

Southern Ecuador: Birding & Nature | Trip Report

November 28 – December 11, 2018 | Written by Bob Behrstock



With Local Guide Andrea Molina, Bob Behrstock, and participants Dick, Diane, Irene, Trudy, Mike, Rita, Ann, Karen, Kathy, and Phil.





Wed., Nov. 28 Arrival in Quito | Birding at Puembo Birding Garden

Most participants arrived one to several days early, taking advantage of sightseeing in and around Quito, or a bit of extra birding. Those who'd been in Quito transferred to Puembo during this afternoon. Mike and Rita arrived in Ecuador during the day and Ann came in very late at night--or was it very early the next morning? Phil, Bob, and Karen, who'd all arrived a couple days early and been at Puembo, went afield with a local guide, visiting the Papallacta Pass area and Guango Lodge east of Quito. Birding around Puembo provided arriving participants with some high elevation garden birds, including Sparkling Violetear, Western Emerald, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Vermilion Flycatcher, Golden Grosbeak, Scrub and Blue-and-yellow tanagers, Saffron Finch, Shiny Cowbird, the first of many Great Thrushes, and Rufous-collared Sparrows. Bob was happy to reunite with his old friend Mercedes Rivadeniera, our ground agent and gracious owner of Puembo Birding Garden, whom he'd known since they met in eastern Ecuador during the 1980's.

Thur., Nov. 29 Early departure | Flight to Guayaquil | Birding our way to Umbrellabird Lodge (Buenaventura)

An early flight to Guayaquil necessitated an early breakfast and airport transfer. During the flight south, we had stunning views of the snow-covered high Andes, taller and colder than the mountains we would visit during the tour. By 8:35 a.m., we were leaving the airport and Ecuador's largest city for a long travel day punctuated with several birding stops. Passing through the outskirts of Guayaquil, we birded from the bus (as well as one can, anyway), seeing Magnificent Frigatebirds, Neotropic Cormorants, Great-tailed Grackles, Scrub Blackbirds, various herons and egrets, and many Snail Kites. By 10:00 a.m., we were on the La Flora road at the Manglares Churute Ecological Reserve. Our first stop in dense and dry woodland provided us with close looks at Mantled Howler Monkeys, a few birds, including Olivaceous Piculet, Long-billed Starthroat, Variable Seedeater, and a few

shy Jet Antbirds that eventually strayed into view. From the bus, we spotted a beautiful Rufescent tiger-Heron crouched at a roadside puddle. Continuing along the road, we encountered Tropical Kingbirds. We then took a short stroll on a boardwalk surrounded by mangroves—a dwindling habitat in coastal Ecuador and protected by the reserve. The mud below us was totally perforated by the burrows of large crabs, many of which sat at the entrances to their tunnels. These crabs are an important food resource for the local population, and we saw hundreds of them being transported on the backs of bicycles and motorcycles or stacked up in markets. In the mangroves, we enjoyed close looks at Gray-and-gold Warbler, a Tumbesian specialty restricted to the southwest of Ecuador and adjacent Peru. We also encountered the local race of Yellow Warbler, Tropical Gnatcatcher, and Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet. As we left, we paused for a Peruvian Pygmy-Owl, Pacific Parrotlets, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Pacific Hornero, Fasciated Wren, and Groove-billed Ani.

Continuing south, we took a side road through agricultural land, eventually reaching rice fields on one side of the road and a broad streambed on the other. Our guide, Andrea, suggested we were in the vicinity of Estero Trovadora. On the bird list, species from here are attributed to la Trovadora. The area was hopping. The streambed had a Roseate Spoonbill, White Ibis, Black-necked Stilts, Black-bellied and Fulvous whistling-ducks, Blue-winged Teal, and three handsome Comb Ducks. The rice fields hosted, among other birds, Little Blue Herons, Limpkins, Masked water Tyrants, several Savanna Hawks, Ecuadorian ground-Doves, a flock of Barn Swallows, and the target of our quest, the huge and curious Horned Screamer, a turkey-like member of the waterfowl clan. About 10 minutes later, we entered the town of Puerto Inca where we enjoyed cold drinks and a seafood lunch. Continuing south, we drove through endless fields of bananas and cacao, unfortunately grown in the open, instead of in the forest understory. A bathroom break in Santa Rosa added Blue-gray Tanagers, more Saffron Finches, and several hundred Laughing Gulls flying by at some distance. Eventually, we arrived at Umbrellabird Lodge and had dinner.



Fri., Nov. 30 Buenaventura | El Oro Parakeet and Long- wattled Umbrellabird

The day began with breakfast at 6:00 a.m. There were dozens of hummingbirds lining the feeding dishes including dapper little Green Thorntails, dull Brown Violetears, and several green and purple Crowned Woodnymphs. Other

visitors included Rufous-headed Chachalacas, South American Coatis, and dozens of Green s. After breakfast, we were bussed uphill to the beginning of the El Oro Parakeet trail. A few birds were seen at a fruit feeder at the trailhead. The group proceeded to a hillside that had been provided with several nest boxes to encourage breeding of these extremely rare and local birds, one of Ecuador's handful of endemic species. After a brief wait, four Parakeets appeared, roosting close to us at approximately eye level and giving us nice looks at their attractive plumage. There were also Bronze-winged Parrots seen at this vantage point. Descending the trail, we visited trailside fruit feeders that hosted several species of chlorospingus and euphonias. A few steps further were an array of hummingbird feeders that hosted some species we didn't encounter elsewhere, including Velvet-purple Coronet, Purple-bibbed Whitetip (both West Slope specialties), White-vented Plumeleater (of the disjunct southwestern race (*C. b. intermedia*), and Booted Racket-tail.

After lunch, we were bussed a short distance to the Umbrellabird Trail to look for our lodge's namesake species. There are three umbrellabirds and this one is a specialty of western Ecuador's wet Chocó Region. With a bit of searching and following the bird's low, booming calls, we were able to get long looks at a male as it moved between several perches. There is no word better than 'bizarre' to describe this large, black, crow-like cotinga, whose pendulous feathered wattle, elongates and shortens during its breeding display.

After the walk, we did some roadside birding that produced the rather local Ochre-breasted Tanager, White-shouldered Tanager, White-bearded Manakin, and several other species. From the bus on the way back, we saw Pale-mandibled Aracari (split by some authors from Many-banded Aracari), and, as we got off the bus at the lodge, three Swallow-tailed Kites soared over the parking area. Before dinner, I was able to 'scope a couple species of calling toucans and several of us saw a female Long-wattled Umbrellabird, perched in a Cecropia tree just off the dining area's deck. Dinner was at 7 p.m., during which some people saw Black-and-white Owl from the restaurant (others caught up with it later).



Sat., Dec. 1 Buenaventura | Arenillas Ecological Reserve | Humedal la Tembladera

After breakfast, we boarded the bus, retracing the first day's route back to Santa Rosa and then turning off to the Arenillas Ecological Reserve. This site protects some of Ecuador's dwindling dry forests, home to plants and animals found only in the Tumbesian region of the southwest. En route, we stopped for several Long-tailed Mockingbirds, harbingers of other good things to come. Arriving at the reserve headquarters, we stepped out of the bus and were immediately surrounded by large and gaudy White-tailed Jays, as Pacific Horneros stepped delicately across the road, and a huge Green Iguana spied on us from above. Before we began the loop trail through the forest, one of the park rangers was kind enough to show us a bright rufous West Peruvian Screech-Owl, perched under the roof of a picnic shelter. The loop walk was productive, despite the woodland being especially dry. Birds we encountered included Rufous-browed Peppershrike, White-tipped Dove, Scarlet-backed Woodpecker, Ecuadorian Piculet, Collared Antshrike, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Tawny-crowned Pygmy-Tyrant, Southern beardless-Tyrannulet, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, and Fasciated Wren.



Departing Arenillas, we drove to a small recreation area with picnic tables at Humedal la Tembladera, and ate our picnic lunches. The Humedal is a patchwork of ponds, lagoons, marshes, and agricultural land. Birding from roadside after lunch, we saw many birds; including 22 Comb Ducks roosting among hundreds of whistling-ducks, Anhingas, all three plumages of Magnificent Frigatebirds, an immature Brown Pelican, Pearl Kite, Purple and Common gallinules, Smooth-billed Anis, Horned Screammers, Wattled Jacanas, and Little Blue, Coccoi, and Striated Herons. As we ascended the dirt road to the lodge, stopping often for perched toucans, two Ecuadorian Thrushes, the only ones during the trip, hopped into the road. Dinner was at 7 p.m., again accompanied by Black-and-white Owl from the dining area.

Sun., Dec. 2 Travel Day to Tapichilaca with birding stops

We began with breakfast at 6 a.m., taking a final dosage of the lodges numerous and varied hummingbirds. While in the driveway, we had nice looks at a Crested Guan perched in a tall roadside tree, and a Plumbeous Kite



that was often present near the lodge. We hit the road at 8:20 and drove about four hours to the town of Catamayo. On a dirt road near the airport, we ate our picnic lunches and then birded in the dry scrub. It was mid-day, not the most active time for birdlife, but Andrea produced two or three Tumbes Sparrows, a bird with a very small footprint in Ecuador and recently placed in a monotypic genus. We also had better looks at Tawny-crowned Pygmy-Tyrant, as well as Ecuadorian ground-Dove. We then continued to the old Catamayo-Loja road to try for Elegant Crescentchest. By then too hot for any self-respecting crescentchest to show itself, although we did hear several very close to roadside. We did see a tiny Purple-collared Woodstar, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, Long-tailed Mockingbird, and a few other widespread species. Continuing to Loja, we learned that

it's difficult to find a combination washroom and ice cream stop on a Sunday. Difficult but hardly impossible. We then continued on the long drive through the mountains to Tapichilaca, arriving at about 6:20 p.m. Walking up the short entrance ramp to the front door, it was obvious that we had climbed a good bit to get to the lodge.

Mon., Dec. 3 Tapichilaca Roadside Birding | Reserva Palmitera

We began the day with a short hike in the forest adjacent to the lodge. Reaching a small clearing where one of the staff members had put out worms, we had close looks at a beautiful Chestnut-naped Antpitta, one of the larger members of its family, and a difficult bird to see without local help. We returned for breakfast and spent the balance of the morning birding the edge of the lodge and roadside to let our lungs and blood acclimate to the higher altitude. Hummingbirds were numerous; mostly large and attractive Chestnut-breasted Coronets, and Amethyst-throated Sunangels, but there were a few orange-chinned Little Sunangels as well. Other birds we encountered included Bearded Guans, Masked Flowerpiercers, and a Yellow-breasted Brush-Finch at the lodge's feeders. At the woodland edge, Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager, Blue-capped, Blue-necked, and Rufous-chested tanagers, Gray-headed Bush-Tanager, Spectacled Redstart, Black-crested and Citrine warblers, and both Black-capped and White-banded Tyrannulets. As is often the case, Rufous Spinetails and Plain-tailed Wrens teased us with their calls at the roadside but could not be coaxed into view.





After lunch, we were joined by Diego, one of the lodge's staff members, and took a bus ride through the nearby town of Valladolid, to a private home and its adjoining grounds called Reserva Palmitera. We did little more than walk up the driveway and stand in the yard but saw many birds as they visited the tree tops or foraged within the canopy as part of a mixed feeding flock. Species of interest included a pair of Blue Dacnis, the very local Marañon Thrush, Piratic Flycatcher, Spotted, Silver-beaked, Paradise, and Silver-throated Tanagers, Red-headed Barbet, Green-backed Becard, Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, and a pair of Ash-browed Spinetails. As we left, we had reasonably good looks at a Black-faced Tanager (a bird that barely enters southern Ecuador) that foraged on the opposite hillside. From the edge of the road, we scanned open pastures and the river below, getting great views of a pair of Golden-olive Woodpeckers. Additionally, people who were looking in the right place at the right time, saw a flying Andean Cock-of-the-Rock. At 6:30 p.m. we reconvened for the list and had dinner at 7. The evening's dessert was a frosted chocolate cake prepared by the staff to celebrate Mike and Dick's birthdays.



Tue., Dec. 4 Tapichilaca | Jocotoco Antpitta | Sitio Arqueologico Santa Ana - La Florida

Because our hike to see Jocotoco Antpitta would take most of the morning, we had an early (5:30) breakfast. At 6:15 a.m. we took a short bus ride to the trailhead along the main road. The first 150 feet or so was a steep climb but the remainder of the hike was fairly level, first on a wide trail overlooking a broad canyon, then through dense forest where we walked on a narrow,

rocky trail that required constant attention to foot placement. There were a few up and down spots, but there were steps and railings to help with footing. On the way in, we were again teased by loudly singing Plain-tailed Wrens that refused to come into view. However, we were surrounded by a flock of large Rufous Wrens that showed well as they worked through the vines and understory. Eventually arriving at a wide clearing with several well-earned benches, we immediately encountered a Jocotoco Antpitta. This impressive beast is the largest of the 50 or so antpittas. Despite its size and loud call, it was discovered here roughly 20 years ago. Subsequently, it became the namesake of the foundation that now owns/manages around 11 reserves in various parts of Ecuador, including the three lodges we visited during this trip. Prior to our arrival, a staff member from the lodge had put out washed and sliced sections of fresh earthworms and was calling "Maria...Maria" to bring in the antpitta (I imagine the earthworms may have been sufficient enticement). For the next half hour, we sat photographing or just enjoying the localized and now iconic member of Ecuador's avifauna. On the walk back to the bus, we added a few more birds including a small group of striking Hooded mountain-Tanagers, Pearled Treerunners, a Streaked Tuftedcheek, and a Blue-backed Conebill, spotted by Phil.

After lunch, we had a 2:00 departure through Valladolid to the Sitio Arqueológico Santa Ana - La Florida. The archaeological site is perched on a flat bench just over a rapidly flowing stretch of river. In the trees were Black-



billed and Marañon thrushes, Great Kiskadees, Swallow Tanagers, a Mottle-backed Elaenia, Paradise Tanagers, and several other species. Along the river, Torrent Tyrannulets and Black Phoebe flew from boulder to boulder, not too agitated by the many children swimming and fishing with cast nets. Here, we also saw a pair of Rufous-fronted Thornbirds attending their huge stick nest, and several Dull-colored Grassquits feeding at roadside. Like the Marañon Thrush, the thornbird just barely enters Ecuador from northern Peru. At 6:30 p.m. some people had a beer or a glass of wine, we ran through the bird list, and had dinner.

Wed., Dec. 5 Drive to Copalinga with Birding Stops

After our 6:30 a.m. breakfast and a few minutes of feeder watching, while the staff fetched our luggage, we departed Tapichilaca at 7:30 a.m. It was clear and sunny--a good day for a drive. At 9:30 a.m., we stopped on an attractive town square in Vilcabamba. People fanned out for ice cream, pharmaceuticals, or washrooms, while a few of us just stayed under the tree cover of the square and enjoyed the birds or talked to locals and visitors from other countries. There were Gray-breasted Martins on the utility wires--perhaps our best views--and as we were about to board, a pair of Croaking ground-Doves, new for the trip, landed right next to the bus. We left the square at 10:00 a.m. and drove an hour to the Jardín Botánico Reinaldo Espinosa Aguilar, which is administered by the National University in Loja. Andrea had a Rainbow Starfrontlet up her sleeve and it was just a few minutes before we were looking at this largely cinnamon hummingbird sporting a green breast and a purple chin. A pair of Summer Tanagers was new for the trip, as were Rusty Flowerpiercer, Three-banded Warbler, and Loja Hummingbird, a recent split from Amazilia Hummingbird. We ate our lunch under a shelter in the attractive botanical garden, leaving at about 1:20 p.m. Another hour and a half took us to the old Loja-Zamora road, where we paralleled the main road on its older dirt counterpart. Our first stop produced a beautiful female Torrent Duck, Torrent Tyrannulets, and flashy Inca Jays. We followed the river for a number of kilometers, with a stop at a bridge that produced several large, dull cinnamon, Cliff Flycatchers. We then continued through the town of Zamora, arriving at the lodge close to dinnertime.

Thur., Dec. 6 Copalinga Vicinity

After breakfast at 6:00 a.m., we birded the immediate vicinity of the lodge. We found some nice birds, including a pair of Magpie Tanagers, a Green-and-gold Tanager, a couple of cooperative Squirrel Cuckoos, a pair of Red-crested Finches, Many-spotted Hummingbird, and Violet-fronted Brilliant. At 9:30 a.m., we boarded the bus and

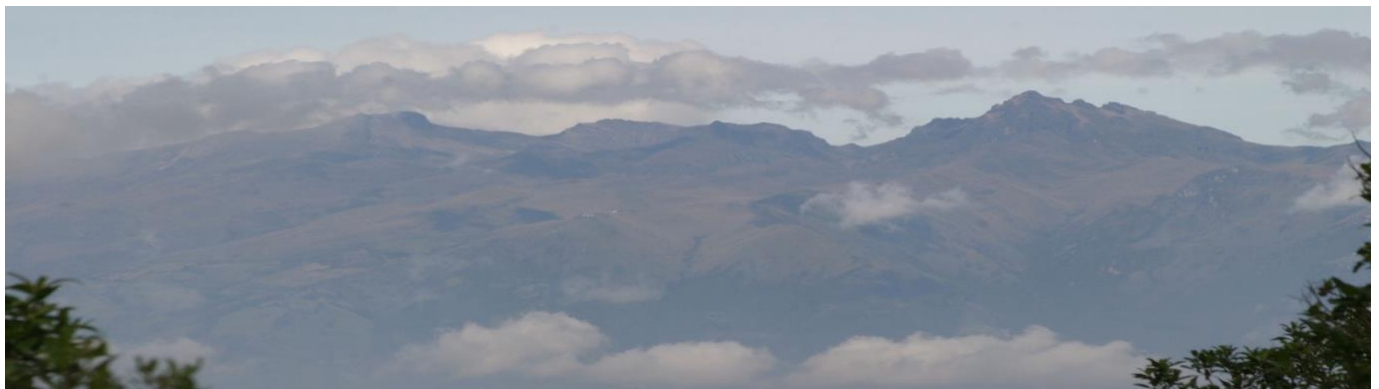


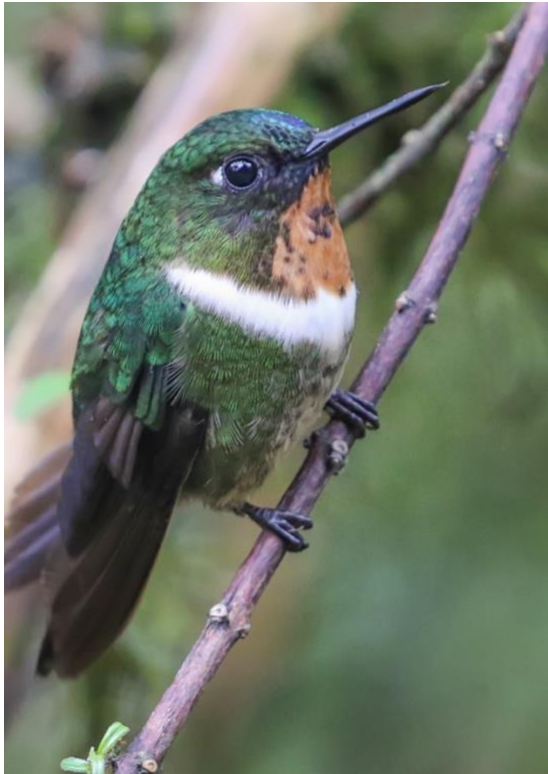
took a short drive to the Bombascaro entrance to Podocarpus National Park. The up and down trail was bathed in bright sun and we saw little besides a couple Yellow-throated Chlorospingus. Leaving there, we drove into the nearby town of Zamora and birded a waterfront park along the Douro River, encountering a couple of Speckled Chachalacas, Ringed Kingfisher, two very confiding Yellow-browed Sparrows, and a Striated. From there, we returned

to the lodge and took a short break after lunch. At 3:30 p.m. we reconvened and, joined by Walter, one of the lodge's staff members, we hiked up to a wall that crosses a trail that serves as a simple blind. There, we waited for an hour, finally being rewarded with an adult Gray Tinamou that appeared with four downy chicks. The tinamous stayed long enough for people to get good views and a few photos. Other birds in the vicinity of the blind were Gray-fronted Doves, Golden-headed manakins, Paradise Tanagers, Inca Jays, and a very difficult to see female Collared Trogon. We descended the trail and spent a little time viewing the stand of Porterweed outside the dining area. The small purple flowers of this plant are attractive to hummingbirds, and for this reason, it is a popular ornamental planting at lodges throughout Latin America. Before too long, we had repeated views of a male Wire-crested Thorntail, its curious spikey crown feathers clearly visible. Before dinner, we took a short drive to look for Blackish Nightjar, but the rain made that activity very difficult, so we returned for dinner.

Fri., Dec 7 Copalinga and Zamora Vicinity

After our 6:00 a.m. breakfast, we drove a short way to the Bombascaro entrance to Podocarpus N.P. Within a few minutes, it was obvious that the rain was going to make it impossible to see anything, made especially frustrating by the presence of a calling Lanceolated Monklet. Backtracking, we drove through Zamora to a road that passes through agriculture, light woodland, and some settlements. For the checklist, we called this the





Jenairo road, although we never really had a good name. We spent the morning along the road, birding somewhat cleared country, the vicinity of the school and trees around the dump. We added a number of species including a pair of fine Lineated Woodpeckers that Diane spotted from the bus, Masked Tityra, Dark-breasted Spinetail, Streaked Xenops, loud chortling Thrush-like Wrens, two Blue-headed Parrots, Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch, and Channel-billed Toucan. At the same time, we got better looks at other birds such as Russet-backed Oropendola, Mottle-backed Elaenia, Roadside Hawk, and Southern Rough-winged Swallow. We returned for lunch, and then a few of us revisited the Bombascaro Entrance trail. This turned out to be a long hike, during which we crossed the river and reached the local park headquarters building. Near the building, a few people had quick looks at an Andean Cock-of-the-Rock. We also encountered a pair of lovely Blue-naped Chlorophonias, two Plain Antvireos, and a few other more common species, as well as hearing a close but stubborn Plain-backed Antpitta. We did the bird list at 6:30 p.m. then had dinner.

Sat. Dec. 8 Acanama Road | Saraguro | Drive to Cuenca

After the night's rainstorm, we met for breakfast at 6:30 a.m., finished packing, and departed at 7:30 a.m., by which time the rains had ended. At about 8:00 a.m., we rechecked the river from the bridge at the junction of the old Loja-Zamora road. A couple days earlier, Mike and I glimpsed a Fasciated tiger-Heron as it disappeared from the riverbank. The look was so brief that, I didn't put it on the trip list. Scanning the river as the rains returned and rapidly strengthened, we found nothing besides the previously seen Cliff Flycatchers, a glimpsed Ringed Kingfisher, and a Spotted Sandpiper. At about 8:15 a.m., we had a bathroom stop at a small store, the bus parked in front of a waterfall made spectacular by the recent rains. Because of the weather (rain and fog), and the curvy road, we proceeded slowly through the mountains, passing through the city of Loja *en route*. At 11:30 a.m., we turned off the main road onto an ascending dirt road (Acanama road) that led high up to a military antenna site. There, Andrea hoped to find us Crescent-faced Antpitta, one of the very special birds of the Andes. The site, at about 11,00 feet elevation, was cold and socked in with cloud cover and the best we could do was the trips only Glossy Flower-piercers. By 2:00 p.m., we were back down at the highway. A few minutes later, we entered the town of Saraguro, had a bathroom stop, then visited the attractive town square where the residents, dressed in the town's somber-colored outfits, sold various crafts; especially articles made of, or decorated with colorful beadwork. It seemed like just about everyone came back to the bus with articles to bring home. Continuing, we threaded our way through the bustling city of Cuenca, eventually reaching the Hotel Inca Real, our home for the next several nights.

Sun., Dec. 9 Laguna Llaviucu at El Cajas National Park

The hotel provided us with breakfast at 6:00 a.m.. At about 6:50 a.m., we departed Cuenca with our local guide Juan Muñoz. As we drove out of this attractive colonial city, Juan spoke to us about the Andes, El Cajas National Park where we were headed, and the history of Cuenca, Ecuador's third largest city. By about 7:40 a.m., we reached the entrance arch to the Zona de Recreación Llaviucu. A bathroom stop yielded a close flock of Hooded Siskins. Continuing up the road a short distance, we exited the bus to look at vegetation around two bridges and the stream that flowed below them. There, we saw a number of birds including Mountain Velvetbreast, Tyrian



Metal-tail, White-capped Dipper, Black Flowerpiercer, Chiguanco and Great thrushes, Spectacled Redstart, and another Rufous-chested Tanager. Continuing up the road a bit, we reached the trailhead for Laguna Llaviucu. Although today was the “lower” day of our two visits to El Cajas, and the walk was not rigorous, it was clear to most of us that we were walking at several thousand meters elevation. In the woods approaching the lake, we saw several sprightly Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrants, and as we all stood frozen waiting for a Rufous Antpitta to stroll into view (it didn’t) an Azara’s Spinetail jumped into everyone’s binoculars, a stroke of luck for everyone. The lake was attractive, surrounded by rather stark mountains and grazing herds of horses and llamas in the surrounding grasslands. It was also productive. From its shore, we saw a cooperative Grass (Sedge) Wren, Andean Ducks, Andean Teal, Andean Gulls, Yellow-billed Pintail, many Brown-bellied Swallows, huge Slate-colored Coots, Plain-colored Seed-eaters, and an adult Virginian (Ecuadorian) Rail with two downy black chicks. After departing this very nice location, we returned to the bridges we’d stopped at earlier. A small flock contained Spectacled Redstarts,

Masked Flowerpiercers, and one or two Superciliaried Hemispingus.

A short drive brought us to Dos Chorreras, a hotel with a restaurant, a store, llamas, and trout ponds. Talk about one-stop-shopping. The restaurant was huge, with exposed wooded beams and floor to ceiling glass walls. Not long after we sat down, Kathy pointed out a Turquoise Jay that was sitting outside the windows preening. An excellent bonus with the meal. We had a very nice lunch with excellent potato soup, grilled fresh trout with seafood sauce, and both salad and dessert bars, thus ensuring that there would be little room for dinner upon our return to Cuenca. When we got back to the hotel, some people walked around town, shopped, and visited a market and a cathedral with Juan and Andrea. Dinner at the hotel was good but hard to finish. Most people though seemed to have room for one of the bar’s Pisco sours.

Mon. Dec. 10 Upper El Cajas National Park | Return to Quito

We left the hotel at 6:55 a.m. Everyone boarded the bus carrying whatever they owned or could borrow that might keep them warm, as we were headed to the upper reaches of the road passing through El Cajas National

Park. Our first stop was at an elevation of approximately 13,050 feet. Fortunately, the trail was short and level. We were birding the edge of a small lagoon surround by a clearing bordered by *Polylepis* trees. *Polylepis* constitutes one of the specialty habitats in South America and is utilized by some equally special birds. The tree is a member of a small genus in the rose family and is easily recognized by its flaky bark (hence the genus name which means many scales). It grows at the highest elevation of any tree, apparently needing less oxygen than we did. There were some good birds around, but they weren't all easy to see. With a bit of patience, we had looks at Tit-like Dacnis, an iridescent steel blue ball of feathers that foraged in the tiny leaves and bark of the *Polylepis* trees. An Andean Tit-Spinetail, a streaky ovenbird with an elongate tail appeared long enough for people to see it, as did a somber-colored Blue-backed Thornbill, a couple of White-throated Tyrannulets, and, for some, a Shining Sunbeam.

Andrea had another very special bird up her sleeve. Leading us just a short distance farther to a hillside with blooming Chuquiraga shrubs, we had nice views of a male Andean Hillstar, a very high elevation hummingbird that clings to the flowers it's feeding on and is one of the only members of its family known to have a male that helps rear the young. Easy to see there were Bar-winged Cinclodes and Tawny Antpittas that paraded around in the open looking for bugs or worms among the grasses, miniature flowers, and cushion plants. Descending a bit, we stopped at the visitor's center at Laguna Torreadora. This site had several tour buses filled with Europeans, and a number of hikers from various parts of the world, some of whom were woefully underdressed. The visitor's center provided interpretive signage, several Plumbeous Sierra-Finches, and much appreciated cups of freshly made hot chocolate. While some people enjoyed the view from the center's balcony, the rest of us went down a series of staircases toward the lake to check the trees, a known site for Giant Conebill. Despite a thorough search of various stands of *Polylepis*, the conebill remained invisible. However, we did see Black-tailed Shrike-Tyrant, a rather good high elevation flycatcher, and another Tawny Antpitta.

Boarding the bus once more, we took a very short drive to the Pato Quinoas trail that began right at roadside. By walking a few hundred feet on a narrow plank boardwalk, we were able to see Violet-throated Metaltail, one of Ecuador's four or so endemic hummingbirds. We also saw a Variable Hawk hanging in the breeze just in front of us, a perky Tufted Tit-Tyrant, and, surprisingly, another Black-tailed Shrike-Tyrant. Descending to Cuenca, we visited the lovely studio/shop of Eduardo Vega, one of Ecuador's best-known artists. Not only is the studio beautifully designed but the picture windows provide an expansive view of the city of Cuenca. Sr. Vega was in the studio, as was his son, and he asked to be photographed with our group. Sr. Vega had illustrated many of Ecuador's birds on his pottery and showed us artist's proofs of a mug and a plaque the studio had created, with very lifelike images of a Jocotoco Antpitta. Most people walked away with something from the studio, some lamenting not having more luggage space for larger pieces. Leaving the studio, we drove to La Herradura, a large and obviously popular steakhouse for a late lunch. They provided us with a prodigious amount of food, and the leftovers probably fed our guide's family for several days. Again, a few people walked around town. Dinner was tasty, but a bit of an afterthought after the generous lunch. At 7 p.m., we left the hotel, bussed to the airport, and departed for Quito at 9:05 p.m. The flight was short; unfortunately, it was dark so we couldn't get another look at the high Andes as we flew northward. Most of us were booked for flights leaving Quito between midnight and 3 a.m. or thereabouts; so we took the lift upstairs and checked in for the next leg of the journey. Phil, Trudy, and Irene had flights mid-day the next day, so they spent the evening at Puembo and got to see a few birds the next morning before flying home.

Photo Credits:

Gray Tinamou, Carlos Sanchez (CS); Black-tailed Trainbearer, Xavier Munoz (XM); Chestnut-breasted Coronet, CS; Jocotoco Antpitta, CS; Golden-bellied Grosbeak, XM; Wire-crested Thorntail, Miguel Lezamas; Golden Tanager, XM; Ecuadorian Hillstar, XM; Black-cheeked Woodpecker, XM; Andean Cock-of-the-rock, Greg Smith;

Green Honeycreeper, CS; Black Phoebe, XM; Porch Birding, Woody Wheeler (WW); Brugmansia Flower, Cajas Park Flower, Tapichalaca Orchid, Papallacta Pass Flower, Karen LeMay (KL); Masked Trogon, Naturalist Journeys Stock; White-capped Dipper, Peg Abbott; Green-crowned Woodnymph, XM; Chestnut-naped Antpitta, CS; Jocotoco Antpitta, CS; Hummingbird feeder watching, WW; Glittering-green Tanager, XM; Antisana Volcano, XM; Andes Scenic, PA; Amethyst-throated Sunangel, XM; Cajas Park birders, Eduardo Vega group, KL.