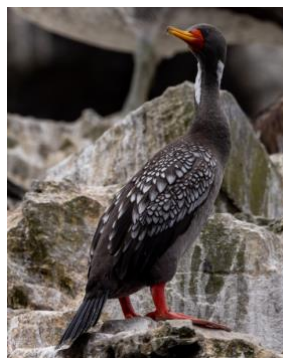


# Peru: Cusco to Manú National Park | Trip Report | Oct. 17 – 31, 2022 | by Peg Abbott



With Naturalist Journeys' lead guide, Peg Abbott, and participants Andrew, Chuck, Gerold, Holly, Lars, Linda, and Rob



**SUMMARY:** A grand adventure to sample one of the planet's most biodiverse places, a journey from the high Andes to legendary lowland rainforest, from Cusco to Manú National Park, taken by seven participants: Linda, Chuck, Rob, Holly, Gerold, Lars and Andrew, with guides Peg Abbott and Andrea Molina along with local guides Juan and Mario. Highlights were many and are detailed in the tour's species list, with wonders from Jaguar to Harpy Eagle, Capped Heron to Cock-of-the-rock, 23 species of mammals and 425 species of birds, including over 40 species in each of three families: hummingbirds, flycatchers and tanagers and their allies. Wow! You can read about our adventures below.





## **Mon., Oct. 17**      **Welcome to Lima**

Our group arrived on numerous flights, with a few coming in early to enjoy the city. We met for a welcome dinner with our amazing guide, Andrea Molina, and looked forward to starting our birding right here in Lima where, along its coastal setting, nutrient-rich upwellings from the cold Humboldt Current offer nourishment for teeming seabird colonies that include boobies, cormorants and penguins. This kicked off our exploration of the eastern flank of the Peruvian Andes, the full elevational gradient of Manú National Park and the biosphere reserve that surrounds it. After the hiatus from travel caused by a global pandemic, we pinched ourselves that we were finally here to experience habitats from high Andean Puna grasslands to lowland Amazonian rainforest, with a chance to see some of the most diverse fauna and flora of any park in the world. In the end we'd see over 400 bird species, with those going on to Machu Picchu adding more.

## **Tues., Oct. 18**      **Pucusana & Pantanos de Villa Marshes**

We departed Lima early, and our driver expertly avoided the local traffic. Soon we were winding our way along a paved sidewalk with a view to the sea. Just out of the bus Peg spied a small dove which turned out to be a Croaking Ground Dove, our only one of the trip. An Eared Dove posed on the phone wires and patterned West Peruvian Doves were seen in scope views, working hedgerows below the walkway on the cliffs going down to the sea. Some of the group watched two Pacific Parrotlets working on some fruits in the hedge. A Southern Beardless Tyrannulet called distinctively and came in to inspect us. A highlight of our time here was seeing Inca Tern on rocky cliff nests at close range. Below them, also on rock promenades, were Blackish Oystercatchers, and on a nearby sandy beach, their cousins, American Oystercatchers, fed and called. Belcher's Gulls were new to most, seen in good numbers along with Gray-headed and Kelp Gulls. Further out to sea, a few Gray Gulls were seen flying with Peruvian Boobies, out where the fisherman were trying their luck for the day. Peruvian Pelicans looked huge as they perched on boats at buoys. Time passed quickly, but we wanted to head on to the



islands. Soon we arrived at the lively fishing village of Pucusana where we met our amazing birding boat captain. Ruddy Turnstones worked the beach alongside the dock.

Once aboard it was non-stop wildlife action – so exciting! This island is like a mini-Galapagos, and it was such a great experience that Peg asked to go around the circuit a second time - it was all so captivating and as we had the time, why not! There was a bit of swell when we reached the open sea, with waves washing into the coves, but we hardly noticed as we were so intent not to miss anything. Pucusana is a colorful fishing village situated to take advantage of these upwelling cold-water currents. For seabirds it is an ideal nesting area, with hundreds, sometimes thousands of pairs including more than 2,500 Inca Terns, strikingly beautiful as they courted and prepared for nesting. We tallied over 700 Peruvian Boobies, elegant and streamlined as they flew to and from the cliffs. The day's showstopper was undoubtedly the Humboldt Penguins, 16 seen in total in two different locations, in pairs and waddling up and down the rock face! That cold Humboldt Current makes their presence here possible. Holly spotted one penguin in the water and our driver maneuvered around to get better views – fun to see one swimming. Red-legged Cormorants were seen at close range, their intricate eye and facial patterns something to behold. South American Sea Lions were abundant as well, very entertaining to watch their hierarchic antics getting in and out of the waves. It was on the second pass that our keen-eyed captain Julio spotted a single Guanay Cormorant and a small group of Blue-footed Boobies. Returning to calmer waters inside the harbor, we got close views of Whimbrel and Surf Cincloides and were surrounded by Peruvian Pelicans. Jorge, our driver, was waiting for us and led us over to an excellent restaurant where we ate very fresh Bonito fish, and a few sampled the local ceviche. He then drove us up back up the coastal highway to the Pantanaos de Villas marshes where we visited three different sections of the reserve.

The first was a trail leading to a series of reeds and ponds, the largest called Laguna Genesis. Highlights here included seeing Cinnamon Teal, White-tufted Grebe, Slate-colored Coot, Wilson's Phalarope and Yellow-hooded Blackbird. We had good looks at two local specialties: the stunning Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, and the secretive Wren-like Rushbird. Chuck spotted both species of Night-Heron, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned. Already the group's camera squad were seriously at work with many rewards for their efforts. The next section included a larger lake, aptly named Laguna Mayor, where we





added good looks at Andean Duck, Great Grebe, Plumbeous Rail and Vermilion Flycatcher. On the way out we saw Harris's Hawks perched in a row of trees. The third spot was hopping, and this high level of bird activity spurred us on, as several of the group were beginning to feel a bit jetlagged. This hotspot included both a freshwater lagoon and a sandy beach on the ocean side. At the lagoon, we scoped 11 Chilean Flamingoes, a good mix of shorebirds, and even an *Amazilia* Hummingbird. Several hundred Franklin's Gulls were gathered, and Chuck managed to tease out a Laughing Gull for comparison. We saw about 30 Black Skimmers resting on the shore, and four Puna Ibis feeding. Wilson's Phalaropes were intently following White-cheeked Pintails, obviously benefiting from the larger species' feeding action. What a day! With many new species, fascinating behaviors to watch, and the vast Pacific Ocean at our side! We returned to the hotel at day's end, had dinner and tallied up our species before collapsing into bed.

### **Wed., Oct. 19                      Cusco | Lake Huacarpay | Acjanaco Pass | Manú-Kosñipata Road to Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge**

Andrea is so gracious and efficient at tour logistics! In no time we caught an early flight up into the Andes, landing at Cusco where our driver Hilmar and local guide Juan were waiting for us at the airport. Cusco, now a bustling modern city, blends a sense of ancient culture with modern conveniences. Several of our group would return at the trip's end before their visit to Machu Picchu to experience a bit of its culture. Today, we skirted around the city on a good road and dropped into a beautiful valley to find ourselves at a prime birding spot. Laguna Huacarpay, a high-elevation lake surrounded by arid shrubby slopes, is always a productive spot. Right away we found Chiguanco Thrushes putting on a show. As we turned from the fields to the lake, scoping a variety of ducks, a wild Peruvian Guinea Pig made a fast dash across an open area of the marsh, surprising us all. Andean Gulls were flying up the ridgeline and we had good views of Blue-and-Yellow Tanagers, the first of a colorful parade of this clan we would see. We enjoyed good looks at Plumbeous Rail and Puna Ibis and trained our scopes on some Band-tailed Seed eaters in grassy areas on the lake's margin. Patient Chuck found an Andean Negrito in the open field by the bus. We had quite a way to go so did not linger here for long. Stopping at the village of Paucartambo, we enjoyed the most delicious coffee and hot chocolate



while eating an exquisite box lunch that Juan had brought from Cusco. There were so many treats in our box we felt like little kids! An enclosed menu explained to us some of the specialty indigenous ingredients used to prepare our food. Yum!

A couple of Torrent Tyrannulets were active in a small canal running through town. Not too much farther out of town, we stopped on the Rio Paucartambo to scope a pair of Torrent Ducks our driver had spotted. We spent quite a bit of time at Puente Huambutio, first working our way up a small drainage for hummingbirds and flowerpiercers attracted to a flower patch there by a small farm. We also found Yellow-billed Teal and Yellow-billed Duck side by side, from the bridge. Black-throated Flowerpiercer was one we'd hoped to locate further up the draw, and we found it though it was quickly upstaged when a Neotropical River Otter was sighted, not a common mammal to see. This one was catching fish, one right after another, and rolling over to eat them while still swimming. It got out on several log jams and put on just a marvelous show, much to the delight of our photographers and those taking video. Other highlights here included seeing Giant Hummingbird, a stunning Green-tailed Trainbearer and watching a flock of Greenish Yellow-Finch. It was nice to hear the calls of Rufous-collared Sparrow and to watch three Spot-winged Pigeons fly overhead. It got quite foggy and wet as we crossed the high pass of Acjanaco at 12,000 feet, so we made just a few birding stops. One stop revealed views of Moustached Flowerpiercer, and good looks at Creamy-crested Spinetail as well. We also found both Tyrian Metaltail and Shining Sunbeam, as well as two beauties: Golden-billed Saltator and Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager. A bold Mountain Caracara posed inquisitively, as if looking into the bus at our pull-off. This pass is the official start of Manú National Park. It was wet, moody and misty as we descended to the moss-covered elfin forest below.

In less than one kilometer, the vegetation changed from puna to elfin forest on the eastern, humid side of the Andes, quite astonishing, and a quick stop near the entrance to Wayquecha Lodge (where we'd return in a couple of days) brought us a veritable bird explosion. We marveled at Red-crested Cotinga, both Hooded and Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanagers, Masked Flowerpiercer, and one species we were familiar with from home, Band-tailed Pigeon. Our jovial group was having fun and the bus rocked with





our laughter at a stop when the spotters diligently tried to point out the first Andean Guan and someone said, “could you repeat that dangle cue?” We had just too much fun, and thus got to our lodge about 6 pm. It was dark as we settled in, thankful for the solar lights in our cabins, which lacked electricity. The main area was powered by a generator, and here we relaxed at the bar, enjoying some nice hot soup, a good meal and time to catch up on our checklist!

### **Thurs., Oct. 20                      Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge and Lek**

What a totally amazing place to wake up. Two raucous White-eyed Parakeets made sure no one overslept. Over our first cup of coffee, we watched seven species of hummingbirds and Russet-backed Oropendolas at the feeders. Bright Bay-headed and Blue-necked Tanagers decorated the trees. Three Speckled Chachalacas made enough noise to sound like thirty. We walked around a bit, returned for breakfast, and then it was hard to tear ourselves away from the viewing area of the feeders as we had an exciting visit by two Tayra, members of the weasel family. Off to the side, a whole troop of very active Brown Capuchin, also known as Large-headed Capuchin, were having their breakfast too. More hummingbird species joined the mix, including Rufous-booted Racket-tail, Green-fronted Lancebill and Buff-tailed Sicklebill.

Stepping out into the gardens, we encountered a mixed flock that included Versicolored Barbet, Olivaceous Siskin and Golden Tanager. Yellow-browed Sparrows fed under the cabins as a light rain started to fall. We headed to the creek, figuring rain would not matter to water birds, and were rewarded with good views of White-capped Dipper, several flycatchers and above us, large White-collared Swifts. We checked out the feeder area before lunch and were amazed to find Peruvian Piedtail, a highly sought-after endemic, working flowers quite close to the lodge, feeding next to the also impressive Wire-crested Thorntail. Sparkling Violetears were among the most common of the hummingbirds commanding the feeders much of the time. We also watched an Olive-backed Woodcreeper and two species of Euphonia, Bronze-green and Orange-bellied. Yungas Manakin remained a tease (heard-only) calling us to follow it from the garden into the woods but staying hidden despite our efforts. The lodge staff was very friendly, and the cook was quite good. Each meal included





fresh juices, fresh greens and vegetables and a main dish, plus dessert. There was always coffee and hot tea available, and they had both local and Chilean wines, which several of our group enjoyed as we did our nightly checklist. Oh, and did I mention Pisco Sours...

The lodge is adjacent to an Andean Cock-of-the-rock display area. Juan and Andrea felt our best activity at this active lek would be in the afternoon, and they judged this well. The misty rain had stopped and we had excellent light to view the group of males gathered there. There was a lot of jockeying for position on various tree limbs. At first most of the birds were below us but in time several came up to eye-level, allowing us to move around freely or watch while seated on a platform designed for viewing. The birds were pretty much oblivious to us, and it was such a treat not to be rushed and to enjoy such fine views of this brilliant species. We also noted a Blackburnian Warbler, Andean Solitaire and Smoke-colored Pewee while there. As if this was not enough of a show, not far from the lek, Juan took us to see a roosting Lyre-tailed Nightjar before we retired for the evening. What a day! It felt nice to share another good meal, do our notes for the day and head to bed. Camera batteries were charged when the generator was on, and WIFI was possible during those hours in the central dining area as well.

## **Fri. Oct. 21                      Wayqechua Biological Station Lodge**

We planned to spend the full day at higher elevation in montane elfin forest at 9,800 feet. After a quick, hot breakfast we set out for the Wayqechua Biological Station with a few planned birding stops along the way, followed by lunch in the large glassed-in dining area of the station. We made a quick stop trying to get good looks at an Andean Motmot perched alongside the road, but only a few saw it well (there would be more later) but our ever-present consolation prize was seeing Blue-banded Toucanets and a lovely Golden-olive Woodpecker! The grounds of the station, and the road coming and going, provided a birding bonanza for us. We saw a beautiful pair of Crimson-mantled



Woodpeckers, Black-faced Brushfinch, and Blue-capped Tanager, and at the feeders a new array of hummingbirds including Gould's (Collared) Inca and Amethyst-throated Sunangel. There were both Sierran and Highland Elaenias and a Rufous-breasted Chat Tyrant. Lars walked down to the lower cabins and found a fine lookout. He summoned us to come join him, and we saw distant White-collared Jays, close-up Azara's Spinetail and a big flock of Andean Parakeets whirling across one of the most beautiful views one could imagine. It's difficult to describe the scale of the Andean landscape. We were seeing majestic, high peaks in the distance with steep slopes cloaked in thick greenery, and a large, raging river coursing through the base. The road we would travel down in the coming days was visible, but other than that, there seemed to be no intrusion – just a wild landscape as far as the eye could see, with swirling clouds and mist making the view ever-changing.

This day Peg would change her designated favorite tanager at least three times, announcing each new one with relish upon seeing such beauty, "this is my new favorite tanager." After all, how does one choose between such gems – Grass-green, three species of mountain-tanager, and the morning's winner – Golden-collared Tanager? We walked the road at a slow pace due to the elevation, taking our time to observe dozens of species, before wandering back for lunch. As we arrived, a colleague of Andrea's let us know that an Urubamba Antpitta had been seen. We quickly organized ourselves, crouching quietly to see if it would come in again. In time we were rewarded as it walked on a mossy log above our heads - quite a thrill! The staff made us very welcome and cooked a delicious lunch that started with a local soup that Juan explained in detail. Potatoes were first cultivated in Peru more than 7,000 years ago, and we were discovering that each variety we tried was more delicious than the one before. They also had a chicken dish that Holly made sure to get the recipe for, made with yellow peppers and garlic. It was so nice inside the glass room with such a stunning view that some just chose to nestle in and let the birds come in time. Others worked the various trails and part of the road, finding Chestnut-capped Brushfinch, Cinnamon Flycatcher, two species of hemispingus and Blue-backed Conebill. A Variable Hawk worked the ridgeline above the road. Everyone had a chance to see Masked Trogon, and our intrepid hikers went almost straight uphill with a park ranger to get a view of Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan, a nice find! We left mid-afternoon, making a few stops on our way





down the road. At Rocotal there was some dramatic bridge work going on, with a massive span being placed to avoid an area of landslide. Our departure was timed to get us through the construction without delay. In some sense, the whole road seemed to be held together with wings and prayers at times, but in reality, it stays open with human determination and heavy machinery, connecting the lower villages of the Madre de Dios to Cusco. We returned at dusk to Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge and enjoyed dinner and our checklist tally.

## **Sat. Oct. 22                      Lower Manú Road | Pico de Hoz with Jonathan and Ada**

The Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge is perfectly situated at a mid-elevation between Acjanaco Pass and the Madre de Dios River. As we'd explored the upper elevations the previous day, our goal today was to work our way down. We had a great opportunity to spend time at the Pico de Hoz, a relatively new garden open to the public that's not far from Villa Carmen Lodge. In a half day there we saw almost 60 species, including amazing views of King Vulture that visit a feeding area along the river. We saw them first in scopes from the viewing platform above, then quietly made our way into blinds. Our host Jonathan knew each bird, naming them as over a dozen different individuals came in.

Everywhere we looked in the garden or at the feeders there were new species. We had fine views of Spix's Guan, 16 species of hummingbirds, Purplish and Violaceous Jays, Magpie Tanager and a host of other, brightly colored tanagers. We did a loop walk on the property and at a quiet wetland saw Hoatzin, including one on a nest providing a wonderful opportunity for photography. These unique birds primarily feed on young leaves and buds, which are digested in the crop with the aid of bacteria and microbes — in effect, feathered cows! We saw a Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth very high in a tree, and near the feeders Toppin's Titi Monkey and Black-capped Squirrel Monkey. On the river edge, we were pleased to find Red-capped Cardinal and several species of colorful parrots and macaws.



Jonathan had acclimated a Rufous-breasted Crake in much the same way as others have done for antpittas, and he invited us to see this elusive species come in to enjoy some juicy worms. It was fun to hear his story and learn about the garden, as we took shelter beneath a metal-roofed farm building, waiting for the rain to let up so we could search for Amazonia Antpitta after viewing the crake. It would take a second pass to see that one (success!) but we had many other good sightings on this walk including Collared Peccary, Red-billed Scythebill and Blue-crowned Trogon.

We feasted on our picnic lunch here, wanting more time with the incredible hummingbirds, that included such beauties as Gould's Jewelfront, Pale-tailed Barbthroat, Fork-tailed Woodnymph and Sapphire-spangled Emerald, all right before our eyes. Our butterfly enthusiasts were thrilled, as the garden was a riot of blooms and the mix of species was extraordinary.

After the visit, we took time to bird along the road, making a stop near the dramatic waterfall known as Tanager Corner, or the Thousand Meter Falls bridge, which has a handy pull-out. There we found Amazonian Umbrellabird, Lemon-browed Flycatcher, Blue-headed Parrot, Chestnut-backed Antshrike, and Paradise Tanager, another beauty in that family. We took time to observe the lush flora, noting the intricate leaf patterns of mosses, ferns, begonias, orchids, bromeliads and so many flowers in bloom. Every inch of the forest was packed with life with the road providing access to a botanical palette of unending variation. Another great day, we only wished at every spot we had more time, but this longing is always a good sign on a bird trip that has activity levels high enough you want to linger.

**Sun., Oct. 23**

### **Lower Manú Road | Inkamazonia Hummingbird Paradise Garden | Atalya | Boat to Manú Wildlife Center**

A light rain was falling in the morning, and several opted for a bit of a lie-in, with just Peg and Andrea venturing out birding. We were fortunate to (finally!) get good looks at Moustached Wren and also to discover a Swainson's Thrush, a boreal migrant that had probably just arrived. Back in the garden, Chuck had two Amazonian Umbrellabirds, male and female, fly right over his head, and a Black-billed





Thrush was singing. After saying good-bye to our most delightful hosts at this lodge, we headed down the road, making three stops, one near Puente Quita Calzones where two regal Plumbeous Kites seemed to shine in the morning sun, perched high on open branches in the foreground of yet another amazing Andean scenic view. Walking the road, we encountered a mixed flock with Bolivian Tyrannulet, Spectacled Redstart, Spotted Tanager and five Paradise Tanagers showing off their outrageous plumage. At the Thousand Meter Falls bridge, we looked upstream to see a Green-fronted Lancebill on territory, perching on rocks and low-hanging limbs. What a niche for a hummingbird! With no warning, a male Cock-of-the-rock zipped under us in full view, like an electric orange bullet, making its way downstream. Among the more common Golden Tanagers we found Saffron-crowned Tanager, which Peg quickly designated as her newest favorite tanager (for at least the next hour).

We had some time before our midday boat trip, so we decided to visit another garden that also was started by a guide who found himself with little income and abundant time during the pandemic. Jardin Inkamazonia is smaller than Pico de Hoz, but with intense blooms layered in front of a seating area. The hummingbird density was high and one we were keen on, Rufous-crested Coquette, was both common and tame. We got good looks at White-bearded, Koepcke's and Great-billed Hermits, Blue-fronted Lancebill and Violet-headed Hummingbird among the 14 species present at the hummingbird feeders. Blue Dacnis was a colorful addition on the fruit feeder. To our delight, butterflies here put on an equally amazing show, and a tarantula came out from under the porch for a quick glimpse. We ran into the group of Peruvian photographers that we'd shown the Peruvian Piedtail to a few days back, so it was high fives and fun to meet them again. Lincoln was our host here, very gracious and informative.

We had to pry ourselves away from the feeders in order to make it to the port city of Atalaya, where we would board a motorized canoe. Hard to believe, but the mountain portion of our journey was done. We had been in such remote areas, it seemed bit unsettling to watch river commerce and be in a



village with stores and restaurants. We were eager to return to the wilds! We met our skilled captain Mario and his agile helper Nicanor. Mario's wife Irma provided us with rubber boots for the river portion of the journey – quite handy. He would drop us off at the Manú Learning Center for a couple of nights, then return for us to head deeper downriver to Manú Wildlife Center. We loved being on the river, wind in our hair, views of rolling hills and water, and so many great birds on the sand islands and river margins. We found our first Horned Screamer, two species of river terns, Fasciated Tiger Heron, and crossing above us, Chestnut-fronted and Blue-headed Macaws. Abundant White-banded and White-winged Swallows were our constant companions.

After a pleasant boat ride on the Alto Madre de Dios River, we settled in at the basic yet comfortable Manú Learning Center. Our host Brenda greeted us warmly as we perched in comfortable chairs on the dining room deck, enjoying cold drinks and watching the late afternoon activity. At dinner we met the interns and students who were working there and learned a bit about their projects. After dinner, the station director, Chris, gave an excellent talk, with maps of the site and its habitats. He explained that there were several nearby areas in various stages of recovery from logging that took place about 40 years previously, and contrasted that with old growth stands, which made for good paired research studies. Data has been collected since 2003 on this private reserve in the buffer zone adjacent to Manú National Park. We appreciated the overview and sharing time in this atmosphere, but in our simpler cabins we missed our solar lights, who would have thought them to be such a luxury!

## **Mon. Oct. 24 Collpa Mascoitania Parrot Lick | Manú Wildlife Center**

We woke before dawn and met at the dock to venture out on the river at the first sign of light. We landed on a broad sandbar beach about ten minutes away; guests from other lodges were also assembled there. With scopes at the ready, we braced for the spectacle to begin, honing in on the more numerous species already perched in trees. At these clay licks, the sounds are as intriguing as the





sights, and it was loud. Blue-headed Parrots arrived early, soon joined by a few Mealy Parrots, 20 Yellow-crowned Parrots and about 50 Chestnut-fronted Macaws. A few White-eyed Parakeets joined the party, and we watched as they came down to the nearly vertical walls of clay, clinging to them to extract minerals. At one point the whole group exploded, a screaming cacophony, but the scare was only a King Vulture, which would do them no harm. We were pleased to see a Collared Plover at close range on “our” beach, and had a chance to test our flycatcher ID skills out on a Plain-crested Elaenia that perched at close range, thankfully calling. Swallow-winged Puffbirds sallied from their treetop perches as we returned to the lodge.

We still had a good portion of the day to explore, and there were a lot of birds to see right on the grounds of the station. A pair of Piratic Flycatchers were nesting in a colony of Russet-backed Oropendola, the long nests swinging in the wind were always a hub of activity. Pairs of Scarlet Macaw noisily passed overhead and Turquoise Tanagers fed on the small berries of a fruiting tree, joined by a Yellow-bellied Dacnis. From our comfortable chairs on the porch, we watched a Plain-crowned Spinetail collect nesting material, and to our good fortune, a lovely pair of Bluish-fronted Jacamars called and then perched obligingly. Lemon-throated Barbet were on territory and calling. With some work, we followed it around and eventually got good looks as it flew from tree to tree. A pair of Barred Antshrike called often.

Mid-afternoon we started out on the T1 trail. Linda recognized right away that the first steep section was not for her, and the deck viewing was pretty fine anyway. She was able to follow the jacamars for some time, enjoying that detailed view. The rest of us continued, hearing Goeldi’s Antbird and finding an Amazonian Woodcreeper. In general, in the thick forest birding was slow, though we did have good views of a group of Common Woolly Monkeys. Chuck ambled back, and later, at a tricky creek crossing, Peg and Holly opted to do the same, taking their time on the return to appreciate the butterflies. With the sun out, these winged beauties were numerous along the trail. Our more ardent hikers pioneered on and were able to reach a bamboo patch where they had glimpses of a calling Manú Antbird.



During our stay we also had a talk by one of the station researchers, Max, and two of the students working on cataloging butterflies. They possessed a notebook and an app with every butterfly identified on the property to date, some 400 species in total! They used traps to catch and release them, taking a quick photo to document the occurrence. It was a grand game of matching, but the exercise prompts one to look carefully at the various body parts – we learned quite a bit in a relatively short time. From here we walked back to bird by the garden, finding the Bluish Jacamars again and getting good looks at Amazonian Red Howler Monkey.

The night stars were lovely at this open location, and we were serenaded by Tawny-bellied Screech-Owls that night.

## **Tues. Oct. 25                      Atalya to Madre de Dios River | Harpy Eagle | Manú Birding Lodge Garden | Manú Learning Center**

Mario and Nicanor arrived early today with big smiles, ready to haul our suitcases down ladders and stairs to board the boat and start the next phase of our journey. We would cruise down the Rio Alto Madre de Dios to the point where its clear, mountain spring-fed waters mixed with the heavier sediments of the main Madre de Dios, one of the longest and most important tributaries of the Amazon basin. We had a big river day ahead of us, but we all enjoyed seeing the world over the prow of the boat, watching so much beauty and so many birds go by. Andrea and Mario had some great stops in mind for us, and Peg ran a couple of eBird checklists along the route, keeping us attentive to finding Capped Heron, Horned Screamer, Osprey, Yellow-billed and Large-billed Terns, various swifts, Roseate Spoonbill, Greater Yellow-headed Vulture, Drab Water Tyrants and of course, stunning Blue-and-Yellow and other macaws. Time passed quickly. We made a beach pit stop and enjoyed looking at Collared Plover and beach stones. Mario stopped at a small drainage where, by picking our way up rounded river boulders and then huffing and puffing up a steep slope, there was – a HARPY EAGLE nest, active with a large juvenile in it! Rob found a better angle to photograph this regal almost-adult bird by hiking on a bit more – well worth it as how fantastic to witness this wilderness species, one





we'd not considered to be on our route this year. WOW! Peg, facing hip surgery in a few weeks, stayed back with a few others who had seen this species previously. Thankfully they were compensated with views of Scarlet Macaws preening and making a racket, and overhead, a colorful Blue-naped Chlorophonia.

We made another stop at a bird-feeding garden of the Manú Birding Lodge. This was also a good location for primates, the promise of which lured us up what seemed like several hundred feet of stairs. The first section was a temporary ladder, where the water level varied, then the second section was built with well-placed, broad stairs to navigate the climb. After the daunting entry to the property, we were immediately captivated by a burst of activity. A pair of Yellow-tufted Woodpeckers were working on a hole, while hummingbird beauties appeared at the feeders and blooms – including Black-eared Fairy, Sapphire-spangled Emerald and Butterfly Coquette. Our host led us to an area where he'd been encouraging Saddle-backed Tamarins to visit, and we had wonderful views, interrupted by a pair of Black-tailed Trogons that put on a show. There were Agouti feeding on fruits, Black-fronted Nunbirds, Masked Tityra, a Buff-throated Woodcreeper, and above us, noisy Blue-and-Yellow Macaws. Several of us walked around the garden to get fine views of an Amazonian Red Howler Monkey. Not a long stop, but very worthwhile! We had more river miles to go, but finally pulled off the fast-moving current into a quiet back channel that we would get to know well: the entrance to Manú Wildlife Center. A couple of Capybara looked at us and then scampered into the brush, shy ones!

Manú Wildlife Center had been badly damaged by floods some years back which, combined with the pandemic, has significantly reduced activity there. Plus, we were visiting at the end of the season, just ahead of the rains that would soon accompany seasonal closure of the Center. Still the young staff did their best to make us welcome, serving up some good food, cerveza and wine. We moved our checklist tally to midday, taking advantage of their amazing thatch-roof great room lit by candles, better to relax and unwind from the day than to list.



### **Wed., Oct. 26      Tamba Blanquillo Parrot Lick | Manú Wildlife Center**

We woke in the dark (thankful for our solar lights) and donned our gear and rubber boots. Today would be a highlight of the trip, time at the incredible Blanquillo Parrot Lick. We had no time limit, bringing food with us, as we wanted to savor the experience. Our thoughtful guides also saved us some walking (in the dark) by hiring a crazy 4-wheel drive vehicle with a tractor pull that we piled onto. We called our driver affectionately “Mad Maxine.” Serafina was indeed a help, getting us to the clay lick so we could enter right at dawn and not disturb the wildlife.

The viewing area for the lick is huge, with multiple rooms connected by a boardwalk. It is open air, but covered, and far enough from the lick so as not to be a disturbance, yet close enough to allow those with telephoto lenses to get amazing images. The sounds were incredible, with hundreds of parakeets, parrots and macaws staging to come in and get the minerals they craved to balance toxins in the seed they consumed. Both Great and Undulated Tinamou called in the background. The intensity of sound and the sheer number of birds was something to behold. We tallied 70 Red-and-green Macaws, but that was probably an undercount. While they were the show-stoppers for beauty, we were thrilled to spot a dozen or more Orange-cheeked Parrots, a stunning species we saw only here. There were tiny Dusky-billed Parrotlets, Tui and Dusky-billed Parakeets, Blue-headed, Yellow-crowned and Mealy Parrots, and Blue-and-Yellow Macaw. Chuck did a great job scanning and calling out new species in the area, though no one could miss the Black-capped Donacobius and Magpie Tanagers, both gaudy species prone to frequent vocalization. We put the scopes on Black Caracara and Bluish-gray Saltator. We spent hours here and loved every minute!

Returning by river, we noticed a kettle of migrating Swallow-tailed Kites, a beautiful Capped Heron, and Andrew spied two Pied Lapwing, often common along the river, but at the current water level, hard to find. A pair of Little Ground Tyrants was a nice find along the sand banks. After lunch and a rest, we walked the grounds and local trails, adding yet more wonders to our Manú experience. White-throated Toucan was common here, and we all had great looks at Amazonian Motmot. Boat-billed Flycatchers called loudly from the garden, and we found White-bearded Hermits, a small hermit species, working flowers in the shrubs around our cabins. Andrea took part of the group out to the





canopy tower, a narrow, high structure that sways, only Rob elected to head up for the view. We had another more secure tower in our future... A large tree towers over the cabins and grounds, and a small stream wanders through the property. Several Scarlet Macaws roosted here, their screams and antics were part of our daily chorus. From the platform above the boat ramp, we often saw Blue-throated Piping Guan perching. Holly, Gerold and Andrew watched a mystery bird down on the riverbank, that, with some study, turned out to be Ruddy Quail Dove – sweet! We caught up on our checklist before dark, then enjoyed another good dinner together. Night sounds here were intriguing with Spectacled and Amazonian Pygmy-Owls calling from deep in the forest as we went to sleep.

### **Thurs. Oct. 27                      Cocha Blanco | Manú Wildlife Center Green Trail**

Today we got to breakfast just in time as the heavens opened with just an amazing downpour. We had waterfalls cascading off the roofs and thankfully the kitchen was equipped with propane, and we ate a good breakfast while marveling at the intensity of the storm. Our goal today was to visit Cocha Blanco lake. The rains cleared as we left the dock, heading down river and keeping our eyes out for Giant Otter, which we were fortunate to see. We left a bit later due to the heavy rain, but little did we know that the timing would actually be perfect, as we'd encounter the top highlight of the trip, seeing a wild Jaguar!

We set off from Manú Wildlife Center, motoring down the river and ticking off species we were now becoming familiar with. We steered towards the landing we'd use to hike into Cocha Blanco where we would walk first and then explore by boat. Mario had just started to turn when he suddenly started speaking in Spanish very quickly, in a low voice with urgent intensity. We all trained our eyes downstream, thinking it must be a special bird, when we saw the most beautiful cat. It had been drinking at the water's edge when Mario saw it, and without his quick skill we would never have seen it. He kept the boat at a non-threatening distance, and we watched as the Jaguar turned from the shoreline toward a log pile, then threaded its way behind the large trunks and then... jumped up onto a large log to stare at us briefly, giving us a full side view before casually melting into the shrubs behind. For the two minutes or so we watched we hardly breathed. We couldn't speak, or even grab for our



cameras. We just stared. This indelible moment cast its spell on us for the rest of the day, each in turn would pause and say, “Jaguar!” We understandably felt a bit euphoric as we reached the dock and platform where the boat was moored. We spent some time scanning from here as the broad view was perfect for scoping. It was a very productive morning, starting with good views of a beautiful Black-collared Hawk. We saw 50+ species from the platform and boat, including Sungrebe, 15 Hoatzin, Horned Screamers at close range, Limpkin, Ringed Kingfisher, Wattled Jacana, Purus Jacamar, Cobalt-winged Parakeets and Black-crowned Tityra. We had terrific views of two Giant Otters that were both curious and wary, approaching us to get a look, then getting back to feeding. We were able to see and photograph them eating fish and we got to listen to them vocalize. They were used to boats, but still cautious and we respected their space, feeling privileged to share the time we did. Returning for lunch and a rest, we then headed out on the Green Trail. We found a few antbirds but no active army ant swarm. Still it was nice to view Plain-winged Antshrike and Chestnut-tailed Antbirds. Screaming Piha were loud but out of sight until the always-patient Andrea got us a window for a view, phew! We saw Olivaceous Woodcreeper and White-necked Thrush, but as the forest birding was far more work than the open gardens, by late afternoon a few turned back. It was very pleasant to wander late in the afternoon, watching the macaws come into the huge tree alongside toucans, and watching for smaller birds by the river.

**Fri., Oct. 28**

## **Cocha Camungo Lake and Tower | Manú Wildlife Center Night Birding**

It was hard to imagine that we could ever top the clay lick and freshwater lake experiences we’d had, but we set out for a Cocha Camungo Lake and the canopy platform with high expectations. We boated down river to another landing spot. Starred Wood-Quail sang us a chorus as we started the walk into Cocha Camungo’s fabled Canopy Tower. This was not your average tower, this was a HIGH tower, several hundred feet up providing a bird’s eye view. Thankfully it’s sturdily built and anchored to a massive rainforest tree, with good railings and wide metal steps. A troop of Black-faced Spider Monkeys came through, swinging with their long arms and legs, and Linda and Lars had fabulous views

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from the stairs. At the top the action started with some impressive raptors, first a distant, but distinct, Black-and-white Hawk Eagle. Then, right in our tree, a Plumbeous Kite and a Double-toothed Kite on a nest, both in clear site of us. We had good looks at two species of trogons, Black-tailed and Blue-crowned. Horned Screammers flew below us, so impressive with their massive wingspans. We were able to scope Channel-billed and White-throated Toucans, and we watched several pairs of multiple macaw species fly by. Other highlights were seeing White-rumped Sirystes, Little Cuckoo, Bare-necked Fruitcrow, Variegated Flycatcher and Black-faced Dacnis. A Yellow-browed Tody-Flycatcher and White-shouldered Tanager stayed in close view for some time. Once again, we could have stayed much longer, but it was time to explore the lake. With sweat bees coming out and a hot sun rising, we descended and then walked the trail over to Cocha Camungo.

Mario and Nicanor were there waiting to paddle us around the shallow freshwater lake. White-lined Sac Wing Bats were roosting by the boat shed, and a young Speckled Caiman lurked by the dock. We sat in folding chairs on a wooden platform, and soon were out on the water, plying along the linear course of the lake. We got super views of Purus Jacamar, closer than the day before, and were delighted when an Orange-backed Troupial came up for a view, not far from a Dark-breasted Spinetail. We saw Red-capped Cardinal, Green Ibis, more Sungrebes (both swimming and close to the shore), and a Rufescent Tiger Heron. We scared up a Ladder-tailed Nightjar that then made several short flights looking for its next day-roost spot. We enjoyed views of 30 or more Hoatzin, Ruddy Pigeon and Greater Ani. Time passed quickly but by midday we were sun-quenched and ready to return to the lodge. But Mario had a last great bird to show us, pulling up on a beach with a big log jam, we walked out to find – Sunbittern, wow! We were content to stay near the lodge in the afternoon, finding Great Antshrike off the boardwalk, and a very young Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (probably just fledged) near the dining room. Several indulged in naps, and Holly had a grand time as it was sunny, photographing butterflies. Peg continued birding and found a group of White-bellied Parrots, new for the trip. She got the scope and put out the word and we had fun watching these colorful, small parrots investigate possible nest cavities. Pale-legged Horneros split the soundscape from time to time.



We'd been hearing owls every night, so tonight we made a concerted effort to find them. We met by the river overlook and did see an Undulated Tinamou come out on the path right at dusk. As it got darker, only a Crested Owl cooperated, and though we were able to follow it back to the staff housing area, it was high in a massive tree, and we couldn't locate it despite carrying on quite the conversation. Andrea tried her best, but the owls remained quiet on this night until we were all tucked in. They then carried on much of the night!

## **Sat. Oct. 29**      **Madre de Dios | Inambira Ferry | Puerto Maldonado**

Our last morning at the Manú Wildlife Center, so we did a bit of early birding on the grounds before boarding the boat to travel down the Madre de Dios River to the town of Boca Colorado.

This was a long trip, so we stopped on another beach where, among the beautiful, polished beach stones, we discovered fresh Jaguar tracks. What an amazing world we were surrounded by! So stunning were these tracks that we gulped all the more when we started to see such river margins torn up by dredging, first "artisanal" gold mining, which is allowed for native peoples, then large-scale dredging operations as we approached the docks and town. At Boca Colorado we said good-bye to Mario and Nicanor, two extraordinary rivermen that had helped us to see so much wildlife (and navigate mud, ladders, stairs and boat landings). Continuing our journey, and we took a ferry, and then a one-hour ride in local taxis across to the Inambari River where our bus was waiting. After our days in the pristine jungle, it was a bit of a shock to see the devastation of rampant, dredge-style gold mining between the river and the bustling frontier town of Puerto Maldonado. This part of the river is essentially lawless, and the encroachment is moving closer and closer to the national park each day. As we approached Maldonado, the dredge fields changed to cattle pastures, then gave way to the edge of the city. Overall, Maldonado seemed welcoming and orderly – hard to say where governance begins but the world's most biodiverse park, a corridor of life from a high pass in the Andes down to a major rainforest river depends on it. We were sad to end our exploration of such a global treasure. We took long, hot showers in our modern hotel, then walked a few blocks over to a delightful local restaurant for Pisco Sours and wonderful dishes of fresh fish or other entrees.





**Sun., Oct. 30**

### **Flight to Cusco for those on Machu Picchu Extension Tambopata Sandoval Lake Boat and Boardwalk**

Those heading on to the Machu Picchu extension had an early flight today. There were many new birds to see and Juan was there to meet them at the Cusco airport. Chuck Graham details their findings in a separate species list. The chance to see this amazing archeological site, to stay at the lovely Machu Picchu Pueblo and Pakaritampu Hotels with wonderful hummingbird feeders and gardens, and to bird a variety of habitats was a great way to continue this adventure. Of course, it was also fun to find Inca Wren, a signature species at the ruins.

Holly, Peg, Andrea and Gerold needed to return home, but they made the most of their last day, visiting Tambopata National Park, traveling first by boat, then walking a boardwalk trail and finally boating around Sandoval Lake. On the boardwalk they found a Zigzag Heron almost right from the start. A pair of Bat Falcons were feeding in a tall tree above the boardwalk, and a Collared Trogon posed well, as did a Dull-capped Attila. Lago Sandoval was much larger than either lake we visited before, demanding more time to paddle across to get to the bird-rich shoreline. There were other boats here, all hoping for sightings of Giant Otter which did not show. We did see some great birds though, including Gray-cowled Wood-Rail and another Sunbittern. We got good views of the smaller, Red-bellied Macaws, and in groves of elegant palms found Long-billed Woodcreeper.

On this evening we elected to have a light supper at the hotel and then tally our list while enjoying some other pisco drinks. We'd seen so much over the last two weeks; we were beyond satisfied. This evening was a chance to take that all in, feel relaxed and savor our memories.

### **Mon. Oct. 31 Parrot Lick near Puerto Maldonado | Departures**

We had a later flight, which allowed for one more excursion! Crazy birders that we are, we set off at the first light, motoring back up the river to check out a small, active clay lick. Leaving the city lights behind, we got into position with some other boats. Viewing from the water meant we had to keep the motor going. Lesser Swallow-tailed Swifts flew by and ashore, a Scaled Pigeon, not yet seen on our trip,



teed up for views. The main species here were Dusky-headed Parrots and Chestnut-fronted Macaws. We also got good views of Chestnut-eared Aracari coming and going and a good number of Red-capped Cardinals feeding in shrubs not far from the dock. We'd taken a taxi to the boat put in, so on the way back we had them drop us at the Plaza de Armas in Puerto Maldonado. Our past trip had seen Saffron Finches here and, right on cue, we found them, the final species of our grand adventure!

*Photo Credits: Red-and-green Macaws (NJ Stock), Group Photo (Peg Abbott - PA), Red-legged Cormorant (PA), Pucasana Village (PA), Villa Marshes Birding (PA), Inca Tern (Holly Greening & Gerold Morrison), Torrent Ducks (PA), Neotropical River Otter (PA), Chuck (PA), Pucusana (PA), Lake Huacarpay (PA), Cock-of-the-rock display (PA), Birding just before Ajacanaco Pass (PA), COR Lodge Birding (PA), Golden Tanager (NJ Stock), COR Sign (PA), Roadside Birding (PA), White-eyed Parakeet (Holly Greening & Gerold Morrison), Group Photo (PA), Wayquecha Bromeliads (PA), Wayquecha Orchids (PA), Hilmar-Andrea-Juan (PA), Andes Group Birding on the Road (PA), Birders at viewpoint (PA), Pico de Hoz lunch (PA), Magpie Tanager (NJ Stock), Hoatzin (NJ Stock), Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth (NJ Stock), Squirrel Monkey (Holly Greening & Gerold Morrison), Manu Scoping Birds (PA), Painted Houses (PA), Inkamazonia Garden Sign (PA), Rufous-crested Coquette (Holly Greening & Gerold Morrison), Paradise Tanager (NJ Stock), Inkamazonia guides with staff (PA), On the river! (PA), Manu Learning Center Deck (PA), Parrots on Salt Lick (Holly Greening & Gerold Morrison), Macaws on Salt Lick (Holly Greening & Gerold Morrison), Alto de Dos River Sunrise (PA), Boating downstream (PA), Holly at Manu Learning Center (PA), Landing at Manu Learning Center (PA), Lunch (PA), Blue-and-yellow Macaw (NJ Stock), Heliconia Flower (PA), Sapphire-spangled Emerald (NJ Stock), Yellow-tufted Woodpecker (NJ Stock), Macaw Lick Viewing Area (PA), Cocha Blanco Platform Boat (PA), Holly & Andrea on the Cocha Camungo Tower (PA), Rob-Lars-Andrea (PA), Manu Wildlife Center Cabins (PA), Ladder-tailed Nightjar (Holly Greening & Gerold Morrison), Blue-crowned Trogon (Holly Greening & Gerold Morrison), Black-faced Spider Monkeys (NJ Stock), Luggage Loading (PA), Madre de Dios riverboat (PA), Jaguar tracks (PA), Crested Owl (NJ Stock), Cocha Sandoval boat ride (PA), Madre de Dios sunset (PA), Puerto Maldonado sign (PA)*