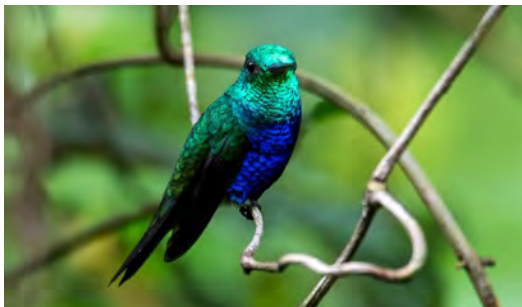


Birds and Mammals of Ecuador's Andes | Nov. 17-30, 2025 | Trip Report | by Robert Gallardo



Compiled by guide Robert Gallardo with local guide Jorge Luna. Our clients included Tracey, Cathy, Daryl, Lisa, Arlana, Arden, Ron & Paula.



A trip to South America would not be complete without visiting Ecuador. It is considered one of the seventeen most biodiverse places on earth; boasting nearly 1,700 birds, 372 mammals, 4,000 butterflies, 20,000 vascular plants, and more. It is small in size compared to neighboring countries, but harbors all the same habitats as well as the famous Galapagos marine archipelago. The towering Andes divide the country into two diverse areas, each one offering a different set of flora and fauna. During this trip, eight intrepid guests would set out with our local guide, Jorge Luna, and Robert to explore the diverse ecosystems that would span the western Andes slopes, paramo in the highlands, eastern Andes slopes, and finally the Napo River in the lowlands of the Amazon basin.

During this incredible trip, we would record 414 birds and 20 mammals, as well as a myriad of tropical butterflies and come to appreciate the incredible diversity of plant life. We visited national parks, reserves, numerous



feeder stations, road canoes through the rainforest, visited indigenous communities, and so much more. There were numerous breathtaking moments which will no doubt remain as lasting memories.

Monday November 17 Arrivals | Overnight in Quito

Today the adventure began for the eight participants. Everyone arrived in Quito and met at the San Jose de Puembo Hotel. We all met in the lobby and took an afternoon walk in the manicured gardens. There, we would become familiar with the Rufous-collared Sparrow and Great Thrush which would be present throughout the highland portion of the trip. Eared Dove (the equivalent of the White-winged Dove in the north) were flitting about. A handsome male Vermilion Flycatcher adorned a volleyball net. Some non-native bottlebrush trees were attracting a few hummingbirds and our future mega list would begin. A few Sparkling Violetears and a lone Black-tailed Trainbearer were found. Further back we found a Rufous-tailed Hummingbird which seems to be everywhere in the Neotropics. However, something tiny caught our attention. It was a female White-bellied Woodstar and we watched as she came in to feed like a large bumblebee. A glittering male Western Emerald also appeared. In the trees above us we spotted a pair of Scrub Tanagers and the species yet to come in this family would be mind blowing. Across the road and over a field we spotted Cinereous Harrier to end the day and mark a great way to start the trip.

Tuesday November 18 | Zuraloma | Guaycapi | Sachatamia Lodge

Today we headed out literally at the crack of dawn. We wanted to get to our first destination early and beat the morning traffic in Quito. Jorge Luna, our local expert guide, showed up and we all met. We loaded our van and had Arturo as our driver. We crossed over the divide of the western range of the Andes and descended a ways. We made a bathroom stop in the small town of Nono and began to see birds. The first one we found was a female Masked Trogon that was perched over a large, vegetated ditch. A handsome Golden Grosbeak and several Yellow-breasted Brushfinches were also nearby. High up in a tree was a lone Black-crested Warbler, having the appearance of a Wilson's Warbler. Not far from it was a Spectacled Redstart. In a nearby thicket a pair of Russet-crowned Warblers was also present. Seeing these resident warblers was a nice way to start the day.



We continued onward and rounded many mountains, eventually leaving the paved road. We climbed up a steep dirt road until reaching a small private reserve called Zuraloma. The majestic Pichincha Volcano was the backdrop, cradled by steep ridges and deep canyons. This patch of forest would reveal some breathtaking species. Right at the reception building we saw a pair of Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanagers. We descended a short trail to a feeding station. One of the owners had instantly delighted us with a Chestnut-naped Antpitta and two Equatorial Antpittas which dined on pieces of worms he had set out. Such whimsical-looking birds. At the fruit feeders, a pair of the majestic Hooded Mountain-Tanagers came in. Foraging amidst the many flowers and bathing in a small water feature were Glossy, Black, White-sided, and Masked Flowerpiercers. There were nectar feeders as well and the action was non-stop. Some of the species that came in were Sapphire-vented Puffleg, Speckled Hummingbird, Tyrian Metaltail, a Shining Sunbeam, Collared Incas, Great Sapphirewing, and Mountain Velvetbreast. A rarity came in, that being a pair of Tourmaline Sunangels, and they put on quite the show during displays. But one everyone really wanted to see in this trip was the Sword-billed Hummingbird, with its gigantic, upturned bill. One showed up multiple times and we were afforded great views. We wandered down the path a bit further where the owner had yet another surprise for us. With a bit of patience, a handsome Chestnut-crowned Antpitta appeared and posed for photos. Our morning not yet complete, Jorge spotted a Red-crested Cotinga near the reception right before we departed.

We continued down the road and made a lunch stop at Guaycapi which sat above a river. Both fruit and hummingbird feeders were hopping with birds. Hummingbirds included the White-whiskered Hermit, Green Thorntail, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Green-crowned Brilliant, Purple-throated Woodstar, and Andean Emerald. Another species everyone wanted to see was the White-booted Racket-tail, and a pair of males was present. Their tiny racquet-tipped tails were reminiscent of some motmots. More dazzling tanagers came and went including Blue-capped, Golden-naped, Black-capped, Blue-necked, Golden Tanager, and Silver-throated. It was almost a color overload. After lunch, we stayed there a bit longer and found a Rufous Motmot down below. We took a short walk by the river and found the tiny, yet colorful Ornate Flycatcher. It would be a common sighting during much of the trip. A Zeledon's Antbird was also seen lurking in the thickets and a Spotted Barbtail was foraging on tree trunks. Several Three-striped Warblers were foraging together.

We continued down the road and turned off the highway once again, heading toward our lodge. In a wooded ravine we had a brief glimpse of a male Andean Cock-of-the Rock. It didn't hang around but we would catch up



to it later. Further down the road we followed a small river and came across a pair of White-capped Dippers. We stopped to watch them a bit.

We eventually reached the Sachatamia lodge where it was raining. We were greeted by a Violet-tailed Sylph, Velvet-purple Coronet, and an Empress Brilliant on some feeders. We were given an orientation to the lodge then showed to our rooms. It would be our base for the next three nights. The rooms were spread out amidst some nice forest and artificial ponds. We had a delicious dinner and wrapped up our first day in the field. The trip was off to an outstanding start.

Wednesday November 19 | Amagusa | Guaycapi Lodge

Our second full day afield was before us and would present a lot of wonderful moments filled with birds and other wildlife. After breakfast, we were getting ready to depart the lodge when Jorge said he 'found it.' It was a Black-and-white Owl that took up residence around the reception building where it hunts large moths and beetles attracted to the streetlamps. A great start!

We drove down the road and reached the Amagusa reserve. We wanted to get there early because they have a moth sheet that often attracts a wide range of birds that dine at the four-winged smorgasbord.

Before we even got to noticing the moth sheet, there were a bunch of Rose-faced Parrots perched on a nearby tree. Numerous racemes of ripened bananas were their 'thing.' Large-stemmed bamboo stalks were nearby with many nesting holes for the parrots. What more could they want? We enjoyed their presence all morning. Meanwhile, the action at the moth sheet began to pick up and the place filled with birds, each with one thing on their minds: a moth breakfast. Several of the colorful Ornate Flycatchers kept busy. Three species of Becards came and went, including the Barred, Cinnamon and One-colored. Wedge-billed, Spotted, and Montane Woodcreepers also came and went along with Scaly-throated and Lineated Foliage-gleaners, Pacific Tuftedcheek, and a Red-faced Spinetail. We were afforded great looks at all of them. A Smoke-colored Pewee perched on a nearby tree, occasionally sallying out for bugs. Yellow-throated Chlorospingus and two Slate-throated Redstarts would eventually join in on the feeding frenzy. Then Jorge got suddenly surprised. A Black Solitaire came in quietly and fed on moths. He said it is locally known as the 'ghost bird.' Partly due to its appearance and the fact that within its limited range it is not an easy bird to find. We felt so fortunate. Then



Robert spotted something blue flitting around in a large tree. It was a male Cerulean Warbler of all things. This is where they overwinter.

The action seemed almost non-stop and Jorge said this was an exceptional morning. Eventually, a few species came drifting in down by the cracked corn that was put out. This included a small covey of Dark-backed Wood-Quail and a White-throated Quail-Dove. In some nearby bushes some movement caught our attention. It was a lovely Orange-breasted Fruiteater. A bit afterwards it appeared in a small fruiting palm right next to corridor and we got even better views. Many wrens are often difficult to see as they remain deep inside thick vegetation. The Bay Wren is no exception, but today one decided to forage nonchalantly in a nearby shrub and we were able to watch it. A Broad-billed Motmot eventually showed up and we all enjoyed it. The fruit feeders were also hopping with activity and included many tanagers such as Moss-backed, Blue-capped, Rufous-throated, Glistening-green, and Flame-faced. The dazzling Black-chinned Mountain Tanager, Red-headed Barbet, and Golden-collared Honeycreeper were also present. It was a kaleidoscope of colors.

It was slowing down a bit and everyone began to wander off. No sooner than we realized, we were being called back to see a Tayra that wandered in to feed on banana scraps. This is a large weasel-like animal and a ferocious predator that can scale 100ft+ trees in search of food. So, seeing it feed on bananas was quite special. We wandered in the direction of where there were nectar feeders and came across a lovely Indigo Flowerpiercer feeding on purple Thunbergia flowers. At the feeders themselves, were a large number of Velvet-purple Coronets. Someone working there had a small cluster of Calathea blooms that were sprayed with sugar water. He handed it to various participants so the hummingbirds could feed out of their hands. We had a lot of fun either watching or participating. Another snazzy species that appeared was a White-throated Daggerbill. We were called back to the fruit feeding area again and this time a lone Mountain Coatimundi came in. It looks quite different than the species that occurs in North and Central America. It was a fantastic way to end the morning.

We returned to Sachatamia for lunch and a little R&R. The feeders near the reception were buzzing with action. There were Empress Brilliants, two Brown Violetears, many White-booted Racket-tails, Violet-tailed Slyphs, Andean Emeralds, Velvet-purple Coronets, and more. Some nearby fruit feeders had drawn in four Central American Agoutis.

In the afternoon, we headed over to the nearby Guaycapi lodge to see what was stirring. We saw many of the hummingbird species seen previously, but we also found a Brown Inca and several Buff-tailed Coronets. After a bit of patience, a stately Toucan Barbet came in to feed in a nearby tree. We got brief looks before it



disappeared. Several of the handsome White-winged Brushfinches came in to feed on the fruit as well as a pair of the dazzling Blue-winged Mountain Tanagers. A lone Black-winged Saltator was spotted on a nearby slope. We got our first, and brief, views of an Azara's Spinetail as well as two Golden-bellied Flycatchers.

We returned to Sachatamia for a short break, and then convened to do our checklist and dinner. What an incredible day it was, replete with birds and mammals.

Thursday November 20 | Refugio Paz | Old Eco Road | Bella Vista Lodge

Today would bring yet more exciting finds as we travelled to various sites in search of birds and mammals. We headed to the nearby famous Refugio Paz de las Aves founded by Angel Paz. We ended up at a parking lot and began a short walk into the lovely cloud forest. It was still breaking light and we needed to get there early for a reason. It was to see the spectacular Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek. Even before we reached the hide we could hear the strange, and loud, sounds that these colorful beings emit. In the subdued light we could see two males downslope from us, squawking away. As the light improved, we could see them better and eventually found four males. Two came fairly close to the hide and we could really appreciate them in the scope. We got to spend maybe an hour with them and just like that, they were gone. They moved far downslope. There may be hundreds of leks of this bird throughout their range in the steep Andean slopes, but the leks that are easy to reach are few and far between. While in the hide, we also got to see our first Strong-billed Woodcreeper; the largest species. Returning toward the parking lot, we ran into Angel himself. Not far away a Giant Antpitta was calling above the trail on the steep hillside. We searched in vain but could not find it. Down another small trail he found a Moustached Antpitta and he tried to entice it with pieces of worms. Although it was close, it would not pop out into view for us. We went to their visitor's center for a short break and snack. A lovely Silver-studded Skipper was feeding on Porterweed. We then headed out to another trail and Laura spotted a Crested Guan. Robert found a Tyrannine Woodcreeper downslope then Jorge found a few Scaled Fruiteaters that were feeding on tree-sized Melastomes. They were high in the subcanopy but we managed to get good views. By some hummingbird feeders we got better views of a pair of Azara's Spinetail. A few Beryl-spangled Tanagers were spotted nearby, adding to the already huge list of tanagers. Some species do not visit fruit feeders and this was one of them. Along the main road we spotted the first Squirrel Cuckoo of the trip. Angel still had a couple of surprises in store for us. Just off the main road and down a short trail was a lovely waterfall inside the forest. He scrambled up the slippery rocks a ways and started calling out to one of his buddies. Within a minute a Yellow-breasted Antpitta appeared and stood on a ledge in the middle of the falls. He said it was an immature, a third



generation grandchild. He knew all these birds by name. We headed down another trail to look for another star: Shakira. But not the famous pop singer. It was the tiny Ochre-breasted Antpitta, and it appeared right on cue. It flew in and was actually high above us, but it quickly descended down to its favorite log where worms awaited it. Angel knew how to work his magic. And magical it was. It was time to say 'bye' to Angel and this famous place he has created. We spotted a few Hook-billed Kites soaring in a nearby ravine.

We returned to Sachatamia for lunch and found a Pacific Hornero walking around. We had a little downtime and rest in preparation for the afternoon's outing.

We headed out to our next destination, which was another section of the old Eco Road that used to be the only way to get from Quito the west coast. It passes through some farmland, but also some spectacular cloud forest. We stopped at one particular spot and Jorge heard a really good bird upslope. It belonged to the snazzy Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan; a Choco endemic. Several more joined in one the choir. The cloud cover was moving in and we got brief views of one before it disappeared. A pair of Spillmann's Tapaculos called incessantly from the nearby bushes and remained hidden. A bit down the road we spotted something fly into a tree so we stopped. It was a male Golden-headed Quetzal and it too flew off before everyone could get out of the van. As we approached our destination, we got out and walked for a bit. Some locals were playing volleyball. In a nearby tree was the stunning Crimson-mantled Woodpecker. We reached the Bella Vista Lodge and stretched out a bit. Someone spotted a male Masked Trogon sitting atop the restaurant roof. We were there to see if we could find a special mammal: the Olinguito. It was formerly described in 2013. Lo and behold, just as it was getting dark, one showed up to look for bananas. We got good, but brief, looks before it disappeared into the cloud forest. We had dinner there and hoped it would return but it didn't.

We returned to the lodge, very content with the day's findings.

Friday November 21 | Sachatamia | Sendero Tutti | Termas Papallacta

We rose early again this morning to check out the moth sheet at our lodge. We reached the hide and sat and waited. A male Masked Trogon came in to sit right in front of us. What a stunner! A pair of Gray-breasted Wood-Wrens and three Three-striped Warblers probed the vegetation around and behind the sheet. A pair of Strong-billed Woodcreepers took up residence on a nearby stump and now and then would pounce on a tasty morsel. What great views we had of this giant. A Plain-brown Woodcreeper also made a quick appearance, adding to the list of woodcreepers. Scaly-throated and Lineated Foliage-gleaners were seen again. A dark bird showed up,



that being a Streak-capped Treehunter. A pair of the cute and colorful Ornate Flycatchers also sallied out for morsels. We then did a short walk down a trail and found a tiny flycatcher; a Marble-faced Bristle-Tyrant. We had breakfast there then got ready to head out. In the parking lot we spotted a pair of Fawn-breasted Tanagers and several Swallow Tanagers; yet more new sightings.

We headed out and descended closer toward the Pacific. Our destination was a place called 'Sendero Tutti' where we could find species that wouldn't be seen the remainder of the trip. And we did. At the dirt road turnoff we stopped and found a Yellow-bellied Siskin and Yellow-bellied Elaenia. We met the owner and got to bird watching. The fruit and nectar feeders were all buzzing with activity. Saffron Finches and Blue-gray Tanagers were common. We saw many familiar hummingbirds, but also found Bronzy Hermit, Black-throated Mango, Purple-chested Hummingbird, Violet-bellied Hummingbird, and Long-billed Starthroat. The tiny Green Thorntail was particularly common and we found many females. A Black-cheeked Woodpecker and numerous colorful Golden-olive Woodpeckers were present on the feeders. A pair of Red-headed Barbets was nesting in a nearby snag. A colorful Yellow-tailed Oriole showed up as well. Atop the main building was a large viewing platform so we climbed up to see what was stirring. In a distant row of trees we spotted several handsome Yellow-throated Toucans. A Pale-billed (Collared) Aracari was also spotted below us. Some commotion caught Jorge's attention. There must be an owl present, and there was. It was a Peruvian Pygmy-Owl and we could barely see a piece of it amidst the thick foliage. A Purple-crowned Fairy also came in to investigate. Some screeching sounds caught our attention as a few Maroon-tailed Parakeets and Pacific Parrotlets came in and perched. Jorge heard another 'good' bird calling below. It belonged to the Pacific Antwren and with some patience we were able to observe both the male and female. Although we had already found so many species, there was one more to add to the list. Not far away, Jorge spotted a pair of Scarlet-browed Tanagers perched atop a flat tree. We got good looks of this prized bird. After this amazing morning, it was time to start heading back. But first, Jorge wanted to try and find something. He said that the Brown-throated Three-toed Sloths are rare on the Pacific side of the Andes but knew of a spot where one had been previously sighted. Down a dirt road past a quarry we found the spot. After a bit of searching, Arlana spotted it sitting high in the treetops. It was a bit far, but we enjoyed seeing it through the scope.

Today we had to travel far to reach the next lodge, so we got under way. We returned to Sachatamia and had lunch then checked out. Right as we were getting ready to leave, several Yellow-throated Toucans surrounded us and began to call. It was a lovely serenade and farewell to the western Andes. We crossed back over the mountains and descended into Quito. We made a quick stop at the equator crossing as an impending thunder



storm was rolling in, replete with thunder and lightning. We managed to get through the traffic and began our ascent up the eastern Andes range. Up, up, and up we went. It was getting late in the day but we drove slowly past steep mountainsides covered with scrubby vegetation. We were on the lookout for a prized mammal. During one of the stops Arturo calmly said (in Spanish), “I found one.” It was a Spectacled Bear, and it was foraging on a large, terrestrial bromeliad. It was far and the light was fading, but we watched it through the scopes. What a way to end the day!

We continued up the mountain and it got dark. We reached the highest point on the highway at 4,063m. (13,330ft.) and descended a bit to an area known as ‘Papallacta’ before arriving at our hotel. It was more of a getaway for nationals as the hotel is adorned with many decorated hot spring pools close to the rooms. We were appointed our rooms then had dinner and called it a day.

Saturday November 22 | Cayambe Coca Ecological Reserve

Today was about exploring the nearby paramo vegetation. This moorland habitat occurs above treeline and below snowline and is covered with wetlands and scrubby vegetation. Although it harbors much fewer bird species than the temperate forests below, the ones that do occur there are specialties. We hired a local biologist who studies the Mountain Tapir and would help us look for it. We started ascending and found another Mountain Velvetbreast and a Great Sapphirewing feeding on wildflowers. We went further up the mountain and ran into light rain. However, we were able to spot a Rainbow-bearded Thornbill and a pair of Viridian Metaltail. In a thicket we found an Andean Tit-Spintail; another highland specialty. On a utility wire we found the first Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant whose red rump is visible in flight. We found several others during the morning. We also found two separate Variable Hawks, including a dark morph. We stopped at a spot that overlooked a small plain and could hear Tawny Antpittas calling. While we were searching for one Daryl said “look, there’s one.” I thought he found the bird when, in fact, it was a second Spectacled Bear. It was sauntering across the edge of a wetland and picked up the pace when it knew we were there. Regardless, we were excited to see a second one. We continued our search and found a Chestnut-winged Cinclodes, Chestnut-bellied Chat-Tyrant, Plain-colored Seedeater, and a Grass Wren. We did finally see a Tawny Antpitta in a shrub at the edge of a dropoff. On our way out Jorge spotted another Red-crested Cotinga.

We had lunch back at the lodge then had some downtime. Afterwards, we took a drive down the highway and found a pair of Blue-and-black Tanager, Turquoise Jay, Mountain Cacique, and Torrent Tyrannulet at a river



crossing. We returned to the lodge and flying over it was a Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle. A very nice welcome!

Later on we met to do the checklist and had dinner. Some of the participants relaxed in the thermal pools by the rooms to end the day.

Sunday November 23 | Papallacta | Condor | Quetzal Feeders | San Isidro

Today would be our last day in the highest part of the eastern Andes as we started to make our way downslope. Before heading down, we took a short drive to Papallacta Lake where there was a large, exposed mudflat. We quickly spotted some Andean Teal and a small flock of Yellow-billed Pintail. An Andean Gull lifted up and took off. There were a few Southern Lapwings and a pair of shorebirds. In the thickets below we spotted a pair of Rufous Wrens and to wrap up that stop Jorge spotted a Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager on the other side of the road. He said that this is a difficult bird to see well and ours perched in plain sight.

We headed over the high pass again to an area where we had a shot at seeing the Andean Condor. We wanted to get there before it warmed up enough for them to take wing. We arrived at the village of Palugillo and Jorge knew where there was an active nest. Sure enough. The male was on the nest and the female was nearby. It was still a bit cloudy but we were able to see these majestic creatures. A couple of times, the male took to the air and landed on ledges. Lo and behold, Arturo said he believed he found a young one. Sure enough. Perched on a vegetated ledge was the dark, young bird. A Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant also caught our attention and we got scope views of it. A small car had stopped and Jorge was talking to them. He said it was a local from the nearby village and said there was a Spectacled Bear on the hillside. Robert started scanning and sure enough, he found it. It was feeding on bromeliads quite low down and close to the houses. So, we loaded up and drove down a side road, getting to within a very close distance. We spent no less than an hour watching it feed and were able to have community members take a look in the scopes. What an incredible morning.

We returned to the Termas de Papallacta lodge and had lunch. Shining Sunbeams were feeding on the abundant Fuchsia flowers near the reception area. We packed up and headed out. In the nearby town we were on the lookout for a bird that was recently added to the country list: the Black-collared Swallow. We found another male Vermilion Flycatcher and another White-capped Dipper at a small diversion dam. There were a lot of



swallows, including the similar Blue-and-white. We noticed that there were two Ecuadorian photographers in the distant field and were likely looking for the same bird. Sure enough, they were. We were able to see the swallow and continued on our way.

Down the highway, we reached the Quetzal Protected Forest reserve. We were welcomed by one of the owners and were soon immersed in their garden s. It didn't take long for a few Russet-backed Oropendolas to come in as well as Scarlet-rumped Caciques and Inca Jays. In the nearby Porterweed flowers we found a Lesser Violetear, numerous female Gorgeted Woodstars, and a Peruvian Racket-tail. We walked up to another feeding station and found Bronzy Inca, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Green-backed Hillstar, and Violet-fronted Brilliant. Our list of hummingbirds was now spectacular. Flying overhead was a small flock of Speckled-faced Parrots. We thanked the owner and continued on our way.

Before going to the lodge, we stopped at the nearby Cosanga River to see what was stirring. We found a Long-tailed Sylph, Yellow-browed Sparrow, Saffron-crowned Tanager, and a Chestnut-bellied Seedeater. One we really wanted to see wasn't present, but we wouldn't give up yet.

We continued to the nearby San Isidro lodge and got checked in. Near the restaurant we were greeted with the first view of a Black Agouti. Once everyone was at the restaurant, one of the staff took us to a nearby spot to look for a special mammal. We waited under a big tree, looking up into the thick masses of epiphytes. It was getting dark which was the cue for the awakening of the Colombian Night Monkey. Sure enough, several came out of a day roost and scurried of toward a fruiting *Cecropia* tree. We sat for dinner and our attention was soon turned to a Black-banded Owl that was perched low and close. It was a great way to end another wonderful day.

Monday November 24 | San Isidro | Wayra Reserve | Coquette in Cotundo

Today marked the last day we would explore the Andean highlands and we would encounter a nice variety of birds and mammals. Early this morning we focused our attention on the moth sheet at the lodge. Daryl and Lisa had arrived early and would be the only ones to see the Andean Motmot. A Black Agouti showed up and appeared to be eating a selection of moths! In the distance we could hear the tell-tale haunting calls of the Collared Forest-Falcon. This is often a species that one can hear trip after trip and never see. Robert was scanning the distant trees and spotted a white silhouette. Sure enough, with the scope we could see it was the falcon. Everyone was enthralled. Many birds came and went, plucking moths off the sheet and surrounding vegetation and included Olive-backed Woodcreeper, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Pale-edged Flycatcher, Mountain



Wren, Common Chlorospingus, and Black-eared Hemispingus. A few Scarlet-rumped Caciques also came in and were singing nearby. A pair of dazzling Blue-winged Mountain Tanagers paid us a visit. It was another fantastic morning.

We had breakfast then headed out to today's destinations. We swung by the Cosanga River again to continue our search for a special bird. After just a short search, Jorge found the Torrent Duck. This special duck inhabits rushing rivers in the Andean highlands across much of South America.

We continued up the road and made a quick stop at Antisana National Park. It was very cloudy and a bit windy, hampering our search and views of the surrounding cloud forest. We heard a Rufous Spinetail below us but could not see it. A pair of Hooded Mountain Tanagers landed on a nearby utility wire and then disappeared into the mist.

We continued down the mountain until reaching the Wayra Reserve, another private protected area. We were greeted by Graciela and, since it was raining, took a seat under the shelter. Several Sparkling Violetears were feeding on Porterweed. A few Red-billed Parrots flew by. The rain lightened up considerably so we strolled to some feeders in the nearby forest. Graciela put out some bananas and in no time at all we were graced with the presence of some little primates. A troop of Black-mantled Tamarins came in and grabbed their respective portions of fruit. It also didn't take long for a few Rufous-breasted Wood-Quail to come in close to the hide and feed on corn. A double treat! A few nectar feeders were also attracting some hummingbirds including a male Black-throated Mango, Many-spotted Hummingbird, Golden-tailed Sapphire, and Fork-tailed Woodnymph. We returned to the main building and had a boxed lunch. Belonging to the tanager family is the lovely Red-crested Finch and one showed up in the trees across the access road. Graciela had received a message from a friend that a special bird was being seen in a garden in a neighboring town. It was a Spangled Coquette. That area was not in the itinerary, but Robert asked everyone if they wanted to go look for it. It was unanimous and off we went.

We travelled to the town of Cotundo and with Graciela's help we went straight to where the coquette was being seen. It belonged to a pastor who had a large, enclosed yard filled with a wide variety of flowering plants. It was quite lovely. We went an overhead structure and it didn't take long for the coquette to appear. It was feeding primarily on Porterweed. We shifted to a different spot and waited patiently as it came and went. It was a lovely male and a special bonus for the trip. One can't go wrong with any coquette. A female Amethyst Woodstar and

Glittering-throated Emerald also appeared, adding to our huge list of hummingbirds. Before we departed, we also saw a large flock of Chestnut-collared Swifts, Blue-headed Parrot, Violaceous Jay, and some Turquoise



Tanagers feeding on Guavas. The decision to visit this garden really paid off.

We returned to San Isidro and had a break before doing our checklist and dinner.

Tuesday November 25 | Travel to Napo Wildlife Center

We had an early departure and said ‘good-bye’ to San Isidro. We descended the Andes until reaching the low-lying foothills of the Amazon basin. Cloud forest gave way to towns and agricultural fields. We eventually reached the large city of Francisco de Orellana (aka Coca), being the gateway to the Napo River. It runs for nearly 500 hundred miles before reaching the mighty Amazon along the border with Brazil. We reached a private staging area for the Napo Wildlife Center where their boats depart. As we waited for one more lodge guest to arrive we did a little bird watching. A pair of Black-billed Thrushes chased each other and a Yellow-headed Caracara and Green Ibis flew past. A colorful Spot-breasted Woodpecker was excavating a nest in a nearby snag. We finally got under way and off we went in our covered motor boat. It had been raining in the upper drainage and river level was up considerably. We saw a fair number of White-winged Swallows along the way but not much else since the river was so wide.

We eventually reached the Añangu Creek which was a staging area for the center. From there, no motorized boats were allowed to travel the 3 ½ miles to the lodge. We had lunch there before heading out and Robert was able to find a nice variety of colorful butterflies that were sipping minerals from the moist soil.

We were introduced to our local guides who would be with us during our stay and had the man power to paddle us on each day trip. We got under way in a large and comfortable canoe and began to be immersed into their tropical realm. We were now in Yasuni National Park which encompasses nearly 2 ½ million acres. It didn’t take long to start seeing a whole new set of birds. A Crane Hawk, with prey, appeared and we got good views of it. We found three members of the cuckoo family including the Greater Ani, Smooth-billed Ani, and a Little Cuckoo. The latter species has the appearance of a miniature Squirrel Cuckoo. To our surprise, the guides knew where



we could see a nesting Zigzag Heron. This diminutive species is one of the smallest members in the family. We also saw the lovely Capped Heron, boasting blue facial skin. There, the Striated Heron replaces the similar Green Heron. The guides also knew where to find another 'great' bird. High in the treetops, virtually at canopy height was a Great Potoo. A species that would be particularly common in the area was the whimsical Hoatzin. A male Anhinga was seen drying itself with its wings spread out. A bird that inhabits the lowland forests is the Rufescent Tiger-Heron and we came across two, including a sub-adult. A Plumbeous Kite was spotted soaring high above the forest canopy. At last we began to see kingfishers and today we found the giant Ringed and smaller Green. Many different toucans would also be possible there and today we found Many-banded Aracari and White-throated Toucan. Two large woodpeckers seen included the giant Crimson-crested and slightly smaller Chestnut. Many members of the parrot family were also possible there and we saw large flocks of the common Cobalt-winged Parakeets. At one point, Jorge heard something calling from within the forest. We waited a bit and then got to see the Long-billed Woodcreeper toting its long, decurved bill. What a cool bird! A rather loud member of the flycatcher family is the Cinnamon Attila and we would see it numerous times while there. While there, we would see numerous mammals including the colorful Colombian Red Howler Monkey. We would see them during every outing. We eventually reached the lagoon where the lodge was located. Upon arriving at the dock we could see a large, bustling colony of Russet-backed Oropendolas coming and going. In an adjacent tree was an active Yellow-rumped Cacique colony.

We were greeted by the lodge staff and a nice welcome drink. We had reached a tropical paradise. We convened in the restaurant lobby area and received a short orientation by the manager then were showed our rooms. Later on, we reconvened and did our checklist as well as receive a more formal presentation about where we were and how it came to be. Meliton, our local guide, was one of the eight founding members of the center and we were honored to have him attend us.

Wednesday November 26 | Napo Tower | Canoe Ride

We rose early to catch the first rays of light. After breakfast we headed out to a nearby canopy tower that the center just opened. Jorge hadn't even seen it yet. It was a short canoe ride to reach an elevated metal walkway that passed over the flooded forest. It was then about a 20 minute walk to reach the tower that was constructed atop a small knoll. During the walk, we saw more howler monkeys as well as a pair of Colombian Woolly Monkeys. We made our way to the top of the covered structure which was as high as the surrounding canopy.



On one side we could see the restaurant roof and all around pristine rainforest. It didn't take long for us to start seeing birds and it was almost non-stop action the entire morning.

A pair of Black-tailed Tityras was frantically trying to lure away a group of Many-banded Aracaris that were searching for its nest. At least on this day the tityras were triumphant. A lone Ivory-billed Aracari also made a brief appearance. Through a scope we found a pair of Blue-throated Piping-Guans; large and lovely species. We spotted a total of three Slate-colored Hawks perched atop trees. Both the White-throated and Channel-billed Toucans were spotted in distant trees. There was a large Cecropia near us and sometimes birds would perch there. A pair of Collared Puffbirds was one of them. A group of four Yellow-tufted Woodpeckers was the next visitor. These colorful birds bounced from branch to branch and put on a show. As the morning continued, we saw large flocks of Cobalt-winged Parakeets and a few landed close enough to see them well. A really nice bird that also showed up in the same tree was a Gilded Barbet. Numerous species of parrots flew by, often in pairs, and included the Orange-cheeked, Blue-headed, Yellow-crowned, and Mealy. The Mealy is the largest parrot found in the area. However, a relative of it are macaws and we saw a pair of Blue-and-yellow Macaws pass by numerous times. One we really wanted to spot was the Spangled Cotinga and we did a distant bird. A group of Bare-necked Fruitcrows was also seen foraging in a distant tree. Just as we were taking a breather, a Double-toothed Kite appeared in the Cecropia and it had a small prey item. It then flew to an even closer tree to devour its breakfast. Robert was scanning the treetops when he found something that was rufous-colored. He pointed it out to Jorge and just as he saw it in the binoculars it flew. He said it was a really good bird; a Black-bellied Cuckoo. We thought it had disappeared and a while later it appeared right in front of us, along with its mate. Its head is adorned with a light gray cap and its face with a blue eyering and a yellow 'tear drop.' What a snazzy bird! A Black-eared Fairy came in and appeared to glean insects from the leaves. A Black Caracara flew past at one point and a perched Bat Falcon was found on a distant snag. There are two lovely green-colored oropendolas in the area and this morning we found a distant Green Oropendola. We had wished it was closer. A bird we saw perched earlier finally took to the sky. It was a Greater Yellow-headed Vulture and unlike its close relative (the Lesser) this one searched for food over the rainforest. One particular tree seemed to attract tanagers and did so all morning. Species that came and went multiple times included the Blue Dacnis, Green Honeycreeper, Opal-rumped Tanager, and Opal-crowned Tanager. And just when we thought that birds couldn't get any gaudier, the next one appeared. The Paradise Tanager appears as if it flew through a rainbow with colors that render it absolutely amazing. For most of the morning we saw them at a distance and close to when we were getting ready to leave one showed up on a nearby tree. What a treat! We descended and began the walk



back to the canoe. Along the way we found an Amazonian Motmot, Golden-headed Manakin, and a tiny Dwarf Tyrant-Manakin.

In no time at all we were back at the lodge and had lunch. We had a bit of downtime before the afternoons' activity.

We headed out in the canoe for a nice 'cruise,' per say. The local guides were set on finding us another local gem. They were searching in the tall grass next to the lagoon. Hmm. A flattened spot clued us in on what they were searching for. The next spot, however, revealed their secret. It was a gigantic Green Anaconda, all rolled up. They said it was about 20ft. long. Yikes! One of its primary prey items must be Black Caiman, of which we had seen during the canoe trips. We continue and found a male/female pair of the elegant Green-backed Trogons. Cruising the shoreline, we came across a Laughing Falcon perched on a snag and looking downward. Maybe it had spotted a snake. At one point we came across a pair of Wattled Jacana and a lone Boat-billed Heron. Flying over the forest and past us went a Cocoi Heron; a giant. Today, we found two more species of kingfishers including the Amazon and Green-and-rufous. The latter species typically inhabits quiet sloughs. High up in a tree we got a brief glimpse of a Lineated Woodpecker; another large species in that family. A call caught Jorge's attention as it belonged to a really cool bird; the Cream-colored Woodpecker. We searched the subcanopy and found this spectacular bird.

We returned to the lodge and went over our ever-growing species checklist. Up to this point we had already seen so many great birds and mammals. After another tasty dinner we called it a day.

Thursday November 27 | Local Communities | Parrot Sip Site

Today we woke to gray skies, but by the end of the day we would have long forgotten about our wet ride. We boarded our canoe with our destination of Rio Napo. It began to rain, and it rained almost non-stop. This was the quintessential experience of being in the tropics. It didn't deter the wildlife, however, and we ran into a large troop of Humboldt's Squirrel Monkey. They passed over very close and we could see that at least four had little babies. We also found the Marañon White-fronted Capuchin, and they also passed close by. We reached the staging area at the river and were glad to shed our rain gear. The rain was lightening up a bit so we decided to switch strategies.

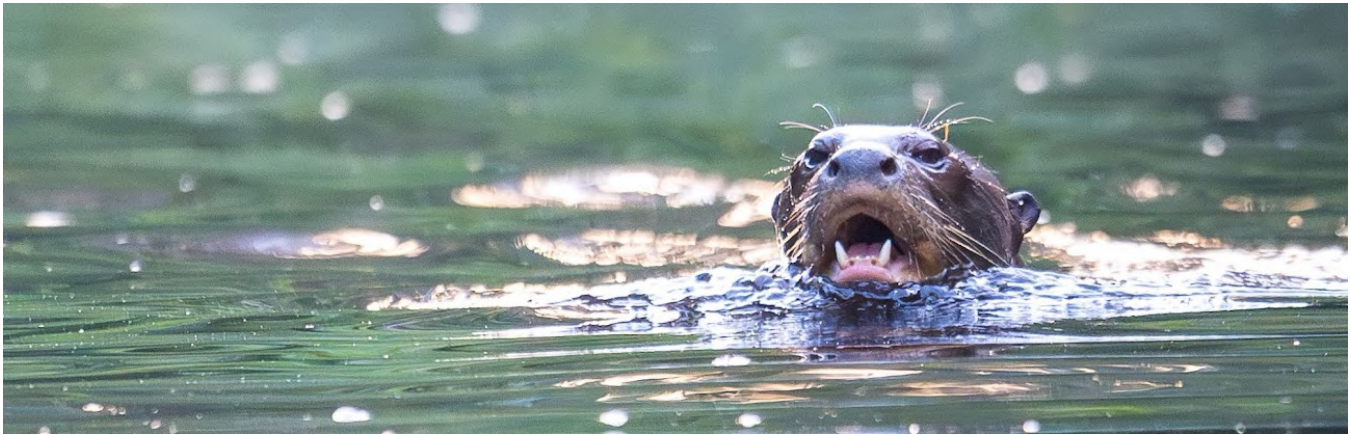


We boarded the motor boat and went to the nearby village of Añangu where hot coffee and tea awaited us. It was much welcomed. This was another indigenous community that was getting involved in tourism and had a nice, little setup replete with a restaurant and craft stores. As we were enjoying the hot liquids we also kept our eyes out for birds. In an open field we found more Southern Lapwing, Shiny Cowbird, and Giant Cowbird. A pair of the colorful Magpie Tanagers flew across and disappeared into the woods. A pair of Blue-throated Piping-Guans also flew over. We remembered Melito telling us that the surrounding communities agreed not to hunt wildlife so animals like these guans could be seen. We were glad they had made that decision. We decided to take a walk toward their handicrafts center and found three White-tailed Titis huddled together. They too were wet. In the crafts center our guests bought some trinkets and other locally made items. Someone pointed out a sleeping Barn Owl in the rafters. We were then invited to watch a dance performed by the local women. One had a small drum replete with stretched monkey skin and another had a turtle shell adorned with bees wax on the edge of the carapace and was able to make a humming sound. The women performed the Toucan Dance which related to how the toucans moved their tails, announcing that rain was on its way. We thanked them for the dance and continued on our way. Nearby, we found a Speckled Chachalaca and Robert spotted a Orange-backed Troupial. We came across an elegant Black-fronted Nunbird (which is totally black), Short-crested Flycatcher, and two Chestnut-eared Aracaris.

We returned to the staging area for a lunch break. A pair of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls was spotted near the dining area. Robert found some spectacular butterflies that were sipping minerals from a spot where dishwater wash being thrown out. A few of the guests were delighted to see the various species of 88's and an electric-blue Panacea. An elegant swordtail swallowtail also sipped minerals from the soil.

We headed out again in the motor boat to a spot just downriver. It was a magical place where many species of parrots descend from the surrounding forest to sip mineral-laden water from a small pool. We took a short walk to a well made hide where other tourists were waiting. The cool, wet weather did not bode well for the parrots to want to drink. A few Scarlet Macaws eventually came in and landed in the trees above us but would not come down. Fortunately, we got to see them with the spotting scope. A Linnaeus's Two-toed Sloth was also found, looking quite different than the Central American species. Robert found a Dwarf Iguana by the hide as well. An inquisitive Blue-throated Piping-Guan appeared and Arden got a wonderful photo of the head and neck.

We returned to the boat and headed out to another destination to search for a special animal. We made landing at the village of Sani Warmi and our local guides started scanning the trees along the river. This was a known



hangout for the Western Pygmy Marmoset. There are two species that inhabit the Amazon basin and both are only slightly heavier than a tennis ball. They are gummivores, specializing on tree gum. The guides searched and could not find them in their usual spots. Robert was scanning a tree further down and spotted one high in the canopy. It was wet and attempting to dry itself on a broken snag. Two more were spotted further down. One was feeding on sap and then bolted off as fast as a squirrel. We were able to get brief views of these tiny creatures.

We returned to the staging area and boarded our canoe. This time there was no threat of rain and we thoroughly enjoyed the serene trip back to the lodge. On the way, Jorge spotted a male Amazonian Streaked-Antwren and another pair of Chestnut Woodpeckers. As we got closer to the lodge Meliton could hear some sounds in the distance. It was the squealing and grunts of the Giant Otters. The guides quietly paddled us closer until we arrived at the spot where they were. They were hunting amidst the roots of the flooded forest and made a lot of loud vocalizations when doing so. One had a fairly large, silver-colored fish and we could see it feeding, crunching all the bones. We moved forward and caught up to the rest of the family who were also hunting. Two adults took off with two young, but two remained. Suddenly, there was a large commotion amidst the thick vegetation and an otter appeared with a huge fish that must have been 3ft long. It bore a long jaw lined with wicked teeth, but the otter won. We were so ecstatic to have such a wonderful encounter with these magnificent beings.

We returned to the lodge and had completely forgotten about our rainy morning. We completed our checklist, had another delightful dinner, and called it a day.

Friday November 28 | Canopy Tower | Canoe Ride

Today marked the last full day at the Napo center. Jorge decided to return to the canopy tower to see what else we could find. A pair of Harpy Eagle had nested nearby more than a year ago and the immature was still hanging out in the area. We had hoped that it would appear after the rains. A pair of Ivory-billed Aracaris came in to a nearby tree. A young male White-necked Jacobin perched nearby and sallied out for insects. Jorge spotted a perched Slender-billed Kite. As if we didn't get enough of the special bird the other day, a Black-bellied Cuckoo returned to show off. The Double-toothed kite returned, but this time with a black-and-white immature. In the distance were two lovely Black-headed Parrots and we enjoyed them through the scope. A pair of Blue-and-yellow Macaws came by and flew to the same spot as the other day. It was a grove of giant palms on the back



side of some large trees next to us. We could hear them and knew they had perched. Robert dropped down a few levels and found one small window in the subcanopy that provided a nice view to them. We got to watch these lovely parrots through the scope. Rains came and went which dampened the bird activity considerably. Melito spotted a distant colorful Olive Oropendola and got to see it through the scope as well. A lone Yellow-rumped Cacique came in and right behind it was an Epaulet Oriole; a nearly all-black species. In the tanager tree we got to see a Turquoise Tanager, male Black-faced Dacnis, and a Purple Honeycreeper. Not far away we got to see a few Colombian Woolly Monkeys traipsing through the canopy. To end the morning, a small flock of Orange-cheeked Parrots came in and landed on a nearby tree. Such a lovely bird!

We returned to the lodge for lunch a nice break. In the afternoon, we returned one to the lagoon for another canoe trip. We wandered down a different, hand-dug channel to see what we could find. A cooperative pair of Black-capped Donacobius perched in plain sight and delighted us with their duet. A lone capuchin wandered out on a low branch to check us out. There wasn't much there so we turned around. In the lagoon we came across one of the lodge guides in an empty canoe. I could hear Melito ask about the otters. The other guide pointed toward another channel, so we headed that way. It didn't take long until we found their whereabouts. The family was down a smaller channel and were swimming right toward us. We were spotted, so they submerged. To our surprise, they emerged right next to us and all got out of the water onto an exposed portion of the bank. It was obviously a spot where they regularly leave the water. They were in plain view for about a minute before returning to the water. We could appreciate their full size, webbed feet, and flattened tails. It doesn't get any better than that! We returned to the lodge and a loose flock of nearly 20 Red-bellied Macaws flew across. It was a spectacular way to end a memorable portion of this worthwhile trip.

We had all returned to our cabins when we heard Jorge looking for everyone. He had just spotted a Golden-mantle Saddleback Tamarin near the restaurant. We all searched in vain but the little primate had slipped away into the forest.

Before dinner we did a trip recap and everyone had their favorite bird, mammal, and experience.

Saturday November 29 | Return to Coca | Flight to Quito

We had to rise earlier today to be able to catch our flight back to Quito. We slipped away under the cover of darkness, saying 'bye' to the Napo center. Other guests were leaving as well and each boat used a spotlight to find our way through the forested canals. It was almost ethereal. Dawn quickly started to break and we could see, and hear, the forest come to life. We reached the staging area and quickly headed out on the motor boat. Some of us slept a little. The river was even higher, filled with debris and logs of all sizes. Our expert boatmen carefully maneuvered through the obstacle course. Within a couple of hours we made it back to Coca. After a short breather we departed for the nearby airport and were soon off to Quito. We climbed quickly to get over the Andes and were soon in Quito. Our driver was waiting for us and soon we were back at the Puenbo Hotel. We had come full circle.

Some participants were departing today so we bid farewell to each other, hoping to meet again on another trip.

Sunday November 30 | Departures

Trip Highlights

With so many birds and mammals seen, it was difficult to pick just one favorite.

Cathy-Spectacled Bears, both wood-quail species.

Ron-Red-headed Barbet, Spangled Coquette, Giant Otters. Napo Wildlife Center.

Paula-Spangled Coquette, Giant Otters, inclusion of all mammals. Like all lodges. Loved our guides and their expertise.

Tracey-Spangled Coquette, Spectacled Bear, moments with Giant Otters. Loved Napo and enjoyed the thermal pools at the Papallacta lodge.

Daryl-Wood-quail with chicks, otters. Like all lodges, but like Napo more.

Lisa-Cream-colored Woodpecker, watching the sloth move at the parrot seep. Liked all lodges. Enjoyed the canoe rides and listening to the birds.

Arden-Cock-of-the Rock. Moment-when Angel was trying to call in one of the Antpittas and everyone else was doing something different. Seeing an antpitta for the first time at Zuraloma. Liked all lodges but Napo the best. Trip was "immersive" and we had great local guides.

Arlana-Spangled Coquette chase in the garden. Otters-was very special when they came out of the water. Very natural experience. Liked Napo the best.

Jorge-We had a great hummingbird and tanager list. Spangled Coquette was a bonus bird. Seeing rare mammals such as the Mountain Coati, Tayra, and Olinguito. Otters coming out of the water. Napo the best lodge.

Robert-Black Solitaire. Having multiple encounters with the otters. Napo was the best lodge.

Photos: Group (Robert Gallardo - RG), Humbolt's Squirrel Monkey (Arden Powell - AP), Red-headed Barbet (AP), Violet-bellied Hummingbird (AP), Vermilion Flycatcher (SP), Hooded Mountain Tanager (AP), Chestnut-crowned Antpitta (AP), Sword-billed Hummingbird (AP), Purple-throated Woodstar (AP), Tayra (AP), Rose-faced Parrot (AP), Glistening-green Tanager (AP), Broad-billed Motmot (AP), Andean Cock-of-the-rock (AP), Pale-mandibled Aracari (AP), Spectacled Bear (AP), Peruvian Racket-tail (AP), Green jay (Inca) (AP), Black-banded Owl (AP), Black-mantled Tamarin (AP), Many-banded Aracari (AP), Yellow-tufted Woodpecker (AP), Restaurant tower sunset view (Arlana Powell - ARP), Panacea prola (RG), Southern Green Longwing (RG), American Barn Owl (AP), Scarlet Macaw (AP), Blue-throated Piping-Guan (AP), Giant River Otter (AP), Capped Heron (AP), Caiman Lizard (AP)

