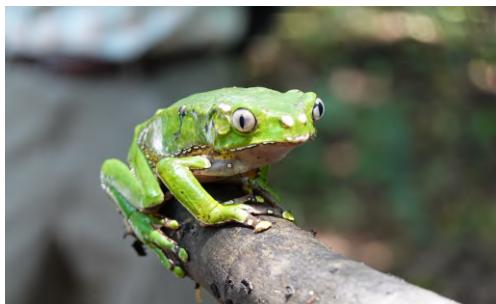


# Amazon Rainforest Discovery | Oct. 23-Nov. 2, 2024 | Trip Report by Chris Harbard



**Guide: Chris Harbard**   **Participants: Jenny, John, Derek, Marge, Eric, Heather, Eric, Jackie, Lisa, Daryl and Gene.**



**Wednesday October 23**

**Lima | Huacha Pucllana | Botanical Gardens**

The trip participants had all arrived early and a few opted to explore Lima on their own, while the rest joined Chris. A minivan took us from the Costa del Sol Wyndham Hotel by the airport to the Huacha Pucllana archeological site and we arrived just in time for a guided tour with an English speaking guide. While enjoying hearing about the site we also managed to see several birds, including West Peruvian Dove, Croaking Ground-Dove, Saffron Finch, Scrub Blackbird, Long-tailed Mockingbird and the wonderfully named Southern Beardless Tyrannulet.



After this we voted to go to the Park of the Legends Zoo and Botanical Gardens before returning to the hotel. Here we saw Amazilia Hummingbird, Harris's Hawk, Blue-and-White Swallow, Bananaquit, Blue-gray Tanager, Cinereous Conebill, Hooded Siskin and many individuals of the dark form of Vermilion Flycatcher, which occurs in the Lima region.

As we had a very early start in the morning the whole group gathered for a welcome drink and confirmation of our plans for the morning before an early dinner at the Costa del Sol restaurant. Robert our local contact had brought luggage tags and boarding passes for all of us so we would be prepared. After our drinks we went for a wonderful meal together in the restaurant, before retiring with a promise to set alarms or get wake-up calls.

## Thursday October 24

## Iquitos | Ceiba Tops | River walks

Our flight to Iquitos was due to leave at 4:25 am and this meant being at the check-in two hours before. So we all met up in the hotel lobby and picked up a box breakfasts to eat on the way. We left the hotel at 2:20, accompanied by our local contact Robert. Walking through the domestic airport we were surprised by the large number of people there that early in the morning ... it would clearly be a full flight! Soon we boarded and were on our way, traveling high over the Andes, and then down to the headwaters of the Amazon.

At Iquitos airport, after we had collected our bags, we were met by our local guide Luis, and taken to the Explorama office where we embarked on a boat which would take us on a 25-mile journey downstream to the Ceiba Tops Lodge, where we would be based for the next three nights. As we sailed down the river there were lots of waterbirds. Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns flew around, occasionally swooping down or diving for fish while on the river's edge were Great Egrets, and small dark Wattled Jacanas, which we would get very familiar with. Breaking the surface near our boat were a couple of pinkish-grey backs ... Pink River Dolphins, which sadly disappeared and were the best (although poor) views we had all trip. After about 45 minutes we reached Ceiba Tops pier where we moored up and climbed the steep steps up to the Lodge and then on to our rooms, soon afterwards heading for a proper breakfast.

Trails run from the lodge into the rainforest and through nearby wetland areas, and Luis suggested a walk around these Luis after we had settled in. So it was we excitedly gathered at about 9:15 for our first excursion into the local habitat. Initially our walk took us between the many accommodations at the Lodge and Luis pointed up into a large tree, exclaiming that there was a barbet up there, and we all looked up high into the leaves, soon spotting a movement which resolved into a pair of Scarlet-crowned Barbets. It was our first experience of bending our necks backwards in order to look directly above us ... an experience which would become familiar with and which would always be very uncomfortable! In the next high tree along the path there



was considerable activity, with several small birds calling loudly and excitedly. There was a Piratic Flycatcher and a couple of unidentified tanagers, plus a glimpse of a euphonia. As is common with mixed groups of birds like this there were many which went unidentified. The trail into the forest took us across a stream and here, at the bridge Luis heard a Green-and-Rufous Kingfisher, which we eventually glimpsed as it sped down the stream. Further on we reached a series of small ponds and we slowly explored around them, getting great views of White-banded Swallows, a pair of Gilded Barbets, an Orange-backed Troupial and a bright red Masked Crimson Tanager. Noisy flocks of Tui Parakeets were flying over every so often and we managed to get views of a few perched. Luis spotted a small frog on the ground and explained to us that this was a Smoky Jungle Frog, normally nocturnal, which would become an enormous seven inches long.

We had already chosen our lunch at breakfast, with a choice of fish or chicken. We became familiar with this decision, for lunch and for dinner, with the fish usually being dorado. However, we soon found that the way in which each meal was cooked was both delicious and varied. After lunch Luis said he would take us to one of the areas downstream, which has an interesting population of bird species. We disembarked on a beach and immediately noticed a shorebird, running across the sand – a beautiful Collared Plover! and walked up to a bridge which crossed a stream. The stream was fast flowing and carried hundreds of small ‘water cabbages’ down into the main river and we crossed a narrow bridge, following a trail inland. Either side of the trail were grasses and bushes and Luis suddenly gestured for us to stop. He explained that he had heard some spinetails, and would try to call them out. Immediately a couple of noisy Red-and-white Spinetails hopped up to look at us and up in a nearby tree were some Blue-gray Tanagers, but these looked different from regular ones as the Amazon race of this bird has white wing patches. The trail entered some woodland where we saw Russet-backed Oropendola nests hanging from several branches and had views of large yellow-tailed birds flying in. High up in the trees a small bird called, and this was a Plain-breasted Piculet, a tiny woodpecker and in a neighboring tree was an Orange-fronted Plushcrown – both were pains in the neck! More woodpeckers appeared – three Little Woodpeckers and a huge Crimson-crested Woodpecker. Soon it was time to head back and as we headed down towards the river a brown bird flew up into a small bush, and perched – a Striped Cuckoo, looking like a diminutive roadrunner. A flock of parrotlets landed in a tree nearby which Luis called Blue-winged but it turns out they are now known as Riparian Parrotlets. As if this wasn’t enough, one final feathered friend flew up ... a Black-capped Donacobius. With a name like that it should look good ... and it does. Arguably one of the best looking birds of the regions ... and fairly common. Into the boat we climbed and headed back to Ceiba Tops, tired and very happy, with dinner to look forward to.

But dinner was not all, as Luis asked whether any of us would like to have a night stroll after dinner to look for night birds. Nearly everyone said yes!! So we gathered together before dinner to run through our first bird list for the day. After our lovely dinner we had a few minutes to grab our insect spray and flashlights before we



headed out. After about a hundred yards, Luis stopped us and shone his torch up beside one of the buildings. There, perched on a branch, was a pale lump which Luis explained was a Great Potoo, a member of the nightjar family. It feeds at night on large flying insects like beetles and grasshoppers and is well camouflaged in the day time, looking like a dead branch. As we walked along the trail towards the ponds we saw many moths in the flashlight beam, and suddenly Luis froze and pointed towards the ground ... there was a huge Smoky Jungle Frog, bigger than most hands! We stopped at the gazebo which sat in the middle of one of the ponds. There Luis threw some food out into the water and suddenly dozens of turtle heads appeared, greedily snatching at the food. In Luis's flashlight beam a pair of eyes reflected back – it was a Spectacled Caiman, which we watched floating around the pond. The night noises were fascinating with lots of piping squeaks from tree frogs plus various insects. As we got back towards the buildings Luis gestured for us to be quiet and crept off the trail. His flashlight beam moved around and suddenly stopped, perfectly surrounding a brown shape on a branch and this time it had glaring yellow eyes – a Tropical Screech-Owl. Everyone had fabulous views of the delightful bird – a fitting end to an amazing (and very long) first day!

## Friday October 25

## Monkeys | Yagua Community | Spinetails

We were up early for a 6:30 breakfast so we could be in the boat at 7:30 to head across the river to Isla de los Monos (Monkey Island) – primate reserve not far away. A quick look outside the Lodge building before we left revealed Fork-tailed Palm Swifts flying over, a bird we would see every day. High on a palm tree was a pair of Yellow-bellied Dacnis and Great Kiskadees were calling, as they did every morning. Into the boat we climbed and were soon heading along the river. We disembarked by a large sign welcoming us to the island, and a trail into the trees. Walking along this trail, one had to watch one's footing carefully as there were many tree roots which might trip the unwary. This made it difficult to look for birds while walking. One of the first birds we saw was a Black-fronted Nunbird, all black with a red beak, then a pair of Cream-colored Woodpeckers appeared, initially difficult to see but later we had great views. Other birds on our walk around included White-winged Becard and Dull-capped Attila and great views of a Zimmer's Woodcreeper. But it was the monkeys we had come to see and we soon gathered in the sanctuary's main building where we were told about this rescue center which protects and preserves monkeys. Individuals being rehabilitated are kept in cages and when ready they are freed onto the 450 hectare island. A guide from the center walked and explained as we went. Around the center there were a few small monkeys visible and as we entered the trees we began to see more. A young brown woolly monkey walked up to us and to everyone's amusement, grabbed hold of Chris's trouser leg and climbed up to his shoulders, clinging on. Chris smiled nervously and said he was OK about it. The monkey, it seemed, like salt and as Chris had been perspiring in the heat there was lots available. Holding on with his four limbs, and his tail, he stayed with Chris for most of the walk round, eventually climbing down after about 15



minutes. Others in the group were approached by other monkeys of various colors and shapes and soon several had their own companions. On the way round we saw a Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth and many other monkeys including Coppery Titi, Black-mantled Tamarin and eastern Pygmy Marmoset. Soon it was time to head back to Ceiba Tops for lunch.

After lunch we headed down river to the nearby Yagua community where we were met by members of the tribe who took us up to a huge, roofed structure where, Luis explained, they would perform various dances, some by the men, some by the women and one by the children. Guests were invited to join in with one of the dances which most did! After this we were shown their traditional blowpipe weapons. The making of one was described in detail to pieces of wood were cut to a suitable length and a groove was cut into one side. These were then bound together and sand was used to scour out a seamless and smooth hole. Some of the tribe then demonstrated how to shoot a dart at a target and guests were invited to have a try, clearly showing that it is harder than it looks! There was a wonderful display of local handicrafts on show and lots were purchased with Lisa buying a lovely tapir.

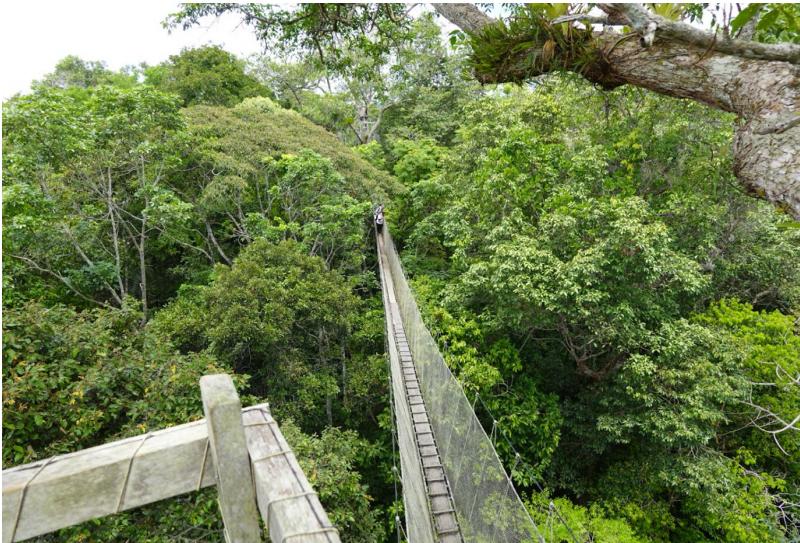
On the way back to Ceiba Tops we stopped at the spot on the river bank and followed Luis along a trail through rice paddies (now dried out with the rice soon to be ready for harvest), carefully avoiding quite large crevices in the dried mud. The path took us to a raised bank and some trees and bushes. This area, Luis told us, was good for spinetails and many other special birds and was soon trying to call some of them out. During the hour we were there we managed to see Parker's and White-bellied Spinetails (the latter only glimpsed), Black-and White Antbird, Riverside Tyrant, and Black-capped Becard plus many other commoner birds.

Back at Ceiba Tops there was time for a little relax before going through the wildlife list and then having dinner. Luis offered another nighttime walk after dinner, but this time only three people took part. Great Potoo and Tropical Screech-Owl were both seen again, also two Spectacled Caimans and a Common Opossum, which was a new one for the mammal list.

**Saturday October 26**

**ExplorNapo Lodge | Canopy Walkway | Hoatzin**

We were all up again for an early breakfast this morning, before taking a boat for a short distance downstream to the town of Indiana where we climbed into tuk-tuks, the local transport, which took us to the Napo River. The road was interesting, very narrow and filled with potholes. According to our guide they are expecting it to be resurfaced soon! At Mazan we boarded a fast speedboat which zoomed down the Napo River for just over an hour until we reached ExplorNapo Lodge.



ExplorNapo Lodge gives access to pristine rainforest in the Sucusari Reserve and also is an opportunity to experience one of the world's longest treetop walkways. The walk to the start of the walkway was productive for birds with Golden-headed and Blue-capped Manakins seen by most. Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, and Wedge-billed and Strong-billed Woodcreepers also appeared. The canopy walkway runs for a third of a mile, reaching 115 feet above the forest floor. It is narrow, with netting on either side, and is suspended between platforms. We reached the tower where the canopy walkway began. Our guide, Luis, showed us that the posts and handrails on the way up the tower seemed strangely gnawed by something. This he told us was the work of porcupines, which come to the towers at night for the salt left by sweating visitors who all hold on to the same places on the posts and rails. They chew off the salty surfaces, which have to be regularly checked to ensure they are all totally safe. Three people at a time cross between each platform. Keep your feet in the center of the pathway as you walk and all is easy, however with other people on it, there is a side-to-side movement which makes steady walking quite tricky. Each platform was a relief, and also provided a chance to look for wildlife. More was heard than seen but Amazonian Trogan, White-fronted Nunbirds and Many-banded Aracari were seen by a lucky few. Some dark clouds were visible some distance away and the rumbling of thunder could be heard, as we swayed over from platform to platform, eventually reaching the end not far from where we started. The walk back proved to be quite exciting birdwise. Luis heard calls and managed to coax out four species of antshrikes – Cinereous, Saturnine, Dusky-throated and Bluish-slate, as well as finding a couple of very showy White-cheeked Antbirds.

As we walked back the dark clouds and distant thunder reached us, soon a small pattering of rain became a huge downpour and the trail became almost a river in places. Some put on ponchos, while others simply got wet and soon we were back to the Lodge building where someone was heard muttering "Well it IS a rainforest". We dried out while we had a wonderful lunch at the Lodge. Just by the entrance door was a feeding station for squirrel monkeys and it was a delight to watch them trying to catch the pieces of banana we threw to them. After lunch it was time to meet the local shaman. We sat in a semi circle, while Luis introduced the tall shaman from a local tribe who spoke the Santa Rosina language so Luis translated for him. He showed us the many of plants which he uses including: dragon blood tree (*Croton lechleri*) whose sap used to treat cuts (it looks just like blood!); cat's claw vine (*Uncaria tomentosa*) whose bark is used for various arthritic complaints; *Dracontium spruceanum* which has a bark resembling the skin of a fer-de-lance snake and whose large tuber is used as an antidote for snake venom. We were also shown a bottle containing a cloudy pale brown liquid – ayahuasca, the famous hallucinogenic brew, used in divination and other shamanic ceremonies and produced from a local vine, combined with the leaves of other psychoactive plants. We were only allowed to smell it – not unpleasant!



Soon it was time to head back and we boarded the boat for our fast trip back to Mazan. Along the way we slowed by the southern bank of the river to look a group of trees where a certain bird is often seen ... and there it was! The Hoatzin!! There were at least four of these extraordinary birds up in some nearby trees, with their long necks and black and white tails, and oddly crested head with blue facial skin. These prehistoric-looking birds feed on leaves and have special digestive system to process them. We watched one of them fly clumsily to the next tree – amazing creatures! Soon we were back in the tuk-tuks, heading to Indiana and our skiff which took us back to Ceiba Tops. Time for a short relax and to begin packing before doing the bird list, then enjoying dinner. No night-time walk but a pair of Tropical Screech-Owls were found perched by the path on the way back to our rooms.

## Sunday October 27

## MV Zafiro | Spectacled Caiman

Our luggage had been placed out early so it could be taken to the boat which would ferry us back to Iquitos. After a delicious final breakfast we boarded our boat and were soon down the mighty Amazon. We slowed down a few times to look for Red-breasted Meadowlarks, a recent colonist to this part of the Amazon. It perches up on vegetation by the river, often with Yellow-hooded Blackbirds, and soon we spotted one, perched on a post. All along the river we could see Wattled Jacanas, and as we approached Iquitos Luis saw a few Common Gallinules with them. We reached the pier in Iquitos and our luggage was unloaded. We then boarded a bus which took us to the Double Tree Hotel in Iquitos where we met our new guides who would be with us on our river cruise on the *MV Zafiro*, Daniel and Hulber. We boarded the new coach (nicely air-conditioned) which then drove us to Nauta, picking up a family of five from the airport who would make up the complement of guests on board the river boat. Along the way we enjoyed a box lunch. In Nauta we were taken to the Jungle Experiences Lounge where we enjoyed drinks and snacks plus dancing from locals and an iguana! Soon it was time to take a skiff over to the *Zafiro* which was waiting for us just offshore.

We were shown our rooms and as we settled in the boat moved to our mooring place for the night, a few miles upriver. *MV Zafiro* is a delight and very well appointed – spacious cabins, lovely dining room and on the upper deck a fabulous lounge with a bar where we would enjoy several special activities along the way. Outside of the lounge was an open deck area, with comfortable loungers, chairs and tables and even a jacuzzi. As the day neared its end, we boarded a large skiff which would be our means of exploring on this river journey. A smaller skiff was used by the family of five whose main interest on the trip was fishing. We slowly sailed along the river's edge with Hulber shining his flashlight, looking for anything interesting. In the smaller skiff guide Daniel was doing the same. On a small tree Hulber found a Proboscis Bat with its distinctive long nose, and in the grassy



vegetation on the bank he also spotted a Cane Toad. Suddenly something was glimpsed among a tangle of tree branches – eyes had reflected back at us. Carefully maneuvering between the branches towards the bank, Huber was able to get out of the boat and reach down to grab ... a baby Spectacled Caiman. He brought it on board so we could all get a close look – what a beautiful animal!! We gently let it go, back into the river, and headed back for a very welcome dinner. After dinner we ran through the wildlife list and then to bed!

## Monday October 28

## Sunbitterns | Spectacled Owl | Shaman

We woke early, ready to head out at 6:30, to explore along the Yanayacu River. Beside the *Zafiro* a shape broke the surface a couple of times giving some of us a brief view of a Pink River Dolphin. Among the familiar Great and Snowy Egrets we spotted several Cocoi Herons with their white necks, silver back and black caps, and then we noticed a smaller heron with creamy neck and underparts, blue bill and black cap, with plumes down its back – a Capped Heron!

All the while there were squawks from various parrots or parakeets flying over which our guide Hulber interpreted: Dusky -headed Parakeet, Orange-cheeked Parrot, and Red-bellied Macaw were just a few. Suddenly there was a message from a second boat ahead of us which had us speeding down the river in time to locate a pair of Sunbitterns perched on a log. What a treat to see these iconic waterbirds with their cryptic coloration. We continued down the river with Black-collared Hawks being the commonest raptor, closely followed by Roadside Hawks. A perched vulture was our first good view of a Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, a nice change from the omnipresent Blacks.

We continued along the river until Hulber signalled our driver to stop and back up. High up in a dark green tree was a lovely bird ... but very difficult to point out. It was too far for his green laser pointer to reach. Eventually by using the clock method and a good descriptive imagination most people managed to get onto a small bright turquoise blob which was in fact a Plum-throated Cotinga – if only it had been closer! Next was an altogether better sighting, a Laughing Falcon perched in the open on a tree branch. Hulber described how these birds are able to catch small boa constrictors and are a major factor in controlling snake numbers along the Amazon. We travelled back toward the river mouth and were met by a team from *MV Zafiro* who drew alongside in their skiff and delivered breakfast! Delicious sandwiches, fruit, even yogurt and granola, plus not just coffee and fruit juice but even mimosas for those that wanted them. All full silver service on trays!

After our breakfast we head back up the small river towards a local village called Buenos Aires, where we met with residents who explained about their initiative for conserving the river turtles. The turtles lay their eggs on sandy beaches, but these eggs are often stolen for food, so the villagers look for signs of egg laying, then dig out the eggs and move them to a special bed of sand, created in the village. Here the eggs can develop safely and the



young turtles are then released into the river when they hatch. We were given a container of tiny turtles which we took onto our skiff and then sailed out into the river where we were each able to release one! Next we sailed a short distance and left the skiff to explore a trail inland, joined by a local villager who was taking us to look for something special. He hacked at vegetation which obscured the trail using his machete, and eventually we gathered beside a large tree and were signaled to be quiet. We split into two groups and carefully walked along, watching our feet to minimize noise. Hulber spotted a sloth in a tree, but this was not our target. Then the local guide gestured up into the trees, and Hulber quietly positioned us to get a view of ... a Spectacled Owl. Perched high up in the distance it glared down at us. Chris set up his scope to get a better view and soon we were all watching this incredible bird, the largest owl in the Amazon.

Back in the skiff it was time to head for another village, called Veinte de Enero (January Twentieth) where we visited a school, meeting the school children who introduced themselves, and we also introduced ourselves. They listened attentively, and then burst out laughing when Lisa told them her name, which apparently is also the name of a local (and tasty) fish. Following a trail out on the village a little way, we came to an area where the villagers are actively replanting native trees to help the jungle to become re-established and we were all invited to plant a small sapling, and each one was tagged with the name of the person planting it. As we waited to join the skiff again, a pair of Blue and Yellow Macaws were seen flying into a tree across the river, and Chris's scope gave us a chance to see them perched there. We headed back for lunch which we enjoyed in the wonderfully air-conditioned dining room of the *Zafiro*. After lunch we had a few hours relaxation as we sailed along the river to our next mooring place.

At about 4pm we arrived by the town of San Regis where we visited a local shaman. It was raining as we climbed the slippery path to the outdoor building where she waited for us. Her name was Karola, well as being a shaman, she is also the local midwife and doctor, serving communities in nine regions along the river for the last 16 years. She told us that her personal protector is a jaguar spirit, and as well as describing the many herbs and plants she uses (all the same as the previous shaman we met), she also revealed that she has helped many people who have been placed under curses by witch doctors. After our visit, we headed back to *Zafiro* where we relaxed until a special performance for us up in the bar, from a 'local band'. The local band, it transpired was our very own *Zafiro* staff, playing guitars, drums, maracas and flute. They played a number of familiar tunes such as *El Condor Pasa* (Simon and Garfunkel) and guests joined them for dancing, with Marge really throwing herself into it!! Then it was time for a wonderful buffet dinner, followed by the wildlife list.



**Tuesday October 29**

### **Fruitcrows | Pied Plover | Piranhas**

We woke up early, ready for a 6am departure for a visit to the Amazon Natural Park. As we left in the skiff some gentle rain started, gradually becoming heavier. We disembarked where a trail began up into the trees, towards a large building. Once an imposing house, it had been abandoned and was now falling into disrepair. It had been very grand, with huge mahogany doors and was specially built by a former government minister who had apparently been involved in various illegal activities. A large, terraced area at the back of the house provided some shelter from the rain, looking out into the forest. A Long-billed Woodcreeper was the only bird which appeared while we were giving us occasional good views. Parrots could be heard flying over but nothing else was seen and we soon headed back to the skiff to return to *Zafiro* for lovely buffet breakfast.

After breakfast the rain we waited until the rain had abated and then headed back to the trail we had begun to explore earlier. A loud, single note call was identified by Hulber as a Cinerous Tinamou, sadly there was no hope of seeing this secretive bird. We ventured past the abandoned house to the edge of a lake and then further on, to where it opened out with a wide view across the lake. There we could see a boat with the other group from *Zafiro* trying their hand at fishing. In the trees by the lake we saw Plumbeous Pigeon, Palm tanager and Yellow-rumped Cacique. On the walk back we heard Amazonian Motmot and Rufous-capped Antthrush, and a noisy group of Purple-throated Fruitcrows appeared and perched above us giving great views.

Back on *Zafiro* we were treated to another wonderful buffet lunch with the pastry chef producing some amazing breads, shaped like animals. The next few hours of the afternoon were spent on board as we sailed to our next mooring spot. As sailed along the river, we occasionally came close to the shore. It was mostly lined with Cecropia trees, and also occasionally with larger varied trees, and these were worth checking out. Chris had his scope out and managed to see several raptors, including Black Caracara, Black Hawk-Eagle and three species of vultures. Several Horned Screamers were also seen by the shore. Where we moored up, a very small hawk was sitting on a branch – a Tiny Hawk!

We boarded the skiff again at 4:30 to cruise along the river and then up an offshoot to do some piranha fishing and some nighttime wildlife watching! As we entered the smaller river Hulber spotted a Pied Plover, one of the most attractive shorebirds of the region, with its back-and-white plumage, and bright red legs. In the trees and bushes along the shore we saw Smooth-billed Anis, Blue-gray and Silver-beaked Tanagers and Red-capped Cardinals. Several White-headed Marsh Tyrants posed for us just above the river's edge and some Red-bellied Macaws flew over. We headed for a spot where we moored the skiff for a spot of piranha fishing. A simple rod and line, with a hook, was baited with a piece of raw meat, and this was then dropped into the water. Splashing the tip of the rod in the water was supposed to be an attractant. We caught one Red-bellied Piranha and several



grabbed the bait but fell off when raised out of the water. Meanwhile, in nearby bushes, Hulber was finding some good birds. A female Black-throated Mango came to see us, her white belly with black central stripe being obvious. Hulber called in a pair of Barred Antshrikes and a Red-and-white Spinetail. By now it was starting to get dark and Common Pauraque was seen hawking for insects. As we headed back to the *Zafiro* there were dozens of Greater Bulldog bats, a huge fishing bat which is common along rivers. Both Great and Common Potoos were seen on riverside branches, and we stopped by some trees where a loud squeaking noise was identified as immature Striped Owls. Soon we were back at the boat in time for dinner, followed by the wildlife list, then bed.

## Wednesday October 30

## Cotingas | Frog and Boa | Potoo

We awoke to a lovely sunny morning, such a contrast to yesterday. A pre-breakfast boat ride had been planned, exploring along the Marañon and down the Nauta Caño. We saw Ringed, Amazon and Green-and-rufous Kingfishers, and at one stop a Bluish-fronted Jacamar showed nicely and at another we had great views of Dark-breasted Spinetail. Down Nauta Caño a longer stop by an area of lower vegetation with some larger trees was very productive, with Plum-throated Cotingas, Glittering-throated Emerald, Lettered Aracari, Green-and-gold and Paradise Tanagers, and Yellow-bellied Dacnis. We headed back for a lovely buffet breakfast wishing we could have stayed out longer.

After breakfast we took the skiff to the start of the Pahuachiro trail – a nice loop which was very birdy. We were joined by local guide, Rafael. A group of three Bluish-fronted Jacamars posed for us and in one small patch of jungle we found Gray-fronted Flatbill, Plumbeous and Band-tailed Antbirds plus Great Antshrike, and Long-billed and Zimmer's Woodcreepers along the trail. But it was not just birds this morning Rafael, with the incredible eyesight possessed by all indigenous people, spotted a Yellow-browed Brush Rat, which was looking down at us from a crevice in the trunk of a tree. Next he found a Waxy Monkey Tree Frog, a huge green amphibian, sending Lisa, our friendly frog fanatic, into paroxysms of delight. This was soon followed by an Ecuadorian Brown Velvet Tarantula and a Red-tailed Boa Constrictor. Time to head back to the *Zafiro*, and after the usual amazing buffet lunch we sailed along the river for several hours seeing a few Plumbeous Kites and Swallow-tailed Puffbirds perched on riverside trees. At 4pm we were invited by Roger, the cruise Director, to a demonstration of how to make the best Pisco Sour by Charlie, our bartender. After describing his 3:1:1 (pisco:lime juice:sugar water) recipe he proceeded to mix one in a cocktail shaker, which those who tried it said tasted good (and strong!). Then it was our turn to try and Lisa quickly jumped up to have a go, being a bartender back home. She mixed everything well but when it came to shaking it up her cocktail shaker was not well sealed leaving Roger to wittily describe it as more like a 'Pisco Shower'!



The plan for the afternoon was to explore up the Yacapana River which leads to a series of lakes. We would stay out until after dark, to look for night creatures on the way back. The river was quite narrow and full of 'water cabbage' which streamed out into the main river. With suitable bug repellent applied we began our way up the river. This proved to be tricky as the water level was unusually low, and not only did we occasionally run onto the shallow edge, but the outboard motor of our skiff kept making contact with the muddy bottom. After an hour or so we decided to turn back, and some of us transferred to the Zafira's second skiff which was smaller and slightly easier to navigate along the channel. The rest of us simply floated back down stream, with Hubert using a paddle to keep us away from the bank.

By now it was dark and we were thrilled to spot a Great Potoo, perched on a nearby tree. While we had seen one roosting in the daytime before, none of us had actually watched one feeding and it was fascinating to see it fly out to catch moths or other insects, returning to its perch like a flycatcher. A couple of Common Potoos were seen a little later. Fireflies flashed on and off from nearby trees, and we tried to identify constellations above us. Night noises included several Amazon Bamboo Rats and Black-crowned Night-Herons. The second skiff came back for the rest of us, and soon we were back on board and ready for dinner!

## Thursday October 31

## Monkeys | Lily Pond | Nighthawks

Another early start at 6am and this morning we were set for a long morning out. All but one of us loaded into the skiff and headed for the entrance to the Yarapa River, quite close by. Along the Amazon River bank we found some Drab Water-Tyrants and a couple of Pale-legged Horneros. Our aim was to look for birds and monkeys and we began by cruising along, stopping if something interesting was seen. A black bird flew up from the riverside and rapidly disappeared – it was a Muscovy Duck, a true wild one and the first we had seen. Every tall bare trunk was inspected as we sailed by and we found a family of Wedge-billed Woodcreepers, a lovely Spot-breasted Woodpecker, and some gorgeous White-cheeked Jacamars. Huber chose a likely spot to attract in some birds and soon we were watching Glittering-throated Hummingbird, Yellow-bellied Dacnis and Red-capped Cardinals. Soon we stopped by the bank where a path led into the forest. We followed this a short way, and there up in a tree, were two Common Woolly Monkeys and adult and a young one. It was fascinating to watch how they used their prehensile tails as if it was a fifth limb, and the little one delighted us by hanging from it with his four other limbs stretched out. Huber told us about how monkeys around the world had evolved into different types, depending on their habitat and behavioral needs. A little further along we stopped to look for the smallest monkeys in the world – the tiny Eastern Pygmy Marmoset which weighs just over 100g. Everyone got great views of one through Chris's scope, many taking great digiscope photos. We walked further into the forest to



look for birds and while we didn't see many, we heard Buff-breasted and Thrush-like Wrens, Purple-throated Fruitcrow and Gray-capped Flycatcher.

Back in the skiff, it was time for breakfast – a lovely tray of sandwiches, boiled egg, cake and fruit, with coffee and juice. After enjoying this we headed for a lodge with facilities we could use, where our quick stop provided a small amount of time for birding, and Gene spotted a Scarlet-crowned Barbet and our first sighting of a Thrush-like Wren, as well as a White-throated Toucan which only he and Hulber saw. Inside the roof of the lodge was a beautiful Nancy Ma's Night Monkey, who peeked out at us occasionally. Leaving the lodge we had a glimpse of a Channel-billed Toucan before finding a narrow river which we sailed down for a short way and stopped to look for kingfishers and other birds. This was very productive and we saw Masked Crimson Tanager, Purple-throated Euphonia, Buff-breasted Wren and Short-crested Flycatcher, as well as hearing Amazonian Streaked-Antwren and Pygmy Antwren. All too soon it was time to head back to the Zafiro after a truly wonderful morning out. Buffet lunch and a relaxing afternoon as we headed to our next stop.

At 4pm we headed from our mooring just a short distance in the skiff to a trail leading through the forest to a lily pond, looping back to where we started. This afternoon we had the other guide, Daniel with us for a change. He immediately pointed out a Red-throated Caracara calling, which we tried to coax in but to no avail. As we explored the trail he found a Red-tailed Boa Constrictor which gave us great views and a Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth. We saw little in the forest but as soon as we reached the lily pond, there were more birds. These giant water lilies are named Victoria after the British queen and the pads can reach a diameter of three meters (nine feet)! In distant trees at the back of the pond we could see parrots (eventually identified as Short-tailed and Festive) and all the time large flocks of White-winged Parakeets were flying over, heading to roost. As we returned to the skiff, there were lots of birds streaming past – Sand-colored Nighthawks which had been roosting on a nearby sandbar. Back at the Zafiro it was soon time for dinner.

## **Friday November 1**

## **Mixed flock | Butterfly Project | Music**

Our usual 6am start with an early breakfast was followed by a skiff trip along the river for several miles, stopping for a short walk to the lily pad pond we visited yesterday afternoon. It was a beautiful early morning and with the breeze from the moving skiff it felt really pleasant. We slowly explored along the river's edge, with lovely views of Red-capped Cardinals, and a mix of Tropical Kingbirds, kiskadees and Social Flycatchers. With a small group of swallows and martins was a larger, blue-black hirundine – a Gray-breasted Martin, not yet seen this trip, soon followed by a couple more. The usual Roadside (should be Riverside) Hawks and Black-collared Hawks watched us pass by and a Horned Screamer perched on a bush. A couple of Red and White Spinetails gave some great views at one point.



We disembarked at the start of the trail to the Lily Pad pond and in the clearing there Hulber tried calling some birds down. The first we noticed were three Blue-throated Jacamars which gave great scope views. Then some Buff-breasted Wrens popped up to say Hello and before long the trees above us were alive with birds. Hooded and Silver-beaked Tanagers, White-vented and Orange-bellied Euphonias, and pair of Yellow-breasted Dacnis all showed well. A couple of hummingbirds kept appearing and disappearing before we could really see them, until one perched for a few seconds and we saw a dark-tipped red beak, plus a red throat – a Rufous-throated Sapphire! As we continued on to the Lily Pond a shout of “Kite” drew our attention to a lovely Swallow-tailed Kite flying over, a winter visitor to the area and another new bird for the trip. We boarded the skiff to return to the Zafiro and sped across the river to a sandbar which had lots of birds on it. Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns and several Black Skimmers were perched on the shore, and some shorebirds caught our attention. Collared Plover ran along the water’s edge and there also were a few Pectoral and Solitary Sandpipers. Suddenly a cloud of birds took off – all Sand-colored Nighthawks, hundreds of them, circling and swooping before landing again at what was clearly a large daytime roost.

Back at the Zafiro we prepared for a visit to the village of Vista Alegre where we were met by the head Selmira, who told us how a large part of the village had been lost to erosion of the riverbank. She also told us of the conservation project she runs called the Golden Pupae, and took us to the butterfly house. We were shown the eggs, pupae and adult forms of an Owl butterfly, as well as a brightly colored caterpillar from a local moth. We then walked to a handicraft display where we were also told about the communities bee-keeping and fabric dyeing. Hulber took a some of us on a birdwatching walk while others stayed in the shade in the village. The trail out of the village was a concrete pathway, was apparently built to make sure than villagers heading out to the fields would not accidentally step on snakes!! A pair of Ferruginous Pygmy Owls were located up in the trees and gave us great scope views. We also heard (but sadly didn’t see) Black-throated Antbirds which were singing close to the path. We headed back to Zafiro for another delicious buffet lunch.

After lunch we headed for the confluence of the Ucayali and Marañon Rivers, which join to form the mighty Amazon. As we contemplated this, we wondered just how many trees and other floating debris passes down here every day. Most of the river banks are inaccessible due to trunks and branches caught up and it seemed incredible that our boat (and others) can navigate safely through these waters. We then turned up the Marañon River and moored up for our final skiff adventure, navigating around a very large island. As we got into the skiff Hulber suddenly saw an Amazonian Umbrellabird flying over, but only a few of us glimpsed it. We explored the northern and southern banks of the river, stopping for anything interesting. Perched on the riverside bushes we saw a Horned Screamer, and several Pale-vented Pigeons. In one tree was a group of Short-tailed Parrots and a few Dusky-headed Parakeets, and a little further on a tiny Riparian Parrotlet. Suddenly Hulber cried



“Chachalacas!” and we saw three long-tailed, brown birds flying up from the riverside vegetation and disappearing behind the bushes – a brief view of a species we had only heard until now. Black-crowned Night Herons, and a smart Cocoi Heron were seen as well as the usual egrets. Soon it was time to head back and Hulber announced that he had drinks for everyone, and produced some bottles of champagne so we could drink a toast to the success of the trip. Chris said a few words and we then returned for dinner. Before we sat down to eat, there was another appearance of the Zafira’s very own boy band who entertained us with songs and more dancing. Chris thanked the captain and crew of the ship for looking after us so well. The day ended with the final wildlife list of the trip and the reminder that bags had to be outside our rooms by 6:30am.

## Saturday November 2

## Farewell | Manatees | Lima

When we woke we were moored just offshore from Nauta. Bags had been put out early and we sat for our last breakfast. We said goodbye to the Zafiro, her captain and the crew and took the skiff ashore accompanied by Hulber and Daniel. Our bags were loaded up to be taken to the airport while we joined some tuk-tuks for a visit to Nauta market. We followed Hulber and Daniel along the narrow passages through the market, assailed by a range of smells and sounds. As well as lots of clothes, hardware items and toys, there was also a fish and meat market. Hundred of fish of different sizes and colors were laid out, un-iced, and not especially appetizing – it was an interesting look into the everyday life of people living here. Soon (thankfully for some) it was time to head back to the coach, and our final journey back to Iquitos and its airport. But there was one stop before we got there – a Manatee Rescue Center which rehabilitates a wide range of wildlife, operated by the Centro de Rescate Amazonica. We were shown around by a guide from the center who explained about manatees and the many problems they face, showing us rescued individuals held in tanks. There were also many birds, including guans, toucans and many macaws, parrots and parakeets. Several monkey species were there, and some javelinas. We were shown the aquarium where they have some enormous Paiche fishes, one of the world’s largest fishes reaching three meters (9 feet) in length.

We reached Iquitos airport and collected our luggage from the coach, heading for the check-in, which we found would not open for a while. Hulber had a box lunch for all of us so we sat and enjoyed this while waiting. Soon we checked in to our LATAM flight and bid Hulber and Daniel goodbye. In Lima we collected our bags and headed for the Wyndham Costa del Sol where a room was available to store our bags. Some were staying on, and had rooms booked, while others had flights at various times to different places. There was time to have a final dinner together, with most of us sitting together as the hotel was full and the restaurant very busy. After dinner went across to the airport and checked in for our various flights back to wherever we had come from with any sleep on the plane no doubt filled with dreams of the wonderful trip we had all experienced.

Photos: Group at Botanical Gardens (Chris Harbard - CH), Black-capped Donacobius (CH), Jackie and Eric White (JW), Waxy Monkey Tree Frog (Eric Mackie - EM), Hummingbird (needs ID) (JW), Vermilion Flycatcher (dark form) (CH), Masked Crimson Tanager (JW), Owl butterfly (JW), Tui Parakeet (CH), Tiny Frog (JW), Suspension Bridge (EM), Aracari NEEDS ID (CH), Tuktuks (CH), The walkway down at Indiana to catch the skiff to Ceiba Tops (CH), Owls NEEDS ID (JW), Riverbank (Jennifer Muller - JM), Riverboat (EM), Yellow head bird NEEDS ID (JW), Tern? NEEDS ID (JW), Caracara? NEEDS ID (JW), Kingfisher NEEDS ID (JW), Owl NEEDS ID (GM), Sunset from the skiff (CH), White head bird NEEDS ID (JW), Red-capped Cardinals (JW), Nancy Ma's Night Monkey, Motmots (JW), Hawk NEEDS ID (JW)