmcreepers, we were able to get decent views of a Yellow-browed Sparrow and some Gray-breasted Martins in addition to the usual Tropical Kingbirds and Black Vultures.

After collecting the second group, we were all handed box lunches and we departed Iquitos for the 2-hour drive on the paved highway to the town of Nauta, a smaller port town on the banks of the Río Marañón (aka the cashew nut river). We were dropped off by our bus at the very nice Jungle Experiences reception building on the waterfront to await boarding the La Perla while our luggage was transferred ahead of us. As if by magic, the La Perla appeared heading slowly up the Marañón right in front of the reception building. It then slowed down, and our entire group boarded two skiffs and we went off to board the La Perla as it cruised along upriver—our adventure had started!

Our first activity after boarding and finding our cabins (scattered over 3 decks) was a meal (depending on your point of view, it was either a late, second lunch or an early, first dinner!). This was then followed by an orientation from Angela, the dynamic Cruise Director, into the ins and outs of our next several days on this lovely vessel as the boat headed upriver and we enjoyed the first of many river sunsets. After dark, we had our first official outing of the cruise, a night excursion in the small boats lasting about an hour and a half. With the aid of spotlights, our guides found Brown-throated Three-toed Sloths, Black-crowned Night-Herons, many Great Egrets and Cooi Herons, and a roosting Ladder-tailed Nightjar at close range. Returning from the night excursion, we enjoyed our first of many delicious buffet dinners (a late one, in this case, not starting until 8:30 PM) and then all retired to their rooms for a soothing rest, lulled by the sounds of the moving ship and the boat engines.



Thur., Nov. 9

Río Marañon | Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve

Overnight, the boat tied up along the Río Marañon and those who were up early got to see a very large movement of Lelis's *Urania* Moths flying along the river, along with the quite distinctive song of the Buff-breasted Wren. We all then assembled by the skiffs on the lower deck for our first boat outing of the cruise. Today, our skiffs visited the Yanayacu River for a lovely morning of birding and wildlife-watching from the boats including a fabulous picnic breakfast on board the boats. The highlights of this trip were too many to mention, but included Pink River Dolphin and another Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth representing the mammals and Black-collared Hawk, Black-capped Donacobius, Plum-throated Cotinga, Chestnut-eared Aracari, Red-bellied Macaw, and Capped Heron among the birds. We finished the morning by docking at the 20 de Enero community where we participated in a tree-planting ceremony (truth-be-told, in this case, a palm-planting ceremony) to assist the local community in its reforestation efforts. After this, we returned to La Perla, those who wished went on a swim with the dolphins, and then we enjoyed a great buffet lunch followed by a rest.

The afternoon's activities began with an informative talk by guide Usiel on the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve along which we would be boating during most of the tour. This reserve spans a vast area (about 8,000 mi²) from the junction of the Marañon and Ucayali Rivers west and harbors some 80,000 people in almost 100 villages in addition to well over 500 species of birds and 100 species of mammals. After this talk, we reconvened at the skiffs again for a late afternoon boat ride along the river and up Pampa Creek near the community of San Regis, staying out until almost dusk. The birding and wildlife-watching was again great, with highlights including Swallow-winged Puffbird, Drab Water-Tyrant, Silver-beaked and Masked Crimson Tanager, Orange-winged Parrot, Violaceous Jay, Osprey, and a Green Iguana or two in the trees. At dusk, a large number of Sand-colored Nighthawks emerged out over the river to forage for insects. Arriving back at the boat a bit before dark, we unloaded, had a chance to clean-up, and then were treated to the first of several music sessions from one of the numerous on-board bands (each band, oddly, composed of the same people!). This was followed by another chance to over-eat at the buffet dinner, followed by a relaxing night on-board.



Fri., Nov. 10 Small Boat Excursions | Jungle Walk | Shiriyacu Creek

La Perla had moved a bit up river this morning, so we began today with an excellent morning outing involving a short skiff ride and then a combined forest walk and stream paddle at the area known as Iquitos Brook or the Amazon Natural Park. As Steve Cox later related to us, this area was the former home and resort of Roberto Rotondo, one of the founders of the tour boat cruise industry in Iquitos. After landing we began with about a ¾ mile walk through the lovely forest, finding a Monk Saki, Chestnut Woodpecker, and Maroon-tailed Parakeet along the way. We then arrived at a large reservoir, which provided great birding, including a sighting of a Sungrebe for those at the front of the line. Other birds seen during our stay here included Piratic and Sulphury Flycatcher, Squirrel Cuckoo, Black-tailed Tityra, and some Purple Honeycreepers. Our return trip was by boat, or, rather, two boats tied together, which were slowly paddled down the Brook by the local guide and those willing to lend a hand. During this delightful ride, we had great views of White-winged Swallows, Swallow-winged Puffbirds, and Greater Ani. Arriving back where we started our walk, we walked back down to our skiffs, headed back to La Perla, and enjoyed another excellent buffet breakfast.

As we ate, the boat moved a bit further upriver to reach the furthest upriver point on the Marañon of the tour, where we tied off. Next up was another fabulous skiff outing on the Caño Iquitos for about 2 hours; this proved to be one of the highlights of the trip. While finding many by now familiar avian friends here (such as the Black-collared Hawk, known locally as “mama vieja,” and Great Black Hawk), we had some great views of new birds such as a pair of Amazonian Streaked Antwren, Varzea Schiffornis, Masked Crimson Tanager, Horned Screamer, and Thrush-like Wren. Singing in the background were also Undulated Tinamou, Buff-breasted Wren, and Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet. After this fabulous morning outing, we returned to the La Perla for lunch and a brief rest while the boat turned around and headed downriver toward the true start of the Amazon.

In late afternoon, we all assembled on the boat deck yet again for another late afternoon/early evening outing by boat, this time to Shiriyacu Creek. An alternative option was also given this afternoon for anyone to go fishing. This proved to be another delightful boat outing, with the river and stream banks and adjacent riverine island vegetation allowing for great bird viewing. Some of the highlights included Pied Lapwing, Collared Plover, Wattled Jacana, Spotted Sandpiper, and Red-breasted Meadowlark on the islands and their sandbars; Chestnut-bellied Seedeater, Yellow-browed Sparrow, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, and Red-and-white Spinetail in the



grasses; Barred Antshrike, Spotted Tody-Flycatcher, and Lineated Woodpecker in the trees; and Orange-winged and Blue-headed Parrots overhead. As dusk settled in, Sand-colored Nighthawks and Giant Fishing Bats appeared over the river as we returned to La Perla after this magnificent day on the river. After returning to the big boat, we freshened up, enjoyed the latest incarnation of the on-board band, and then dinner. For those who still had not had enough, there was a night boat trip along a nearby creek which turned up both Common and Great Potoo and Boat-billed Heron.

Sat., Nov. 11 Caño Nauta | Puerto Prado | Yacapana Creek

We began today with another wonderful skiff trip, this time to Caño Nauta off the Río Marañón. Another lovely morning on the Marañón yielded plenty of equally lovely birds, today including Red-capped Cardinal, White-eared Jacamar, Paradise Tanager, Cream-colored Woodpecker, Pale-legged Hornero, incredibly close views of a pair of elegant Band-tailed Antbirds and the much sought-after Green and American Pygmy Kingfishers. We returned to La Perla for breakfast, our appetites well-whetted at this point, as the boat untied and moved downriver to approximately opposite the town of Nauta (where we had embarked from several days ago). After breakfast, we took a very short skiff ride to the community of Puerto Prado, where we climbed up the steps from the river and took a short walk in this community, which had a small pond with giant (or Victoria) waterlilies in it, a few in bloom. Usiel and Victor pointed out a few of the widely used local plants, such as a species in the Marantaceae, which is used to wrap foods, and the very impressive tree *Gustavia superba*, a species in the Lecythidaceae (Brazil Nut Family). Although the birding was a bit slow this morning, we found a super-duper-cooperative Spot-breasted Woodpecker, which allowed all 25 people on the tour to see it, and a pair of Sunbitterns stalking around the pond. We also had very close views of a pair of Pygmy Marmosets grooming and several Saddleback Tamarins running around in the subcanopy. After this, we sampled some of the arts and crafts the community had for sale (an important source of income for local communities) and then used the skiffs to go back to La Perla for lunch and an afternoon siesta, during which the boat moved down river.

Reconvening late in the day for another afternoon/evening boat ride, we enjoyed another great birding outing along the banks of the Marañón River and in the Yacapana River side channel. Among the highlights of this outing were great views of a pair of very handsome Red-and-white Spinetails; decent views of Dark-breasted Spinetail; Orange-headed, Blue-gray, and Silver-beaked Tanagers; and Oriole Blackbirds. We also found some



Squirrel Monkeys in the trees and Pink River Dolphins in the river. As another incredible sunset filled the sky, we returned to La Perala—a wonderful finish to another superb day in the upper Amazon basin. As usual, we finished the day off with an excellent buffet dinner and another restful night. As we ate and drifted off to sleep, the boat moved downriver, past the junction of the Marañon and Ucayali Rivers and we tied up along the main stem of the true Amazon River.

Sun., Nov. 12 Amazon River | Yarapa River | Vista Alegre Community

The day dawned with the boat tied up on the banks of the Amazon, but it soon got underway for a short repositioning upriver. After tying up again, we headed out for another wonderful morning boat ride on the skiffs, this time to the lower or white-water part of the Yarapa River, an old river channel that roughly parallels the main river at this point. The birds came fast and furious again this morning, with some of the highlights being Oriole Blackbird, Brown-chested Martin, Wing-barred (or Caqueta) Seedeater, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, and our only Snail Kite of the tour. After this super start to the day, we returned to the Perla for breakfast and prepared for our next boat outing in the late morning, by which time the boat had moved upstream into the Ucayali River.

The late morning boat trip headed out onto the Ucayali and then entered the upper (or black-water) part of the Yarapa River near the community of Vista Alegre. This lovely small river was full of birds from the familiar (e.g., Black-collared Hawk, which apparently are EVERYWHERE on the Amazon and its tributaries, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Black-tailed Tityra, and Red-capped Cardinal) to some species we had not seen very much such as Thrush-like and Buff-breasted Wren, Amazonian Streaked Antwren, and Black-tailed Trogon. We then returned to La Perla for our usual mid-day lunch and a break while the boat moved a bit further upstream on the Ucayali. Returning to the boats in late afternoon, we took a short skiff ride and then disembarked at the small San Jose de Panapacura Community on the north bank of the Ucayali. Our quest at this spot was to find Hoatzins in a large, inland lake, but despite hiking through several trails with the local guide, none were to be found. Despite this minor disappointment, we were rewarded on the walk back to the boat with another Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth and a small Anaconda clinging to the top of a small tree. We then returned to La Perla, freshened up, and enjoyed another buffet dinner while the boat turned around and headed a short-ways downriver.



Mon., Nov. 13 Amazon River

Our last early morning boat trip was a truly memorable one. Off from the La Perla by 6:00 AM, we headed back to the upper (or black-water) part of the Yarapa River for our excursion. This is an excellent river for birding from the boat, wide enough to easily spot birds on both sides yet narrow enough so that many things are close to the boats. Interestingly, this part of the river is also the site of quite a few rustic Amazon lodges. The birds on this trip were memorable, as almost on every trip of this tour, but today the mammal sightings were truly superb! Species seen and photographed well today included a Southern Tamandua (roosting in a tree high up, yet quickly spotted by Alison, our boat driver), a Brown Woolly Monkey feeding in a tree in full sunlight, Dusky Titi Monkey, and a group of Long-nosed Bats roosting on a tree over the water! Best wild mammals of the tour, by far. The birds did not disappoint, with many by now old friends appearing again, but we also added great looks at a pair of Slate-colored Hawks, Cinnamon Attila, White-throated Toucan, Cream-colored Woodpecker, and a Zimmer's Woodcreeper. We then returned to La Perla for another great buffet breakfast and a brief break.

During breakfast, La Perla moved to the confluence of the Marañón and Ucayali Rivers which marks the official beginning (in Peru, at least!) of the Amazon River. Embarking on the skiffs, we then went out and explored various parts of the confluence on all three rivers, although low water conditions prevented us from entering any side channels. Enjoying the magnificent setting at the junction, we enjoyed great looks at species such as Black-and-white Antbird, Oriole Blackbird, Horned Screamer, Dusky-headed Parakeet, and many Gray River Dolphins. We then returned to the La Perla and reconvened before lunch in the upstairs meeting area for a quick review on the map of where we had been, a masterful demonstration of how to make a pisco sour from Charles ("best bartender in the Amazon"), and a fun demonstration from Avalir and Carlos on how to turn room towels into fauna—who knew! After that, we headed downstairs for our final buffet lunch on La Perla and a bit of a rest.

After lunch, we embarked on our final excursion from La Perla, this time a short skiff ride followed by a hike through the forest at the community of Casual on the north bank of the Río Marañón. Although not many birds were seen, the local guide was superb at finding "critters" in the woods and he found and brought back to us for closer viewing a Red-backed Poison Frog (the very same species used for the poison darts of blow guns), an Ecuadorian Brown Velvet Tarantula (aka "bird-eating tarantula"), and a Western Leaf Lizard. Among the few birds detected were Cinnamon-throated Woodcreeper, incredible short-range views of a Plain-throated Antwren



male, and Blue-capped Manakin (which, despite heroic efforts by Usiel, was only glimpsed by Beth out of the whole group). After returning to La Perla, we cleaned up for our final night on board. The festivities began with the much-anticipated “Battle of the Bands” in the bar/meeting area. This consisted of all the various bands which had been playing for us during the tour reassembling on the “stage” for a final show. Suspiciously, all the members of all the bands appeared to be the same people, but never mind, the various bands and their songs had the boat a-rockin’ well passed the scheduled end time. In fact, some amazing dancers appeared in the crowd who had apparently been hiding their best stuff until the final night! After this, we adjourned to dinner in the dining room (for a last chance to over-eat!) followed by our final night on board. During the dancing and dinner, the boat moved upriver to dock on the shore opposite Nauta, our final stop on the cruise.

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Those of us up early enjoyed a bit of final birding from the upper deck while enjoying coffee, bidding a fond farewell to many of our avian and dolphin friends before the final buffet breakfast and boarding the skiffs one last time. We headed across the Marañon to the Jungle Experiences dock and climbed the steep stairs to the shore depot. A bus was waiting for us there and we all boarded it to begin our trip back to Iquitos. Once on board, we were all given box lunches to consume at our leisure. Our first stop, however, was the city market in Nauta so we could experience “market day” in Nauta and see firsthand how the local people buy and sell food and merchandise. It was quite an experience to wander around and see firsthand the variety of things for sale, ranging from clothes and consumer electronics to freshly caught fish and freshly plucked chickens! We then re-boarded our bus and continued to Iquitos.

We made one stop en-route to the Iquitos airport at the Manatee Rescue Center, an animal rehabilitation facility operated by the Centro de Rescate Amazonica (CREA) where we had a short talk and tour of the operation by Carlos. While there, we saw a few semi-tame Scarlet and Blue-and-white Macaws and Mealy Parrots wandering around, rehabbed birds that had been allowed to roam free on the grounds. Carlos introduced us to various animals in various stages of care, including several small Amazonian Manatees, a Giant Anteater, numerous primates, and several enormous Paiche fish (aka arapaima or pirarucu) in a large tank, one of the largest known freshwater fishes.

After this informative walk, we arrived at the Iquitos airport, unloaded our luggage, said good-bye to our faithful and excellent guides Usiel and Victor, and then checked in for our flight to Lima on LATAM. After arrival back in Lima and reclaiming our bags, the tour basically came to an end. A few remained in Lima for extra days of exploration, while the rest of the group headed over to the Wyndham Costa del Sol across the street to sit and wait several hours until our midnight flight back to Atlanta and home. Fortunately, we had access to a conference room in the hotel to store our gear and the hotel's restaurant for us to enjoy a final dinner together and swap stories about the tour. Then, with the aid of local logistics guy Robert, we went back to the airport terminal to check in for our flight home with fond memories of an excellent Amazonian adventure in Peru.

Group Photo with Yagua Community (David Mehlman - DM), Red Howler Monkey (Mike Kershaw - MK), Many-banded Aracari (MK), Yellow-crowned Parrot (MK), Gilded Barbet (MK), Marañon River (MK), Huaca Pucllana (DM), Ceiba Tops Lodge moth (Henry Shapiro - HS), Blue-gray Tanager (MK), Ceiba Tops turtle pond (DM), Turtle Release (DM), Cream-colored Woodpecker (MK), Gray-headed Tanager (MK), Great Potoo (MK), Judy (DM), Monk Saki (MK), Titi (MK), Dusky-headed Parakeet (Judy Buckham - JB), Yellow-headed Caracara (MK), Yagua girl with sloth (MK), Canopy Walkway (DM), Beth on Canopy Walkway (MK), Group boat ride (DM), Frosted Arcas (DM), Morning in the Amazon (JB), Two-toed Sloth (JB), Yellow-tufted Woodpecker (MK), Chestnut-eared Aracari (MK), Group with Giant Ceiba (DM), Green Longwing Butterfly (JB), La Perla (DM), Sunset (DM), Group breakfast on the Skiff (DM), Red-bellied Macaw (MK), Black-collared Hawk (MK), Green-banded Urania moth (MK), Black-capped Donacobius (JB), La Posada boat trip (DM), Horned Screamer (MK), Amazonian Streaked Antwren (MK), Shiryacu Sunset (DM), Sunset (DM), Greater Ani (MK), Green Kingfisher (MK), Spot-breasted Woodpecker (MK), Eastern Pygmy Marmosets (MK), Red-capped Cardinal (MK), Pond of Giant Water Lilies (JB), Black-tailed Trogon (MK), Green Iguana (MK), Squirrel Monkey (JB), Sunset from La Perla (MK), Dusky-headed Parrot (MK), Howler Monkey (MK), Southern Tamandua (MK), Black-and-white Antbird (MK), Tuk-tuk taxi (HS), Nauta Market (DM), Blue-and-yellow Macaw (MK)