

# Incredible Ecuador: Chocó Galore

## October 2 -11, 2025 | Trip Report by Peg Abbott



**NJ Guides Jorge Luna and Peg Abbott**  
**with 5 great participants: Terry, Janine, Julie, Carol, and Philip**



### **Thurs., October 2: Arrivals in Quito**

Several of us arrived early to rest up from travels. By afternoon our full group had checked in and we met up at 3PM to walk and bird the grounds. We had fun finding Sparkling Violetear, Harris's Hawk, Tropical Mockingbird, Hooded Siskin, and in the hedgerow just over the wall of the hacienda, Rusty Flowerpiercer. The most common bird on the grounds was the Great Thrush, uttering frequently its musical song. We were happy to see the first species of what would become a big tanager list and Julie was quick to get a shot of Blue-and-yellow Tanager, one easiest to find in this inter-Andean valley of Quito.

Four-legged lawnmowers (llamas) with a fairly young baby kept us entertained during the walk, and we admired several enormous trees - both in height and circumference. In the central area of this hotel are historic buildings and grounds from an 18<sup>th</sup> century hacienda. Artwork and furnishings in the dining, bar and reception areas provided a historic feel. Even with just 37 rooms, the hotel was not busy today, though we did have some company and fun watching some Ecuadorian families play in the ten acres of gardens.



At dinner we got to know each other. Peg tried a native-spiced chicken dish that was delicious, others raved about their “hamburguesas” and we tried the Pisco Sour, a classic south American cocktail, yum! Tomorrow we’d meet our driver Luis and our guide Jorge early, so soon it was off to bed.

### **Fri., October 3: Reserva Zuro Loma | Restaurante Mirador Guaycapi | Piripe**

Today was an awesome kickstart to our trip. Our visit to the Reserva Zuro Loma, a private, community-run reserve was just incredible. We were so impressed with their whole operation, which is nestled into the highlands at 10,500 feet, one of the highest sites we’d get to on our trip. It is located on the legendary Nono-Mindo Road, a location birders have prized for decades. It has been open for less than a decade but offers a rare chance to see up to three antpitta species. So, we were on a mission to leave early, get there in time to see their staff offer the antpittas and other specialties their daily treats. Antpittas are shy, but with patience community staff members have gained their trust. We saw all three species: the tiny Chestnut-crowned, medium-sized Equatorial and the giant Chestnut-naped. Two species were near the top of the reserve, the other we ventured downslope past some amazing hummingbird feeders and into a small clearing, where it took some time but eventually this shy individual came in.

We pulled up to the property with light playing on the surrounding mountains and a blaze of bird activity going on. While we watched Red-crested Cotinga, Spectacled Redstart, and a mixed flock of colorful tanagers that included Scarlet-bellied Mountain, Blue-and-black, and Golden-crowned beauties, the staff handed us hot and delicious cups of Ecuadorian hot chocolate or coffee. Such great hospitality; we could get used to this!

The hummingbird feeders did have another group there, but we joined right in, jostling between big lenses that were clicking away. There were thirteen species, one more beautiful than the next. The show-stopper was Sword-billed Hummingbird, but Shining Sunbeam, Sapphire-vented Puffleg, Giant Sapphirewing, and Mountain Velvetbreast all commanded attention. There were four species of flowerpiercers (Glossy, Black, White-sided, and Masked) all feeding and bathing, joined by a snazzy Yellow-breasted Brushfinch. Some of the tanagers came in close and Jorge kept up his steady identification tips so we could all be assured to see the numerous species. We had 41 in all, but the day was still young and we had to move on!



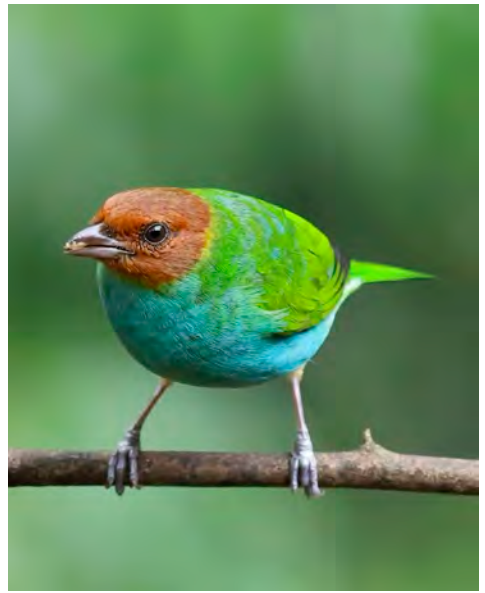


Our next stop was the roadside Restaurante Mirador Guaycapi, a business run by Jorge's family. Our arrival was perfectly timed - we had about 15-20 minutes before our delicious food came, and with the food also came an absolute gushing downpour! To see the bird activity first in sun, then in rain, with several species of hummingbirds taking joyous baths as it continued, was just great. We recorded another 43 species here; a few we'd met that morning at Zuro Loma but a lot of them were new. It was wonderful to see a cooperative Squirrel Cuckoo and another dozen species of hummingbirds, including the delightful White-booted Racket-tail, Crowned Woodnymph, and two species earning their name of brilliant - two bright euphonias, Thick-billed and Orange-bellied. They vied with Tropical Parula and TWELVE species of tanagers for our attention. It was so hard to pick favorites and many were right there, almost posing. Beauty awards this day included Metallic-green, Golden, Silver-throated, Flame-rumped and Golden-naped Tanagers. But a trip highlight for several of us was Peg calling out as two Golden-headed Quetzals came through. Jorge was lightning quick to get a scope on them perched and we saw them also in flight – spectacular. Amid all this activity we almost forgot to eat a very delicious and traditional chicken and rice dish with a fresh vegetable side and a delicious soup.

Rain continued as we made our way through the Alambi Valley to our lodgings at Piripe Lodge. We got there close to sunset, and had to navigate a steep hill, wet from the rain, which made it a bit challenging to check in. But our rooms were spacious and welcoming, each with its own balcony and huge glass doors looking out on the forest. The dinner setup was lovely, served in a covered but open-air space. We had grilled Dorado, with yucca fries, vegetables and for dessert, a luscious pear with sauce. We did the first of our evening checklists as we had already seen close to 100 species!

## Sat., October 4: Piripe Area | Cock-of-the-rock Lek

We had an early breakfast and birded some nearby areas, including from the deck of our delightful mid-morning coffee stop in Delicias. We soon discovered that Luis was a superb spotter of birds in addition to a really safe and well-qualified driver. He helped us to see a perched Hook-billed Kite, Rufous Motmot, Crimson-rumped Toucanets, both Black-cheeked and Scarlet-backed Woodpeckers, both Masked and Black-crowned Tityras and a new euphonia for us, Golden-rumped. A real highlight of the morning was a fairly common species, the Pacific

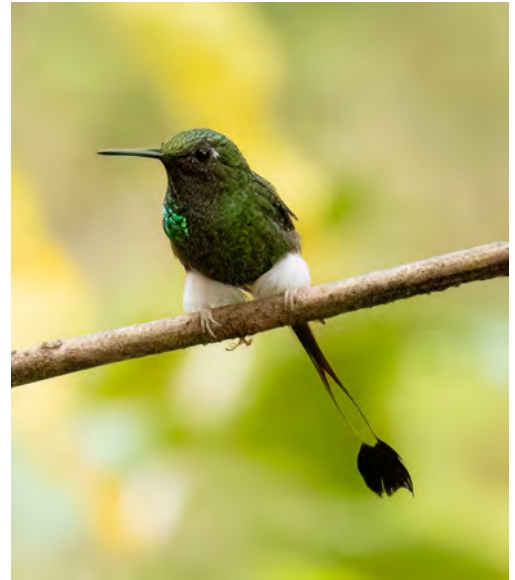


Hornero, but Luis had found us a pair building a nest. They were coming and going, adding plant and mud to construct the adobe-like structure with gusto. They would stop to vocalize, court a bit and then back to work.

Another beauty today was the Swallow Tanager; a turquoise gem that likes to perch out in the open on treetops - our kind of bird! In some towns and agricultural areas, we picked up a few seedeaters and seed-finches and enjoyed seeing the equipment and homes of local farmers as we drove by. And near the turnoff to Mashpi that we would circle back around to later, we encountered some near-virgin forest in which walking was just a treat as we gazed at tree limbs laden with orchids, bromeliads (several in bloom) and other epiphytes. A pair of Ornate Flycatchers were memorable and very cooperative for photos and digiscoping. We saw Montane Woodcreeper, a mouse-like Nariño Tapiculo, a pair of Sharpe's Wrens, several Black Solitaires (special to the area) and some new gorgeous tanagers, Flame-faced and Beryl-spangled. Philip commented that Flame-faced Tanager was high on his list when studying ahead and we all agreed! Indigo Flowerpiercer was another specialty we had hoped to encounter and almost right out of our trusty high-topped van we found them, thanks to Jorge's excellent bird ears.

After a nice rest after lunch at the lodge, we were off to another of the area's private reserves, this time to visit an Andean Cock-of-the-rock lek in Santa Elena. In a field near the parking area, we had seen Southern Lapwing, and here on the trail we found Strong-billed Woodcreeper and Red-faced Spinetail. The owner, Washington, was there to greet us, and he led the way down a forest trail, always eager to help if we needed a hand. But we kept up our pace in order to reach a blind set up near a lek of one of the country's most iconic birds – a day-glow orange species that, with raucous voice, collects up each day to broadcast their communal presence to females. At first, they were only heard, but soon we got glimpses and then we got just gorgeous and fairly close views. The blind was large enough, more of a platform with a wall on the outer side, that each could take a window or change to another view to capture wonderful photos and looks. Jorge was impressing us all with his digiscoping talent and we were handing him our phones just as fast as we could!

As light started to fade into shadows, we came out and were pleased to find Western Emerald and a few hummers in the clearing before we headed back. Another glimpse into conservation in action – we were lucky to receive such great views of a secretive species under the stewardship of the owner/guide. This site has been open just six years and is a real addition!



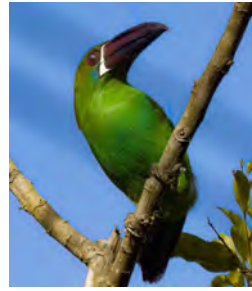
## Sun., October 5: Upper Mashpi Road | Amagusa Reserve

Today we carried breakfast with us, which Jorge and Luis set up on the porch of a most amazing place, the Amagusa Reserve, hosted by gracious Sergio and Doris who have transformed the property into a birder's paradise. Arriving not long after sunrise, we joined a couple of local photographers and a foursome staying at the place to catch bird action at an ingenious moth trap. A sheet was draped between pillars with a small roof overhead, a narrow structure with trees and shrubs on one side from which more timid species could take part in the daily banquet assembled by the attraction of lights left on over the past evening. We saw so many species that a decade ago were only a chance encounter with a mixed flock in thick forest. A group of five Dark-backed Wood-Quails were feeding at the forest's edge and a White-throated Quail Dove came in for a treat. Catching moths with gusto were Zeledon's Antbird, Great Anshrike, Pacific Tuftedcheek, Scaley-throated Foliage-gleaner and S streak-capped Treehunter. Crazy!

Again, there were food treats, cups of coffee, tea and hot chocolate and a steady stream of birds. Close to twenty Rose-faced Parrots, a range-restricted species we'd hoped to see, were gorging themselves on unripe bananas. We went from there uphill a short ways to see hummingbirds; eight species in total including Empress Brilliant came right in! Then came a yell from Luis still down on the balcony – a Mountain Coati and Orange-breasted Fruiteaters in the trees. Most of us ran down, but Philip and Julie lingered with the hummingbirds and had a really magical time with some landing on their outstretched hands. We saw 62 species here and left amazed.

Next... Helping to celebrate Peg's return to Ecuador, Xavier Munoz, the owner of our partner company there, invited us over to see his home and personal conservation efforts, the establishment of another private reserve in this area he calls Mashpi Wuasi. We enjoyed a good box lunch of chicken and rice, with salad, tree tomato and naranjilla juice and an apple torte for dessert. He shared his excitement of all the community conservation work that is going on with such positive effects for birds and wildlife in the region. He has recently had Puma appear on his wildlife cameras, demonstrating the benefit of creating corridors. He gave us a talk as we watched the action at his feeders; a group of Silver-throated Tanagers that were feeding a begging youngster was quite entertaining. Carol had brought with her educational materials for teachers and students about bird migration from her work with Partners in Flight. Xavier was thrilled to receive these and promised to distribute them to schools; in this area that has so embraced ecotourism they will be most useful!





From here we headed to Cielo Verde Lodge, located at about 3,600' elevation and such a welcoming, delightful place. En route we stopped at one last spot, Sacha Guatusa, where feeders were set up in a hillside garden where we found Andean Solitaire, Collared Trogon, Choco Toucan and yet more great tanagers. Our host, Claudia, was most gracious and she brought us coffee and hot chocolate to enjoy as a parade of Gray-and-gold, Rufous-throated, and Blue-necked Tanagers came in, alongside Green Honeycreeper and Flame-faced – this time right before our eyes with ease. Today felt like an embarrassment of riches.

After settling in to our rooms tucked under big trees, we met poolside for tea, Pisco Sours or wine, to work on our growing species list. We then settled into dinner, served poolside on a raised deck, with wonderful home-cooked food. There were choices of spaghetti, shrimp, or chicken, all with veggies sliced thin and served al dente, and a banana cake for dessert.

## **Mon., October 6: Middle & Lower Mashpi Road | Oilbirds! | Local Reservoir**

Cielo Verde caters to birders and, though early, they gave us a hot cooked breakfast that included some corn masa puffs stuffed with oregano and cheese, served with eggs, tropical fruits, and blackberry juice. As we went to get into the bus, a mixed flock of birds called loudly as if they came to pull us away. We followed the flock up the lodge driveway and were happy to get super close looks at Collared Aracari, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Olivaceous Piculet, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Red-billed Scythebill (outrageous!), Slaty Becard and other species. We then loaded up, drove on, and stopped by a local reservoir where, although there were surprisingly few waterbirds, we did find Striated Heron, Pied-billed Grebe, and a White-throated Crake.

We continued on, driving through an agricultural area where we hopped out to find Pacific Parrotlets, Pacific Antwren, a variety of flycatcher family members, Chivi Vireo and more. We had a surprise destination for our tour and we loved it - the chance to see Oilbirds in a local cave! The local steward of the cave, Romero, met us and took us in. It was a very short walk to this intricate cave system and soon we were immersed with Oilbirds roosting directly above us on a ledge, several quite visible in front of us, and noises of more around the bend. This part of the country has a lot of limestone areas and this one was cool and shaded, making for a grand refuge for this large, nocturnal, fruit-eating species. This visit was a trip highlight for several of the group and felt like a rare opportunity.



In the afternoon we took a leisurely walk alongside the reservoir and after a quiet start found some really good sightings, including a cooperative Little Cuckoo. A pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars put on a good show, we got good views of two woodpeckers, Lineated and Golden-Olive, and a species familiar from home, a Merlin, zipped by, causing quite a stir. White-bearded Manakins, though calling often, continued to elude us, but we did get good looks at gorgeous Yellow-tailed Oriole in lovely light, Giant Cowbird, and Saffron Finch.

Another good meal awaited us after some time to freshen up. We met in the pool area to do our list with cocktails in hand and then headed for dinner. Terry thought the nachos we had as appetizers were the best dish of the trip! They were good, and following was again a choice of chicken, shrimp or a rich risotto with veggies, followed by Crème Brulee. After dinner there was a chance to try out the hot tubs for those that wanted to enjoy the night air and relax a bit.

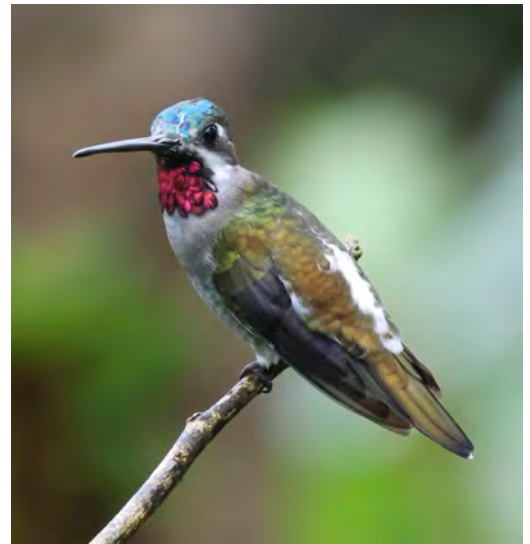
## **Tues., October 7: Mashpi River | Chocolate Farm | Tutti Frutti**

We enjoyed our stay so much at Cielo Verde Lodge that it was hard to say goodbye to such a wonderful and welcoming staff who had taken such good care of us. The food was delicious and we had one more delicious, hot breakfast before heading out. A quick scan of the reservoir gave us a repeat of our water associated birds from the day before, then we kept going towards Mashpi Shungo, an organic, artisanal chocolate farm, with plans to bird the entrance road heading towards it.

We walked a quiet dirt road which paralleled the Mashpi River and along it had a grand show of birds. It seems like our luck was with the larger species today, almost right off the bat. We had premier looks at Lineated Woodpecker, and watched a group of five Collared Aracari for some time that seemed to be either looking to predate another bird's nest or to excavate the nest for themselves. We found a Snowy-throated Kingbird perched just a few feet away from a Boat-billed Flycatcher. Again, an embarrassment of riches, we were watching the aracaris when a White-tailed Trogon flew in and just sat above us, looking around in that classic slow moving trogon style.

Eventually, we felt we should move on from this section of road that was popping with birds, and we continued to walk upriver a bit along the road. Philip and Carol called out excitedly as they spotted a Neotropical Otter tucked





up in a little circle of rocks. Alerted, it slipped off the rocks back into the water as the rest of us came rushing over to see it, and with luck all did except poor Luis who was back watching our bus. This was a rare find and we considered it a mark that this was a wild healthy stream. Further up river our driver Luis spotted a White-capped Dipper, so we all quickly piled out of the vehicle and went down to the river's edge where we enjoyed watching this little dynamo do all things in classic dipper style.

The chocolate farm we visited is owned in part by one of the guides from Neblina forest, and a friend of our guide Jorge. What a treat to meet and interact with all these local people! We were given a very informative presentation by Manu, who shared her experience with in-depth information on the processes required to transform a cattle pasture into the incredible farm that it is today. They have numerous varieties of chocolate, some heirloom varieties prized for their complex flavors. And they're working with the forest to renew the soils by fermenting up batches of microorganisms from local fungus and then spreading it around the trees. We admired all of the processing stages and enjoyed taste-testing the various chocolates. On the trail we had sampled cacao seeds covered with a luscious, white fruity paste, and so were pleased to find that they use this tasty paste as the center of one of their chocolates. The labels were beautifully drawn and we went home with various purchases. We were particularly thrilled to find out that one of their relatives is distributing these wonderful products in the USA (<https://choiba.com>).

Rain started at the end of our time there, but it did not deter us from seeing the beautiful Purple-crowned Fairy and the White-whiskered Hermits that were feeding on banana flowers, as well as a bright colored flowering tree that was an exquisite magnet for them. Janine and Terry, experts in landscaping in the Pacific Northwest when home, had been admiring this purple-flowering tree from the start. Manu talked about the unseasonable rains we were encountering; this was supposed to be dry season and a time to dry the cacao!

It was heartwarming to hear that this property adjoins a 5000-hectare reserve, and they and six other farms have joined together as a network of farmers working towards sustainability. Our host from the farm talked about a species count done the first year of operation with some 70 bird species. Four years later it was 150, and by year eight it was 350 species! It is hopeful and impressive to witness what conservation can do, especially with the reservoir of a wild land area nearby to invite populations to expand.





Off to lunch at a place with more birding, another private endeavor that had started as a fruit farm offering tours, and then expanded into birding - thus the name Sendero Tutti Frutti! Located in Pedro Vicente Maldonado, it is family run and a lot of fun. An impressive feeder drew in birds like magnets. Hummingbirds were very active, this time with Bronzy Hermit in the mix, and in time, a Long-billed Starthroat. We saw a good number of species, but one of the most memorable was a species that shows up in the southern USA, the Black-whiskered Vireo. Seeing it here was a huge surprise and only the second on record for Ecuador. Jorge spotted it and got us all on it, including another local photographer who got excellent photographs, so the record will stand.

It was cool to be a part of a rarer find, but we also loved the parade of local species up close and personal. Standing up on the top deck with a view of this new forest emerging from a former cattle pasture, we spied a Laughing Falcon. Fortunately, it flew across our view and perched, distant but recognizable. The owner, Manuel, gave us a short talk about the development of this place over the last 14 years; again, a nice encounter with Ecuadorian entrepreneurs involved with conservation and ecotourism. And he was happy to see the species count for his property today was 286 .... +1.

We finished the day with a drive ahead to reach our next oasis, Kapari Lodge, nestled in the tropical forest at around 2,700' elevation. We settled into our rooms downslope from the main area, and came back up to work on our list and enjoy dinner. It was a lovely dinner, starting with empanadas , followed by choices of steak, shrimp, or spaghetti Bolognese. Dessert was Tiramisu, no getting thin on this trip!

## **Wed., October 8: Silanche Road | Canopy Tower**

We took a box breakfast with us, and set up waiting for some fog to clear so we could walk a short ways to climb a wonderful canopy platform at Silanche Reserve. What a n experience! Up in the treetops, we watched as waves of birds came through. It was not so fast we couldn't keep up, and some of the species actually came right into the tree that the platform was built on. We had great sightings, including a Checker-throated Stipplethroat, what a name.

We took a few chairs onto the platform which had plenty of space to move around. Three Swallow-tailed Kites, first perched, then flying, were a treat. We worked hard to find Orange-fronted Barbet high in a tree above us, and in time, got good views. Zipping below us in a mixed flock we picked out Russet Antshrike, Northern Barred-



Woodcreeper and Western Woodhaunter. Almost hidden in nearby foliage, we picked out a tiny and very cute Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant. We got eye-level views of Yellow-throated Toucan, Scarlet-rumped Cacique and several memorable tanagers.

We returned to the lodge for lunch which was served outside: chicken with patacones (fried green plantains), and chocolate cake for dessert. Our plan was to continue birding in the afternoon, but in a second, plans can change. Poor Julie slipped and fell getting up from lunch. It was a serious fall, though thankfully, with tenacity, she came out of it with stiches and bruising, but game to join the rest of the trip in time. But first she needed medical help and we were relieved that it came quickly. The local fire department sent medics and after assessment and care that Carol helped with, she, Peg and Jorge were off to the local hospital. It was deemed important to get quality images of the areas affected by her fall, so she and Peg continued on to Quito where Xavier's son Pancho met them at a private hospital and stayed with them for all the required care. Thankfully they got excellent and timely care, including a plastic surgeon to inspect the local work and polish up the stitches!

For others of the group, it was also stressful, and as Jorge was away, thankfully the hotel had nice grounds for birding, and a lovely pool to jump in to recenter. A jaunty Masked Water-Tyrant bobbed around the edge, watching the swimmers! Jorge rejoined them for the nightly bird list and another delicious dinner, this one with choices of swordfish, beef stir fry, or a veggie dish, and pound cake for dessert. Peg and Julie got lodgings in Quito and would join the group again the following day.

## **Thurs., October 9: Kapari Lodge Birding | Milpe Reserve | Sacha Tamia and Las Cotingas Hummingbird Garden**

We had hoped to go to see a lek of Long-wattled Umbrellabirds today, but with all the unseasonable rains over the last week or so, they were not active. Instead, Jorge chose a walk right on the lodge grounds at Kapari which everyone enjoyed, getting good looks at a number of species. Philip took on the eBird list task from Peg, who would catch back up to the group with Julie later in the day.

From the lodge they headed to the entrance road to nearby Milpe Reserve where Jorge had a hunch they might finally catch up with White-bearded Manakin, but sigh, it remained elusive. The group returned to the lodge for a lunch of coconut shrimp or chicken in pineapple sauce, and then continued on to Sacha Tamia Lodge just outside





of Mindo. It is one of the pioneer lodges of the area, at the end of the famous Nono-Mindo Road when it was the main road to this area from Quito. It's the perfect place to use as a base for exploring the lower part of that road and has a terrific moth light set up as well.

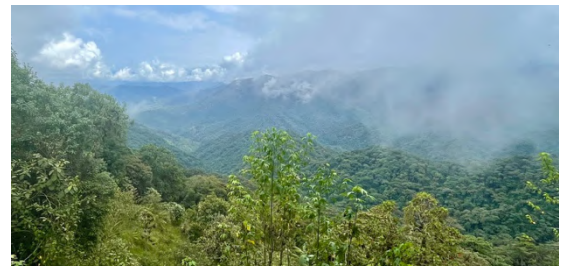
Julie and Peg had lunch at Sacha and Julie headed off for a well-deserved rest. Peg joined the group to go back out to a nearby site that was protected, as it was raining so it seemed the best choice. Nothing about climate seems very stable right now and we'd had more than our share of rain, Thankfully, most of it was light, cooling and not unwelcome, just challenging for our optics.

The Las Cotinga hummingbird feeders were productive and entertaining as they give you small cups of nectar water you hold in your hand. This place had more Violet-tailed Sylphs in one place than you could imagine; a dazzling show of color. Soon tiny, tiny feet are landing on each of us, and we might hold up to four of these winged jewels! Up close and personal, one can see their tongues going into the nectar. It was mesmerizing. Philip marveled at holding a Velvet-purple Coronet, a species he'd wanted to see. We all smiled with delight and took videos of each other with extended hands. There were tanagers and a few other species around, but here hummingbirds stole the show. Janine commented on the passion and dedication we were seeing, again and again by these owners creating such an experience.

Back at Sacha Lodge, after time to freshen up, they were ready for us with a hot rum drink called Canelazo. It is a warm spice drink of the highlands, made with naranjilla and cinnamon. Very fun to try a local hot toddy of the Andes. And we had cause to celebrate - somewhere in the course of the day, Philip had passed the 1000 mark for species seen in this year, a great year record and still growing – wahoo! The food here was very good with a variety of choices.

## **Fri., October 10: Refugio Paz de las Aves | Sacha Tamia Grounds | Lower Nono-Mindo Road**

This morning, we headed out early to visit the famous antpittas of a farm now known as Refugio Paz de las Aves, a giant in the conservation realm. We had hopes to see several antpittas, as they have now acclimated 5 different species of these secretive forest dwellers. They are using the techniques that the owner, Angel Paz, and his brother Rodrigo, pioneered here, which are now used in many locations. Peg was one of the first visitors to come



here more than a decade ago when it was a simple, small farm, and she marveled at some changes including a forest viewing platform and a cozy shop and restaurant. Carol, with a lifetime career in conservation, was so pleased to meet Angel in person, having heard about his evolution from farmer to famous conservationist over the last twenty plus years.

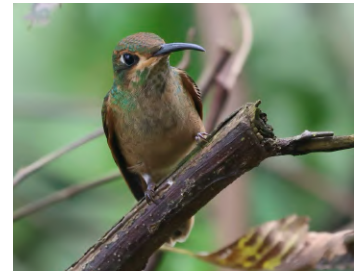
To conquer the inbred timidity of forest-dwelling antpittas, one must feed them foods they prefer (forest worms, not garden-bred substitutes) at regular times, year-round. So, whether there are guests to view them or not, these forest guardians must attend to them daily. We were amazed at the dedication here, and while Angel may be famous in the conservation realm, he was there to greet us and so humble. Along with his brother Rodrigo, they took us to the various sites, whistling or calling “Venga!”. We were successful with three of the five species, seeing Giant, Yellow-breasted, and Ochre-breasted and we were thrilled. This trio showed off the variation in size, and with the Ochre-breasted we had a bonus bird, the Rufous-breasted Anthrush which appeared with its tail cocked, sauntering in with a swagger. Jorge is such a master of digiscoping, he got us all some wonderful photos to remember these moments by. Refugio Paz is popular and we switched activities around so we could be the only group – nice! This visit was a treasured part of our trip.

## **Sat., October 11: Nono-Mindo Road | Guaycapi Lodge | Departures**

We kept up our rhythm of early mornings, having breakfast at 5:30 and departing a little after 6 AM. We were excited to explore the old Nono-Mindo Road, still a dirt track passing through primary forest. We had a peek at the lower portion of it yesterday with good species, and today surpassed any of our expectations. We also had clear skies and some sun, making for a wonderful final day with marvelous views of the Andes.

And we had awesome luck with some birds! We were on a sort of mission to see Plate-billed Mountain Toucan and on a quiet trail we had good looks. While watching them, we also watched a pair of Powerful Woodpeckers, a very memorable moment for sure. Flocks of Red-billed Parrots flew quickly overhead, calling. We tried hard to see an Ocellated Tapaculo calling almost at our feet, getting only brief glimpses, but had better luck with the tiny, mouse-like Spillman’s Tapaculo. Pearled Treerunner, Smoke-colored Pewee, noisy Turquoise Jay, Glossy-black Thrush, and a still-bright Blackburnian Warbler, who likely had just arrived to spend the winter, were other highlights of this grand morning.





Our final lunch was at a newly-opened lodge we plan to use on future trips, a ridgetop location with a million-dollar view, owned in part by our guide, Jorge. It was great to meet his wife and adorable son, and we were warmly welcomed. The scenery we experienced was finer than we'd imagined all through the trip, but we'd had mist and rain that sometimes precluded a full appreciation. Yet on this, our final day, the sun broke through and we could gaze off to our heart's content, that is when not watching the birds which came in to bananas and nectar at close range. We had more hummingbirds putting on a show, including White-necked Jacobin, Andean Emerald, Lesser Violetear, Empress Brilliant and Speckled (45 species of hummingbird for the trip in total!). Julie was able to enjoy her camera again and nailed a classic shot of Flame-faced Tanager, wow. Blue-winged Mountain Tanager was here and common and along a small trail, we walked and spied an Azara's Spinetail. Lunch was delicious, and we shared our trip highlights, sad that our flock, so companionable, would soon disperse.

Time passed quickly and we needed to head back to Quito where, before many of us would catch flights out after midnight, freshened up back at the lovely San Jose del Puembo hacienda hotel. Peg and Philip walked the grounds at sunset for some fresh air and one last species – Cinereous Conebill. Then we did our list in the historic fireplace room and shared good times at a last supper. Here's to the next adventure, this one was great!

*Photos: Group (Carol Beidleman - CB), Andean Emerald (Julie Morgan - JM), Andean Cock-of-the-Rock (JM), Orange-bellied Euphonia (JM), Golden-headed Quetzal (Peg Abbott - PA), Hooded Mountain Tanager (Philip Downey - PD), Group Birding (Terry LeLievre - TL), Sword-billed Hummingbird (PD), Equatorial Antpitta (PD), Yellow-breasted Brushfinch (PD), Scenic (Janine Alice - JA), Black-capped Tanager (PD), Bay-headed Tanager (PD), Golden Tanager (PD), Collared Inca (JM), White-booted Racket-tail (JM), Andean Cock-of-the-rock (PA), Crimson-rumped Toucanet (JM), Rose-faced Parrot (PA), Birding (PA), Flame-faced Tanager (PA), Oilbird (PD), Golden-olive Woodpecker (PA), Collared Aracari (TL), Long-billed Starthroat (PD), Red-headed Barbet (PD), Rufous-fronted Wood-Quail (PD), Group (TL), Scenic (JA), Blue-tailed Trogon (PD), Violet-tailed Sylph (JA), Masked Trogon (PD), Smoke-colored Pewee (PD), Giant Antpitta (PD), Purple-bibbed Whitetip (PD), Scenic (TL), Flame-faced Tanager (JM), Group (JA), Masked Flowerpiercer (JM), Fawn-breasted Brilliant (PD)*