

ITINERARY  
**JEWELS OF ECUADOR:  
HUMMERS, TANAGERS, & ANTPITTAS**  
*October 27 – November 13, 2023*



*The Ecuadorian Hillstar is a near-endemic found in the high paramos of Ecuador.  
Photograph by participant Bill Byers.*

*We include here information for those interested in the 2023 Field Guides Jewels of Ecuador: Hummers, Tanagers, & Antpittas tour:*

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

*These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:*

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour.

**T**his tour visits the most exciting—and some of the most beautiful—habitats montane Ecuador has to offer. Centered around the lush, forest-cloaked slopes of the Andes, the world's stronghold for tanagers, hummingbirds, and antpittas, our itinerary visits both outer slopes of Ecuador's two north-south-running cordillera, from paramo and tree line down to the rich upper tropical zone along the eastern base of the Andes and the tropical choco lowlands in the northwest. We fly south to include fabulous Podocarpus National Park, itself spanning habitats from tree line to the upper tropical zone; El

Cajas National Park in the paramo near Cuenca; and a nice sampling of the geographically restricted Tumbesian avifauna in the arid intermontane valleys near Loja.

Throughout tiny Ecuador, every year brings new developments in the ecotourism infrastructure, from new preserves and lodges to new “eco-trails” and hummingbird pavilions. Some places boast *comederos*, or earthworm feeders for antpittas! Our itinerary is flexible enough to incorporate the best of these new developments as they arise. Taken together, they reflect an exciting transition to a more ecotourism-based economy that contributes to improved conservation and awareness of the country’s incredible biodiversity.

We’ll begin our birding with a day at beautiful Yanacocha Reserve, exploring the humid temperate forest on the slopes of Volcan Pichincha above Quito, where an old Inca canal still collects a portion of the city’s drinking water. With luck we could start with such dazzlers as Sapphire-vented and Golden-breasted puff legs, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Great Sapphirewing, and even Sword-billed Hummingbird. Not to mention a bunch of mountain-tanagers, including Scarlet-bellied and the scarce Black-chested. And we could see *Grallaria quitensis*, the Tawny Antpitta, named for its occurrence near Quito.



One of 14 species of antpittas we might see on this tour, the Chestnut-crowned Antpitta is said to be one of the easiest to observe, and it may be one of the prettiest. This individual was seen near San Isidro. Photograph by participant Roy Giles.

Then we’ll fly south (past some towering snow-capped volcanoes) to the arid Catamayo valley, where we’ll seek such Tumbesian specialties as Pacific Parrotlet, Peruvian Pygmy-Owl, Amazilia (Loja) Hummingbird, Collared and Chapman’s antshrikes, Elegant Crescentchest, Superciliated Wren, Tumbes Sparrow, and Bay-crowned Brush-Finch in a shrub-desert at 5000 to 6500 feet (1500-2000 m). Based in Loja, we’ll have a day-and-a-half to bird the vast stretch of temperate Podocarpus National Park, only thirty minutes from our hotel. Podocarpus offers superb birding from dramatically beautiful trails (with Rufous, Undulated, and Chestnut-naped antpittas and the recently described Chusquea Tapaculo) to the forested entrance road—which over the last few years has offered up such goodies as Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucans duetting and bill-clapping, mixed-species flocks with sun-bathing Red-hooded Tanagers, and Spectacled Bears feeding on fruits in the canopy below!

Seven thousand feet (2100 m) down the mountain, contiguous with these forested slopes, lies the Rio Bombuscaro entrance to the park, at the eastern base of the Andes near Zamora. We’ll spend two nights in a fabulous new lodge located very close to the park, our base for birding the high-diversity upper tropical zone along one of the most scenic trails in the country. Generally scarce species that are regular here range from Ecuadorian Piedtail, Black-streaked Puffbird, Lanceolated Monklet, Equatorial Graytail, and the recently described Foothill Elaenia, to such fancies as Coppery-chested Jacamar, Amazonian Umbrellabird, and the near-endemic White-necked Parakeet. It is this foothill zone, along with the lower subtropical elevations we’ll bird along the old Loja/Zamora road, that supports the greatest diversity of colorful *Tangara* tanagers, which often occur in large mixed-species flocks absolutely electrifying to encounter.

Before leaving Loja Province we hope to have seen, among many other birds, Bearded Guan, Little (Flame-throated) Sunangel, Glowing Puffleg, Wire-crested Thorntail, Violet-fronted Brilliant, Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan, Red-headed Barbet, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Ash-browed Spinetail, Montane Foliage-gleaner, White-browed Spinetail, Mouse-colored Thistletail, Lined Antshrike, Foothill Antwren, two or three species of antpittas, Ocellated Tapaculo (this big,



colorful, noisy tapaculo can change one's entire attitude toward tapaculos!), Ash-colored Tapaculo, Andean Cock-of-the-rock, Barred Fruiteater, Lemon-browed Flycatcher, Ecuadorian Tyrannulet, Agile Tit-Tyrant, Rufous and Plain-tailed wrens, (Andean) Slaty Thrush, Plumbeous-backed Thrush, Pale-naped Brush-Finch, Golden-collared Honeycreeper, and oodles of glittering tanagers, from Grass-green and Golden-crowned to Vermilion, Orange-eared, Blue-browed, Golden-eared, Golden, and Paradise.

We'll then drive north to Cuenca where magnificent El Cajas National Park awaits, characterized by paramo grassland studded with big *Polylepis* groves and sparkling Andean lakes. Such is the habitat of the fabulous Giant Conebill and the Tit-like Dacnis, as well as a very local endemic hummer, the Violet-throated Metaltail, and another almost-endemic, the striking Ecuadorian Hillstar. It's a land of breathtaking scenery where, at any moment, a Carunculated Caracara or a magnificent Andean Condor could sail overhead.



*The wonderful Choco Toucan is found in the lowland "Choco" region of Ecuador and Colombia. We'll watch for these large, colorful birds near Mindo. Photograph by participant Justin Khalifa.*

Then we'll fly back to Quito and head across the eastern cordillera, transecting arid canyons, the high temperate shrub zone, and boggy paramo grassland and *Polylepis* at Papallacta Pass. A sunny morning would almost guarantee a look at Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, and it would improve our chances for such high-elevation specialties as Viridian Metaltail, Andean Tit-Spinetail, White-chinned Thistletail, Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant, and Black-backed Bush-Tanager. After a lunch stop at Guango, where Long-tailed Sylph, Tourmaline Sunangel, and Sword-billed Hummingbirds compete for our attention with high-elevation mixed-species flocks, we'll continue down the humid east slope to our beautifully situated forest lodge at San Isidro, our comfortable base for two-and-a-half days of birding mid-elevation forest. Recent highlights here have included point-blank looks at White-bellied, Slate-crowned, and Peruvian (!) antpittas, lovely Black-billed Mountain-Toucans, a Tyrannine Woodcreeper at eye level, the sudden appearance of a noisy nomadic flock of White-capped Tanagers, and unbelievable looks at what seems to be a new species of *Ciccaba* owl at high elevation here. The location, gracious hospitality, and delicious food at San Isidro make this an ideal place for our base.

Next we'll head back across Quito, bound for the rich west slope, crossing the equator (a couple of times) and transecting the western cordillera, where we'll focus on birding the subtropical zone (around 7700-5000 feet; 2400-1500 m) and continue down to the upper tropics near Mindo at about 4000 feet (1200 m), our base for three days of dynamite birding. This is the Choco, the land of the Toucan Barbet and the Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, as well as such scarce and alluring specialties as Dark-backed Wood-Quail, Tanager Finch, Club-winged Manakin, Scaled Fruiteater, Barred Puffbird, Giant, Yellow-breasted, and Moustached antpittas, Yellow-collared Chlorophonia, Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Empress Brilliant, and Velvet-purple Coronet. We plan a very early start one morning in order to visit some incredibly birdy islands of remnant lowland rainforest (including two new bird sanctuaries) that shelter such specialties as Dusky Pigeon, Blue-tailed Trogon, Choco Toucan, Collared (Pale-mandibled) Aracari, Guayaquil

Woodpecker, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Blue-whiskered, Rufous-throated, Scarlet-browed, Moss-backed, and Ochre-breasted tanagers, as well as hordes of more widespread (Panama-type) species. A number of forms found west of the Andes are quite distinctive from their relatives east of the Andes, and many of these are treated as full species in the *Birds of Ecuador*. We also plan an early departure to visit an active lek of the bright-red, western form of Andean Cock-of-the-rock.

Beyond all the specialties mentioned above, the real showstoppers on this tour tend to be the almost constant procession of “tanagers” and hummingbirds (more than 60 species of each are regularly recorded!), a truly dazzling array of gemlike beauties, some very scarce or threatened. But we will not ignore the tougher, rough-hewn, and less colorful species. In fact, the wonderful array of Ecuadorian antpittas and tapaculos—to see most of which requires good sound recordings and an in-depth knowledge of where and how to go about it—is one of the foremost reasons for coming to Ecuador with us. For some, they will constitute the highlights of the trip.

Although on such a time-restricted survey we'll no doubt miss many of the species made possible by our rich transect of the Andes, we can assure you of a tremendous birding adventure and superb looks at an incredible diversity of birds. *We urge you to come a day early*—not only to rest up (the flights from the US arrive late) and start adjusting to the elevation (9000 feet), but because Quito's evening fogs sometimes cause international flights to be diverted to Guayaquil and redirected to Quito the following morning—too late for our early departure to Yanacocha. For those interested in shopping in Ecuador, there are numerous good shops in Quito. There will be very little opportunity to shop during the tour itself.

So rich is the birdlife of Ecuador that we will want to maximize our time in the field, prioritizing what we consider Ecuador's long suits—its long list of hummingbirds, tanagers, antpittas, and tapaculos. We plan to orchestrate our activities to maximize our chances of finding and seeing the specialties of Ecuador. This does *not* mean that there is no time for the more common and widespread species, only that we would divert your attention from a Blue-gray Tanager in order to see a Rufous-throated Tanager. In fact, during our survey of the habitats of Ecuador, we will have excellent views of far more common species than of rarities or specialties.

**All participants will be required to confirm they will have completed a full COVID vaccination course at least two weeks prior to the tour (which includes a booster for those eligible to have one).** Note too, that many travel destinations may still require proof of vaccination for entry to bypass testing delays or quarantine, and that entry requirements for a destination can change at any time. Proof of a booster shot, too, may be a requirement for some travel destinations.

*We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.*

## Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS & WALKING:** Good amounts of walking (up to 3 miles per day) along roadsides and trails, some of which will be on even ground, but many of which will be somewhat steep, narrow, uneven, and muddy, with obstacles such as rocks or tree roots. We walk short, somewhat challenging trails almost every other day. The trail to the Andean Cock-of-the-rock lek is steep, and because we need to be inside a blind before dawn, we descend a half-mile with flashlight in the dark. Walking sticks can be useful.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** We drive for long periods several times on this tour. Participants should be able to step up (and step down) 10-12 inches to get into and out of our vehicles, whether small buses, vans, 4x4 Land Rover-style vehicles, or jeeps. Several roads are rough, and although we drive slowly, there is still a fair bit of bouncing around. We will have some periods of standing and waiting for birds to appear.
- **PACE:** After breakfast (a few as early as 4:30 a.m., usually at 5:00-5:30 a.m.), we bird until lunch time. We sometimes pack a picnic lunch, to extend our time in the field. Normally, weather permitting, we bird after lunch or continue traveling to our next destination. On occasion, we may take a siesta of several hours after lunch.
- **WEATHER:** Temperatures will range from the low 50s at night in higher elevations to the 80s F in lower elevations during the day. Rain showers are likely, but weather is highly variable, even in short periods of time.
- **ELEVATION:** We reach elevations of up to 14000 feet on this tour, and will be on some moderately difficult trails from 6000 to 9000 feet. We will be going slowly at these elevations.

- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Participants should be prepared to make comfort stops in nature, as there are simply no other options (away from our lodgings) on many sections of this tour's route.
- **OPTING OUT:** Where we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, participants can opt to sit out a day or sometimes a half-day. This will not be possible on days when we are changing locations. It may also be possible to opt out of birding some of the more challenging trails, and instead bird near the bus or our lodge.

If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide.

## About the Birding Areas



**Yanacocha**—Around the northern slope of Volcan Pichincha, at an elevation of 10,000-11,500 feet (3000-3500 m), lies a beautiful treeline forest known as Yanacocha. Protecting one of the sources of Quito's drinking water—some of which still runs through an ancient Inca canal—in 2001 this humid forest was converted to a Jocotoco Foundation Reserve. It offers temperate-forest birding easily accessible from Quito, as well as the possibility of a few highly sought rarities. With a wonderful variety of blossoms throughout the year—and with well-maintained *bebederos* along the trail—Yanacocha is a veritable hummingbird haven, where one gets excellent views of a nice variety of species. Possibilities include such dazzlers as Mountain Velvetbreast, Great Sapphirewing, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Sapphire-vented Puffleg, Golden-breasted Puffleg, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, and the amazing Sword-billed Hummingbird. Andean Pygmy-Owl inhabits the slopes in low density, as do Bar-bellied Woodpecker, Tyrannine Woodcreeper, White-browed Spinetail, Rufous and Tawny antpittas, Blackish Tapaculo, Streak-throated and Smoky bush-tyrants, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, and Barred Fruiteater. Mixed-species flocks may contain Pearled Treerunner,

Streaked Tuftedcheek, Rufous Wren, Blue-backed Conebill, Superciliaried Hemispingus, Glossy and Masked flowerpiercers, Golden-crowned Tanager, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager, and the scarce Black-chested Mountain-Tanager.

**Antisana Ecological Reserve**—Volcan Antisana is one of the spectacular snow-capped peaks of Ecuador's eastern cordillera, just 50 kms east of Quito. Rising to almost 19,000 feet (5,758m), the volcano is a spectacular backdrop (on a clear day) to the tracts of land recently acquired by the Jocotoco Foundation and the World Land Trust to secure the future of the existing Antisana Ecological Reserve and expand its boundary. We will have only a few hours to visit the first part of the 120,000-hectare (297,000-acre) reserve, but it is an area that most of you probably have not visited. It can be spectacular, and we should see a few species otherwise not possible on this trip, with the more exciting targets including Andean Condor (probably the best place in Ecuador for this species), Aplomado Falcon, the rare-in-Ecuador Andean (Black-faced) Ibis, and Ecuadorian (Chimborazo) Hillstar. More regular high-elevation species include Carunculated Caracara, Andean Lapwing, Andean Gull, Black-winged Ground-Dove, Chestnut-winged and Stout-billed cinclodes, Many-striped Canastero, Tawny Antpitta, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, Plain-capped Ground-Tyrant (nominat), Paramo Pipit, and the sneaky Brazilian Rabbit.



**The arid intermontane valleys of the south**—The rain-shadow valleys of the Rio Catamayo (where we fly into Loja) and the Rio Leon (between Loja and Cuenca) support a semi-desert shrub formation characteristic of arid southwestern Ecuador. We'll spend most of one day birding these (verdant, we hope) slopes and *quebradas*. Bird possibilities include Pacific Parrotlet, Peruvian Pygmy-Owl, the *alticola* race of Amazilia Hummingbird (sometimes split as Loja Hummingbird), Purple-collared Woodstar, Elegant Crescentchest, Collared and Chapman's antshrikes, Tawny-crowned Pygmy-Tyrant, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet (of the race *tumbezana*), Fasciated and Superciliated wrens, Long-tailed Mockingbird, (Andean) Slaty Thrush, Plumbeous-backed Thrush, Chiguanco Thrush, Golden Grosbeak, Saffron Finch, Tumbes Sparrow, Bay-crowned Brush-Finch, Collared Warbling-Finch, Drab Seedeater, Dull-colored Grassquit, Peruvian Meadowlark, and—with good rains—the erratic Black-and-white Tanager.



Near Loja, we'll look for the beautiful Golden-Crowned Tanager and other highland species.  
Photograph by participants David and Judy Smith.

**Podocarpus National Park and Loja-Zamora**—Just twenty minutes from Loja is an outstanding, large preserve of montane cloud forest known by the generic name of an ancient tree that occurs within the park. This is the Cajanuma entrance to Podocarpus National Park. Were there no birds present at all—as it sometimes appears during the periods between encounters with mixed-species flocks—just to walk a trail or even the seldom-used, entrance road through this glorious, moss-festooned forest, accented here and there with intense-red terrestrial bromeliads and blossoming orchids, would be well worth our while. But there are intriguing, if difficult, birds to seek, including such specialties as Tawny-breasted Tinamou, Bearded Guan, and Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan. Hooded, Lacrimose, and Scarlet-bellied mountain-tanagers are fairly common, sometimes accompanied by stunning Golden-crowned or Grass-green tanagers, along with Gray-hooded Bush-Tanagers, Black-headed and Black-capped hemispinguses, as well as Black-capped Tyrannulet, Rufous Wren, and Pale-naped Brush-Finches. A group of Red-hooded Tanagers might surprise us, as might an Undulated Antpitta or even a Spectacled Bear, South America's only bear and a rarity of these forested slopes. We'll make a special effort for Undulated and Chestnut-naped antpittas here, one of the best places to see these species well. And the mixed-species flocks are full of a delightful variety of temperate insectivorous and frugivorous birds, as well as numerous hummers—Rainbow and Buff-winged starfrontlets, Little ("Flame-throated") and Purple-throated sunangels, Shining Sunbeam, and the shimmering Glowing Puffleg.

And for a taste of upper tropical and subtropical birding on the east slope of southern Ecuador, we'll spend some time right on our lodge grounds near Zamora and along the wonderful old Loja-Zamora road. The city of Loja is in a dry intermontane valley at 6800 feet (2070 m), still in the Pacific drainage. The road to Zamora climbs eastward from Loja, cresting the eastern Andes at a rather low 9000 feet (2700 m) pass and winding down through still relatively undisturbed temperate and subtropical forest. Middle-elevation subtropical forest lines much of the road. On a cloudy day—especially with mist—this forest can teem with activity, from Long-tailed Sylphs and Andean Cocks-of-the-rock feeding at the

roadside to mixed flocks of brilliant tanagers, with as many as twenty species possible (including Yellow-throated, Rufous-crested, Saffron-crowned, Flame-faced, Blue-necked, Blue-browed, Golden, Golden-eared, Orange-eared, Vermilion, and Blue-winged Mountain-). And there's always a chance we'll encounter a noisy flock of wide-ranging White-capped Tanagers, an anomalous species that behaves more like a jay or a blackbird than a tanager! We'll plan to spend some time in the section of forest near 5000 feet, where mixed flocks could include numerous tanagers as well as such rarities as Equatorial Graytail and Fulvous-breasted Flatbill. One of our main targets in the lower subtropical/upper tropical forest zone is the lovely White-necked Parakeet, an Ecuadorian near-endemic known from only four specimens until 1981 when it was rediscovered above Zamora. It has now been found in the Cordillera del Condor on the Peruvian side of the border as well.

By staying for two nights in a wonderful lodge near Zamora, we'll have most of a day for birding the Rio Bombuscaro entrance to Podocarpus Park, in the heart of the upper tropical zone at the eastern base of the Andes. This overwhelmingly beautiful, forested zone is full of rushing water and a terrific diversity of birds, many of them genuinely scarce. Foothill specialties we've seen here on past tours include Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Sickie-winged Guan, White-tipped Sickiebill, Ecuadorian Piedtail, Wire-crested Thorntail, Violet-fronted and Black-throated brilliants, Brown Violetear, Andean Motmot, Coppery-chested Jacamar, Black-streaked Puffbird, Lanceolated Monklet, Chestnut-tipped Toucanet, Equatorial Graytail, Ash-browed Spinetail, Montane Foliage-gleaner, Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper, Black-billed Treehunter, Olive-backed Woodcreeper, Foothill and Yellow-breasted antwrens, Scale-backed and Blackish antbirds, Plain-backed Antpitta (usually heard only), White-crowned Tapaculo, Ecuadorian Tyrannulet, Orange-crested and Lemon-browed flycatchers, Foothill Elaenia (a little *Myiopagis* flycatcher that was officially described after the Ecuador text went to press), Amazonian Umbrellabird, Andean Cock-of-the-rock, Blue-rumped Manakin (rare), White-crowned Manakin, Slaty-capped Shrike-Vireo, Orange-billed Sparrow, Olive Finch, and dozens of glittering tanagers, including Blue-naped Chlorophonia, Orange-eared, Paradise, Golden, Golden-eared, Yellow-bellied, Spotted, and Blue-necked. The well-designed trails climb gradually upriver through absolutely glorious forest.



*The Carunculated Caracara is one of the raptors we'll be looking for when we visit the high elevations of El Cajas National Park. Photograph by guide Mitch Lysinger.*

**El Cajas National Park**—A short distance north of Cuenca is beautiful Parque Nacional El Cajas. Preserving high-temperate forest and *Polylepis* around sparkling Andean lakes, Cajas affords an opportunity to explore nearby treeline forest and paramo for several specialties. Foremost among them are two Ecuadorian hummingbirds of restricted range, the dazzling Ecuadorian Hillstar (which feeds on orange-blossoming *Chuquiragua* in the paramos of Ecuador) and one of the most geographically restricted endemics of Ecuador, the Violet-throated Metaltail (found only in the high temperate and paramo scrub of the Cajas Plateau). Two other fabulous hummers at treeline here are Rainbow Starfrontlet (at the northern extent of its range) and Purple-throated Sunangel, both regular along with a host of other hummers, including



Great Sapphirewing, Mountain Velvetbreast, Shining Sunbeam, and Black-tailed Trainbearer. A restricted furnariid specialty, the Line-cheeked Spinetail, occurs in the high temperate zone near the park entrance, and the marshy margins of Laguna Llaviuco are home to a population of Virginia Rail (*aequatorialis*) that is considered a full species, Ecuadorian Rail, by many. In the open paramo and *Polylepis* above treeline occur a number of high-elevation specialties, including Blue-mantled Thornbill, Stout-billed Cinclodes, Mouse-colored Thistletail, Many-striped Canastero, Tawny Antpitta, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Plain-capped Ground-Tyrant, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, Giant Conebill, and Tit-like Dacnis (here very near its northernmost outpost). With a little sunny weather (and some luck) we could also see Carunculated Caracara, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Variable Hawk, Aplomado Falcon, and Andean Condor.

**Papallacta Pass to Guango**—As one heads east out of Quito, the main road to the Oriente climbs through shrubby canyons and slopes of the intermontane valley—relatively arid, as they are in the rain shadow of both eastern and western cordilleras. The Scrub Tanager, a denizen of yards and orchards in these intermontane valleys, is more easily found near Tumbaco than elsewhere on our route; we plan a short birding time in the car park of our hotel before we head to the east.

Our next stop will likely be in a section of cultivated fields and natural temperate shrub with lots of flowers, where we may want to check for hummers or for Blue-and-yellow Tanager. Watch, too, for Andean Condors; they frequent the drier intermontane slope of the eastern Andes, where flight conditions are superior, especially during rainy periods.

Continuing through increasingly natural habitat, the road crosses the eastern cordillera at Papallacta Pass—at 13,000 feet (4000 m)—where it runs for a short distance through paramo at elevations well above 12,000 feet (3650 m), thence down the east slope into the lowlands. The wet grassland near the pass is especially fine, the bunch grass rank, and the landscape everywhere inflected with *Puya* bloom stalks. The many scattered marshes support a small population of Noble Snipe, and the highest slopes—covered with colorful lichens and cushion plants—are home to the Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, here at the northern extent of its lofty range. Sizable, if shrinking, stands of *Polylepis* still grace the more sheltered slopes and flats near the pass and harbor the likes of Viridian Metaltail, Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant, Paramo Tapaculo, Andean Tit-Spinetail, White-chinned Thistletail, Many-striped Canastero, Red-crested Cotinga, Pale-naped Brush-Finch, and Black-backed Bush-Tanager.



*Seedsnipes are a group of shorebirds that have adapted to feeding on vegetation. The Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe is the largest in this group, and Papallacta Pass is one of the most northerly places that this species can be found.*

*Photograph by guide Willy Perez.*

Should the weather be bad at Papallacta Pass, we may choose to bird instead at Cayambe-Coca National Park to the east, above Papallacta town. The park preserves great expanses of lovely treeline forest and paramo, where mixed



flocks can include Black-backed Bush-Tanager, Buff-breasted and Black-chested mountain-tanagers, and even the scarce Masked Mountain-Tanager. Watch too for Viridian Metaltail and Shining Sunbeam sitting atop roadside shrubs.

On our way down the east slope toward Baeza and San Isidro, we plan a birding (and lunch) stop at Guango, around 8900 feet (2700 m). Well-established hummingbird feeders just outside the dining room attract fabulous Sword-billed Hummingbirds, lots of Tourmaline Sunangels, Long-tailed Sylph, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, White-bellied Woodstar, an occasional Gorgeted Woodstar, and, rarely, a Mountain Avocetbill, among others. If the weather's right, in the temperate forest bordering the pasture here we could encounter Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan, a rare Dusky Piha, Pearled Treerunner, Turquoise Jay, Black-capped and Black-eared hemispinguses, Plushcap, Slaty Brush-Finch, and Mountain (Golden-shouldered) Cacique. It was here, too, that we saw a Mountain Tapir on one trip.

**Cordillera de Guacamayos and Sumaco National Park**—The Cordillera de Guacamayos and our cabins at San Isidro are situated *right in* the subtropical forest zone, making them one of the most exciting sites we'll visit on the tour. "Guacamayo Ridge" is a little-disturbed ridge reaching slightly above 7000 feet (2100 m) at its highest and affording beautiful vistas. A considerable portion of forest along the ridge and to the east has recently been declared a part of Sumaco National Park. It still supports a dense cover of subtropical cloud forest, concealing many fabulous species of birds, and the San Isidro reserve is part of a vast forest corridor that connects snow-capped Volcan Antisana, in the high paramo near Papallacta Pass, with Volcan Sumaco, a scenic, outlying cone that rises above the Andean foothills well to the east. By staying at San Isidro, west of the town of Cosanga, we will be within easy access of numerous species that are active early and late but are difficult and retiring during midday—species such as Wattled Guan, Slate-crowned and White-bellied antpittas, Pale-eyed and Glossy-black thrushes, and Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant. Crested and Golden-headed quetzals are both possible, sometimes feeding on fruits right on the grounds, and a covered hummingbird pavilion ensures good looks at hummers, usually including Bronzy Inca, even in the rain. Dawn brings lots of insectivores to the driveway, where they gorge themselves on moths attracted to the light poles overnight. Lunch at the lodge could be interrupted by a noisy band of nomadic White-capped Tanagers, and dinner could be interrupted by the discovery of the "San Isidro Owl" sitting on a pole along the driveway. Dusk may find us in search of an Andean Potoo or a Swallow-tailed or Lyre-tailed Nightjar. Along the ridge road—which skirts the distant flanks of the disjunct Volcan Sumaco and continues down into the foothills—or on one of several trails we could see Black-and-chestnut Eagle, Red-billed, Speckle-faced, and Scaly-naped parrots, Andean Motmot, Black-billed Mountain-Toucan (the subtropical, east-slope representative of the striking genus *Andigena*), Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Spotted Barbtail, Flammulated, Striped, and Black-billed treehunters, Montane Foliage-gleaner, Olive-backed and Montane woodcreepers, Streak-headed Antbird, Ash-colored, Long-tailed, Spillmann's, and Blackish tapaculos, Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher, Rufous-breasted, Handsome, and Flavescent flycatchers, Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant, Black-chested (rare) and Green-and-black fruiteaters, Andean Solitaire, Chestnut-bellied Thrush, Black-billed Peppershrike, Scarlet-rumped (Subtropical) and Mountain caciques, many species of tanagers (including such rarities as Vermilion and Blue-browed), and some interesting mixed-species flocks with such tantalizing, if outrageous, possibilities as Greater Scythebill and White-faced Nunbird. The spectacular Barred Antthrush, the recently rediscovered Bicolored Antvireo, and even the little-known Peruvian Antpitta are all rare possibilities here.

**Tandayapa-Mindo area**—These fabulous birding areas are located west of Quito along roads that run from Quito to Mindo (and beyond) via the *poblados* of Nanegalito and Tandayapa. They have long been favorites of birders since they wind down from well over 10,000 feet (3050 m) through the lush temperate and subtropical west slope of the western cordillera, so rich in Ecuadorian bird life. The old Nono-Mindo road, from Tandayapa to the ridgetop at 7700 feet (2350 m), down to the Mindo entrance road at 5600 feet (1700 m), receives very little traffic, making it ideal for birders in search of such west-slope specialties as Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Toucan Barbet, Spillmann's and Narino tapaculos, Dusky Chlorospingus, and the rare and local Tanager Finch. The hummingbird feeders in private reserves along here can be buzzing with dozens of hummers, from Buff-tailed Coronet and Collared Inca to Gorgeted Sunangel, Fawn-breasted and the scarce Empress brilliants, Tawny-bellied Hermit, Booted Racket-tail, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Violet-tailed Sylph, White-tailed Hillstar, Western Emerald, and Purple-throated Woodstar. Watch for White-winged Brush-Finches at the forest edges.

By birding our way down the old road from the Tandayapa Ridge to Mindo, we'll encounter a number of additional birds. Possibilities include Red-billed Parrot, Crimson-mantled and Powerful woodpeckers, Rufous Spinetail, Striped and Streak-capped treehunters, Ashy-headed Tyrannulet, Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager (west slope only), and the scarce Beautiful Jay (also confined to the west slope). Bright sunny weather can cause the forest to go quiet, but it brings out such raptors as Barred Hawk and Black-and-chestnut Eagle.



*The beautiful Powerful Woodpecker is a large bird found in the mature forests of the northern Andes. Though not considered rare, these birds are not often seen, but we have a good chance to find a pair on the road to Mindo.*

*Photograph by participant Ken Heffernan.*

Staying near Mindo for three nights allows us to bird an impressive diversity of nearby habitats. We'll have two days in the very rich lower subtropics and upper tropical zone, where we'll spend our time looking for and birding mixed flocks, feeders, and flowering trees. Plumbeous Forest-Falcon, Cloud-forest Pygmy-Owl, Colombian Screech-Owl, White-whiskered Hermit, Crowned Woodnymph, Green-crowned Brilliant, Velvet-purple Coronet, Wedge-billed Hummingbird, Golden-headed and Crested quetzals, Masked Trogon, Rufous and Broad-billed motmots, Choco and Black-mandibled (Chestnut-mandibled) toucans, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Toucan Barbet, Red-faced Spinetail, Lineated and Buff-fronted foliage-gleaners, Strong-billed and Spotted woodcreepers, Ochre-breasted and Scaled antpittas, Ornate Flycatcher, Cinnamon Becard, Scaled Fruiteater, Golden-winged Manakin, Ecuadorian Thrush, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Yellow-collared Chlorophonia, Glistening-green, Golden-naped, and Metallic-green tanagers, Tricolored Brush-Finch, and Black-winged Saltator are among the many birds we've seen right in the Mindo-Milpe area (around 4000 feet). We'll visit the newly enlarged Milpe Bird Sanctuary, maybe half an hour away, where the mossy forest supports such specialties as Barred Puffbird, Striped Woodhaunter (of the race *assimilis*), Pacific Tuftedcheek, Golden-bellied Warbler (race *chlorophrys*, with quite a distinctive song; often treated as a full species, Choco Warbler, including in THE BIRDS OF ECUADOR), Moss-backed and Rufous-throated tanagers, and a display lek of the fabulous Club-winged Manakin.

Another nearby lek, where male Andean Cocks-of-the-rock (red, west of the Andes) gather almost daily to display, promises another marvelous show for those able to climb down to the blind before dawn. Yes, we'll go early to what has become one of Ecuador's most popular birding destinations: Refugio Paz de las Aves, the reserve of "the Antpitta Whisperer." On our way back from the blind at the lek (assuming good weather), we'll hope to see Dark-backed Wood-Quail and as many as four species of antpittas—Ochre-breasted, Yellow-breasted, Moustached, and Giant—all of which have been habituated to coming out for earthworms offered by Angel and (his brother) Rodrigo Paz! If it's not been too rainy and the antpittas are responding, it's quite a show to behold. Even if the antpittas are otherwise occupied, there are sure to be some goodies at the Paz fruit feeders: such knockouts as Toucan Barbet, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, and Blue-winged and Black-chinned mountain-tanagers. With luck we could see a shy Sickle-winged Guan or White-throated Quail-Dove, a pair of Olivaceous Pihas, an Orange-breasted Fruiteater, or even the rare and aberrant White-faced Nunbird. Plus, Angel usually has a surprise or two in store. One year it was an Ocellated Tapaculo that he coaxed into view!

**Choco lowlands**—The great rainforest that once cloaked all of the lowlands and foothills of northwestern Ecuador and western Colombia—known as the Choco (with an accent on the final "o")—is one of the wettest rainforests in the world.



Sadly, most of the easily accessible lowland forest in western Ecuador has been cleared or converted to oil palm plantations, leaving but patches here and there. Birding these patches is a bit like birding an island, albeit a very rich island, with an avifauna primarily of Middle American (more specifically, Panamanian) affinities, but with some South American specialties tossed in. We plan to spend one day sampling the riches of such patches of lowland tropical forest, one of which is now protected as the Rio Silanche Bird Sanctuary, which offers a sturdy canopy tower and a network of forest trails. Over the years we've had good luck with some of the South American specialties here: Dusky Pigeon, Bronze-winged and Rose-faced parrots, Purple-chested Hummingbird, Blue-tailed (Choco) Trogon, Collared (Pale-mandibled) Aracari, Guayaquil Woodpecker, Ochre-breasted, Blue-whiskered, Scarlet-browed, and Scarlet-and-white tanagers, as well as hordes of more widespread (Panama-type) species.



*At Refugio Paz de las Aves, we'll hope to see as many as four species of antpitta, including the tiny and adorable Ochre-breasted Antpitta. This pair was seen on a recent Field Guides tour. Photograph by participant Bill Byers.*

## Itinerary for Jewels of Ecuador: Hummers, Tanagers, & Antpittas

**Day 1, Fri, 27 Oct. Official arrival in Quito.** We often use the American Airlines dinner flight from Miami, but it is possible to arrange flights from other destinations as well, e.g., Atlanta, Houston, or Los Angeles. Upon arrival (usually between 9:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m.) our representative will meet you just outside the baggage claim and transfer you to our charming, historic hotel, some twenty minutes away in crisp-aired Puembo. If we do not book your flights, please be sure to notify us of your arrival and departure details so that we may arrange transfers for you.

In fact, ***we encourage you to come a day early to Quito.*** The late arrival of international flights from the US means that passengers often don't get to the hotel until between 10:30 p.m. and midnight. *This is before our planned 6:00 a.m. departure to Yanacocha for our first morning of birding.* Another consideration is that night fog in Quito sometimes causes flights to be diverted to Guayaquil, where passengers are given a comfortable hotel for the night and flown to Quito the following morning, usually arriving around 8:00 a.m. This could cause you to miss the first day of birding. Past participants strongly recommend a relaxing day in Quito to rest up and begin to adjust to the higher elevations of Andean Ecuador—ca. 9000 feet (2700 m) in Quito. If you would like to do some shopping in Ecuador (There is very little opportunity during the tour.), there are good shops in Quito. We can help you make arrangements for an English-speaking guide if you like, and we can help recommend a comfortable base for anyone arriving early, depending on what you'd like to do. And you would be ready for an early start on Day 2.

When you arrive in Quito, *watch for a sign with your name* as you exit Baggage Claim. You will be met and transferred by our representative to our hotel, where you'll check into a room in your name. If you are arriving tonight, *be sure to check for a message from your guide* with additional information you will need for tomorrow. There should be complimentary bottled drinking water in your room. Night in Puembo at the Hotel San Jose de Puembo.

**Day 2, Sat, 28 Oct. Yanacocha.** We'll start with a specially arranged early breakfast in the restaurant, hoping to depart for the day as soon as possible after breakfast. We'll take a box lunch with us to nearby Yanacocha. Our birding will be primarily on foot, walking along a road that narrows into a trail through lovely treeline forest around 10,000-11,500 feet (3000-3500 m). We'll be moving *slowly* at these high elevations, where the weather can vary from cloudy and cold to sunny and warm, so layer up and bring raingear (rubber boots are not necessary here but could be advisable if it is raining when you awaken). You'll also want water with you (to sip frequently), as one dehydrates easily at these high climes.

After our picnic lunch, we'll bird a bit on our way back to Quito, but we plan a fairly early close for the day; we should reach our hotel by 4:30 p.m. or so in order to ensure an early dinner and a good night's sleep. If you have a bill to pay (meals, phone calls, minibars), please pay it tonight so that we can get away quickly tomorrow morning. If you plan to store anything at the hotel, please contact a porter and collect your own claim check from him to facilitate retrieving this luggage when you next want it. Night in Puenbo at the Hotel San Jose de Puenbo.



*Flowerpiercers are tanagers that have adapted to stealing nectar from flowers using their uniquely hooked bill. The Glossy Flowerpiercer is found in the higher elevations of the Andes in Ecuador; we'll watch for them when we visit Yanacocha.*  
*Photograph by guide Dave Stejskal.*

### **Day 3, Sun, 29 Oct. Flight to Loja.\***

**\*NOTE** – *The flight schedule from Quito to Loja can change (and frequently does!!). Sometimes there are afternoon flights; sometimes there are only morning flights. Just know flights are subject to change and we must be flexible.*

If the only option is the afternoon flight, then we'll start with an early buffet breakfast with a departure from the hotel shortly after. We'll head straight for Antisana Reserve, where we'll be birding mostly above tree line, from the road edge near the bus, for several hours. We'll be moving *slowly* at these high elevations, where the weather can vary from cloudy and cold to sunny and warm, so layer up and bring raingear just in case. Chances are that it will be warming up some by the time we reach the birding areas, and you'll want to peel a layer; but a wind or a cold mist can reverse that. We'll have water on the bus, but you'll need your own water bottle with you. After our morning here, we'll return to the hotel to pick up our luggage and have a quick lunch before heading to the airport for our afternoon flight to Catamayo airport, in southern Ecuador. From there it is roughly an hour to our hotel in Loja. If it's a clear afternoon, you should be able to see the outlying Volcan Sangay from the left of the plane and the Volcan Chimborazo, Ecuador's highest mountain, off to the right. Quite often these peaks are obscured by clouds, but sometimes the highest peaks poke up through a sea of clouds.

If we take a morning flight instead (could be early morning), we will most likely do an early breakfast at the hotel even though they'll likely serve a sandwich on the plane. Our bus and driver will meet us at the airport, and we can get into our luggage for anything we need for a day of birding in this arid intermontane valley. You may not need your rubber



boots today, but it would make sense to dig them out and store them under a seat in the bus so that they are always handy. (Our bus will be with us all the way to Cuenca.) It should be warm and possibly overcast at this season, so you'll need both your sunscreen and your umbrella. We'll be birding primarily along abandoned roads and side roads for a sampling of Tumbesian specialties. We'll have a picnic lunch and continue birding our way toward Loja, over a ridge and into another intermontane valley at 7600 feet (2300 m). We should reach our hotel by 5:30 p.m.

Loja is not a tourist destination. Ours is among the best hotels in town—and it's close to wonderful birding—but it is still simple and yet with a certain charm. It offers hot-water showers, relatively quiet (for a city), and very congenial and helpful service. We'll be here two nights to start with, then in Zamora for two nights, and then back here for one more night. It's a good place to have some laundry done while we're gone. (Your next chance to have laundry done will be at San Isidro.) Night in Loja.

**Day 4, Mon, 30 Oct. Podocarpus National Park: Cajanuma entrance; Catamayo Valley** We'll have most of the day today, as well as tomorrow morning, for birding the beautiful temperate forest (mostly 9000-9500 feet; 2750-2900 m) at the Cajanuma entrance to Podocarpus National Park, only 40 minutes away. Exactly how we utilize our time will depend on the (ever-changing) weather, but we expect to have early starts (with hotel breakfasts) and picnic lunches at the headquarters area. We plan to bird both along the entrance road, in search of Bearded Guans, hummingbirds, canopy flocks, Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucans, and other birds that sit up; *and* inside the forest along a couple of beautiful trails that climb toward the ridge top (bring your walking stick if you use one), in hopes of such forest denizens as antpittas, tapaculos, secretive wrens, etc. This is a raingear-and-rubber-boots kind of place, as it almost always rains some here and the trails are usually muddy. It's often cold (fleece jacket under rain jacket) on cloudy or rainy days, but it can be quite warm (shirt-sleeve weather) if the sun is out. This afternoon, we'll drive back over to the Catamayo area and bird the arid regions near the airport for a completely different landscape and mix of birds. Night in Loja.

**Day 5, Tue, 31 Oct. Cajanuma for morning; drive to Zamora for late-afternoon birding.** After an early breakfast at the hotel, we'll probably spend the morning at Cajanuma again. This is our final morning for upper Podocarpus, and we'll likely head directly to the trails, returning to headquarters for our picnic lunch. In the afternoon, we'll head for Zamora in the east-slope foothills, possibly stopping for a Torrent Duck, a White-capped Dipper, or a Cliff Flycatcher on the way. We plan to spend the late afternoon birding the grounds of the new Copalinga Lodge, a lovely set of cabanas built into the slope, very near the Rio Bombuscaro entrance to Podocarpus National Park. We can sit near the dining area and watch the busy hummingbird feeders and banana feeders and check for fruiting cecropias, where frugivores can abound. And we can stand in the driveway, watching the vervain hedgerow that often attracts Violet-headed Hummingbird, Blue-tailed Emerald, Spangled Coquette, and Wire-crested Thorntail. We should have fun with a whole new avifauna at the eastern base of the Andes. Night at Copalinga Lodge near Zamora.

**Day 6, Wed, 1 Nov. Podocarpus Park: Rio Bombuscaro entrance.** Our beautiful lodgings are only 10 minutes from the entrance to the park, and we'll start with an early breakfast at the lodge and then drive straight to the park. Our lunches will be provided by the hotel, to carry with us (bring your daypack) such that we can maximize our time in the park. (The trail is somewhat hilly, and if the birding is good, we won't want to come back out for lunch.) Weather permitting, we'll have much of the day in fabulous foothill forest along a beautiful trail and around the headquarters clearing, where we'll hope to observe the impressive "clearing-edge flock" full of tanagers and furnariids, with accompanying barbets, woodpeckers, woodcreepers, antbirds, flycatchers, warblers, and greenlets. We'll keep an ear out too for flocks of White-necked Parakeets that are sometimes attracted to vertical mineral banks along the trail. In the afternoon, we'll return to our lodge for dinner and another night. We may do some owling after dinner if the weather is good. It should be warm at Bombuscaro, but, of course, be prepared for both sun and rain *every* day of the tour. Night at Copalinga Lodge near Zamora.

**Day 7, Thu, 2 Nov. Old Loja-Zamora road; back to Loja.** After another early breakfast, we'll load up and head for the lower part of the old Loja-Zamora road, birding our way up. We'll have a picnic lunch (from Copalinga) on our way and return to Loja for dinner. It should be cool (think layers) by the time we reach the pass back into the Loja valley, but we plan to get in early after another dynamite day of birding in the eastern cloudforest. Night in Loja.

**Day 8, Fri, 3 Nov. Drive to Cuenca via Acacana.** After a 4:30 a.m. breakfast, we'll load up and head for another patch of treeline forest en route to Cuenca. By reaching our first birding area early, we have a chance for both Black-billed and White-tailed shrike-tyrants performing their dawn songs side by side. We'll continue to Huashapamba and Acacana, isolated patches of humid montane forest—some of which extend to treeline—to try especially for the scarce and erratic Red-faced Parrot and for the rare and elusive Crescent-faced Antpitta, perhaps the fanciest of the little *Grallariculas*. In

some years, such treeline species as Golden-plumed Parakeet, Ocellated Tapaculo, Orange-banded Flycatcher, Golden-crowned Tanager, Gray-hooded Bush-Tanager, and Black-headed Hemispingus have proven to be more easily seen here than at Podocarpus. Other scarce specialties of these high forest patches include Andean Pygmy-Owl, Viridian Metaltail, Glowing Puffleg, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Mouse-colored Thistletail, Ash-colored Tapaculo, and Agile Tit-Tyrant (especially in bamboo).

After a morning's birding mostly along a rocky road with water running along it, we'll continue north, descending into ever more arid valleys—through the country of the Saraguro Indians—until we reach the semi-desert valley of the Rio Leon. We plan a few stops in this warm, arid terrain (to check for Giant Hummingbirds if we encounter any big cluster of blooming agaves) before climbing again along a long high ridge, to above 11,000 feet (3400 m) at its crest, and ultimately dropping into the valley of Cuenca (at 8400 feet/2560 m), where a wonderful dinner and a good night's sleep await us. You may want to repack tonight to send your big bag with our driver to Quito in the bus tomorrow while keeping with you only what you need (including rubber boots and warm clothing) for our day of birding at high elevation. We fly to Quito late tomorrow afternoon. Night in Cuenca.



*The tiny Agile Tit-Tyrant is found with mixed species flocks at higher elevations of the Andes in Ecuador.  
Photograph by participant Lance Runion.*

**Day 9, Sat, 4 Nov. El Cajas National Park; late-afternoon flight to Quito.** We plan to have a buffet breakfast at 6:30 a.m. Put your bags destined for Quito out before you come down for breakfast; our driver will load them onto the bus and leave shortly after breakfast for Quito. We'll try to leave by 7:00 a.m. for El Cajas, possibly storing a few bags at the hotel until our return from Cajas en route to the airport. We'll have the morning at high altitude in beautiful surroundings with some fascinating birds. Birding early will be along a temperate-forest trail around a lake, and then we'll head for higher altitudes (13,500 feet; 4100 m). The diversity of birds in these high-Andean habitats is low, but the quality is high, and the scenery is dynamite. We plan some limited walking through impressive old *Polylepis* groves overlooking open paramo grassland. Layer up today, bringing your warmest layers, as it can be cold at this elevation. If it's raining, you will probably want your rubber boots and rain pants. We'll hope for sunny weather, which brings out all these high-elevation birds. After a picnic lunch in the park, we'll bird our way back down to Cuenca for dinner and head for the airport. Time permitting, we'll tour a bit of beautiful, old Cuenca on our way to the airport.

We'll take the late-afternoon flight to Quito, and we will be met at the airport and transferred to our hotel. Our bus will be with us for the remainder of the trip—and there are no more internal flights. Night in Puenbo at the Hotel San Jose de Puenbo.



**Please Note!** *it is not possible to guarantee the precise order of our lodging at Septimo Paraiso and San Isidro Lodge as described in the day-by-day description below. We will, however, monitor the situation and make arrangements for the best possible schedule for the tour.*

**Day 10, Sun, 5 Nov. To San Isidro via Papallacta Pass.** This is a travel day interrupted by a number of calculated birding stops. We'll probably start at moderate elevations in the arid intermontane valley near Tumbaco (Scrub Tanager), but if good weather persists we plan to bird the high paramo above the pass (Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe et al.). Again, at these high elevations (today to as high as 14,000 feet, 4300 m), we'll move very slowly and sip water frequently. Expect the weather to be anything from cloudy and cold to sunny and warm, so layer up and bring raingear. Should it be rainy or foggy up high, we'll spend most of our time at lower elevations; there are plenty of new birds awaiting! We'll have a hot, sit-down lunch at the lovely montane lodge at Guango about 1:00 p.m. Here we'll watch hummingbird feeders with some species new for us, possibly including the rare Mountain Avocetbill. After lunch we'll take a walk along the edge of the humid montane forest below the lodge. We should reach our cabanas at San Isidro in time to look around for Wattled Guans displaying in the distant treetops. At dusk be sure to watch for Rufous-bellied Nighthawks swooping for moths around the lights outside our cabins.

Our base for the next three nights is the Hacienda San Isidro Labrador, a set of cabanas at 6500 feet (1980 m). Owned by a lover of nature who welcomes birders—and also happens to be Mitch Lysinger's wife, Carmen—San Isidro offers delicious home-style meals between birding forays. Set in a grassy clearing overlooking the forest, the cabanas are within earshot of Rufous-banded Owls and displaying Wattled Guans and are but minutes away from some tremendous east-slope, subtropical birding. Here too you'll want your umbrella whenever you walk up to the dining area, and bring your flashlight mornings and evenings; the mystery owl of San Isidro could be perched on a light pole along your route. Night at Cabanas San Isidro.



*The spectacular Long-tailed Sylph is one of many jewel-like hummingbirds we'll see at San Isidro.  
Photograph by participant Lance Runion.*

**Days 11-12, Mon-Tue, 6-7 Nov. San Isidro area and the Guacamayos ridge.** Exactly how we spend our time here will depend on the weather and what we've already seen. Activities we expect to include are early morning birding right along the driveway to watch birds collecting at the lamps; some trail birding right at San Isidro, including scheduled attempts to see White-bellied Antpitta and any other specialties that are coming in for earthworms; birding along the dirt road beyond San Isidro; a morning along the Guacamayos ridge trail, with a probable descent to lower elevations for at least an afternoon; and an afternoon/evening for night-birding, wherever it seems most promising. Nights at San Isidro.

**Day 13, Wed, 8 Nov. San Isidro to Quito via Papallacta.** Depending on how things have gone, we'll decide whether to opt for early birding near San Isidro or a morning departure to Cayambe-Coca National Park, en route back to Papallacta Pass. Whatever we do, we'll spend the afternoon traveling back to Quito, with a few well-appointed stops at higher elevations. Overnight at Hotel San Jose de Puenbo near Quito.

**Day 14, Thu, 9 Nov. To Mindo via Tandayapa ridge.** We'll start with an early breakfast (with bags out) and head for Tandayapa and the west slope of the western Andean cordillera. Most of our birding for the next three days will be along little-traveled roads at subtropical and upper tropical elevations, where it can be cool if it's cloudy or rainy. You should have your raingear with you throughout the trip. We can leave rubber boots on the bus again. Today's birding will be primarily in the subtropical zone—the upper portions of the Quito/Mindo road and the Tandayapa ridge. We'll probably walk some stretches and have our bus pick us up periodically. We'll let the weather dictate when we bird where; sunny days are gorgeous, but often the worst birding! Our dream is of a day with some sunshine early and late, and with overcast skies and intermittent light mist in between. En route to Mindo we plan to visit some wonderful hummingbird feeders at a private reserve, have a picnic lunch in the field, and then bird our way down the old Nono/Mindo road, hoping to reach our lodgings at Mindo by late afternoon.

Our base at Mindo is a comfortable lodge just off the Mindo entrance road. Meals are served buffet-style in a modern dining room, which opens to and overlooks the lovely gardens and hummingbird feeders nearby. We'll probably start birding right in the gardens, checking the hummingbird feeders for lower-elevation species of the west slope. Night at Septimo Paraiso near Mindo.

**Day 15, Fri, 10 Nov. Mindo area all day.** We'll have the full day to devote to the west-slope upper-tropical/subtropical ecotone so rich in birdlife. We anticipate birding on the grounds and along nearby roads and trails for most of the morning, literally surrounded by birds! After lunch we'll plan time for a nap and then probably head for the nearby Milpe Bird Sanctuary, a humid forest reserve in the foothills, with hummingbird feeders, a nice network of trails, and good patches of forest right along the road. Night at Septimo Paraiso near Mindo.

**Day 16, Sat, 11 Nov. The Choco patches.** We'll start early to spend most of the day sampling the riches of the new Rio Silanche Bird Sanctuary, which preserves a remnant patch of lowland tropical forest well down the (paved) main highway toward Esmeraldas and then well off on a side road. We plan to drive pretty straight to the new canopy tower, which can be teeming with activity, but we may want to make a stop or two on the way. Our birding will be on foot at road edge and along well-maintained trails that could be muddy, but can be dry if there's been much sun. You'll want to carry your water, for it gets hot in the lowlands. We'll have a picnic lunch, returning to our lodge for dinner. Night at Septimo Paraiso near Mindo.

**Day 17, Sun, 12 Nov. Mindo to Quito.** We plan to leave by 5.00 a.m. this morning (after a quick light breakfast) to head for a wonderful patch of mossy forest with an active lek of Andean Cocks-of-the-rock. This is the lek where we must reach the blind before daylight, by carefully climbing down a steep trail for about half kilometer (by headlamp or flashlight) so as not to disturb the birds.

When the cock show is over, we'll work back up the trail network slowly, with our hosts Angel and Rodrigo Paz, stopping to try for four species of antpittas and for the wood-quail that they have trained to come to the trail for earthworms. We'll sit and watch the fruit feeders for a while, check out the hummingbird feeders, and doubtless spend most of the morning enjoying the magic of Refugio Paz de las Aves. When we get back up to the top of the hill, we'll have a hot breakfast (or mid-morning brunch) prepared by Angel's wife while we watch for raptors and tanager flocks from an open-air dining area. We have the remainder of the day, with a picnic lunch, to work on whatever still eludes us, back in Angel's forest, along the Tandayapa Ridge, or along the old Nono/Mindo road.

In the afternoon, we'll continue to the central valley near Quito, arriving in time to clean up and reorganize before dinner. This will be our farewell dinner. Participants flying home on Delta, United, or LAN Airlines may choose to book flights departing near midnight tonight, but will still have a room for showering before the overnight flight. For those not flying tonight, night in Puenbo at the Hotel San Jose de Puenbo.

**Day 18, Mon, 13 Nov. Departure for home.** American Airlines flights to the US generally depart in the morning and require an early check-in, to arrive mid-day in time for connections home. Having reconfirmed your flights, we'll help you with arrangements for transfers to the airport as appropriate. ¡Váyan bien!



## About Your Guide

**Jay VanderGaast** was introduced to birding by his father, and his obsession with birds was evident by age seven when he memorized the plates in Peterson's eastern field guide. He went on to earn a B.S. in biology at university and briefly contemplated a career in research, but two years on the mosquito-infested arctic tundra watching ptarmigan do little other than occasionally getting eaten by Gyrfalcons soon put an end to that plan! Instead, he strapped on a backpack and a pair of bins and began roaming the world in search of birds. His travels eventually led him to Costa Rica, where he stumbled into a job as a birding guide at Rancho Naturalista Lodge. Amazed that he was actually getting paid to watch birds, he jealously guarded his position there for six years. His career with Field Guides coincided with the dawn of the new millennium (if you believe that began in 2000!), and since then he has guided more than 100 tours on several continents.

*"Jay VanderGaast was a delight to travel with...incredible at finding the birds and extremely helpful in getting us on the birds—which was much appreciated! ....he made the trip an exceptional experience which I will remember for the rest of my life." L.K., Costa Rica*

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for Jay's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

## Financial Information

**FEE:** \$7150 from Quito

**DEPOSIT:** \$700 per person

**FINAL PAYMENT DUE:** April 30, 2023

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional):** \$775

**LIMIT:** 8

**Special Note: Tour fees may be subject to change due to the global economic effects of COVID-19.**

We have published the itinerary and price for this tour with the understanding that during these uncertain times we are likely to encounter unforeseen changes. Some of our tours may incur higher costs due to increases in currency exchange rate fluctuations or COVID-19 related fees imposed by countries and/or suppliers. Travel and hospitality companies all over the world have been adversely affected by the pandemic, and there is no guarantee that all of the lodging and transportation we have booked for this tour will still be available at the time of departure. We hope to maintain our services as indicated in our itinerary as well as our published tour fee. However, if changes are required, we will make every effort to maintain the quality of the itinerary as it is published with the most appropriate substitutions available. Should any necessary changes or other unforeseen causes result in an increase in service rates to us, we reserve the right to pass on those increases in fees to the tour participant.

## Other Things You Need to Know

**TOUR MANAGER:** The manager for this tour is Nicole Cannon. Nicole will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

**ACCOMMODATIONS:** The Hotel San Jose de Puembo near the new Quito airport in the Tumbaco valley is a lovely, non-touristy garden inn that offers delicious meals and elegant rooms with Wi-Fi. The Oro Verde Cuenda in Cuenca is an excellent, modern hotel. The more rural areas have surprisingly comfortable lodgings given the settings, with beautiful cabanas at Copalinga and a comfortable lodge at Mindo. The Cabañas San Isidro is simpler, but the gourmet food there is more than adequate compensation. Our simplest hotel is in Loja, but even it has charm and wonderfully congenial service. All of our accommodations offer comfortable beds and private baths with hot water. The hospitality of our Ecuadorian hosts, in each of our lodgings, is extraordinary.

**A NOTE ON ALTITUDE:** We plan to spend several days at elevations in excess of 10,000 feet, reaching 14,000 feet near Papallacta Pass and at El Cajas. We will work our way up to the higher elevations, take our time when we're there, and do most of our walking downhill.

**DOCUMENTS:** We recommend that your passport be valid for at least 6 months beyond the dates of your visit, as regulations vary from country to country, and are subject to change. You will be issued a **tourist card** upon arrival; please keep this in a safe place, as you will need it to depart Ecuador.

If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Ecuadorian consulate nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries require a blank page for their stamp and as a precaution it is best to have one blank page per country you will visit or transit.

**AIR ARRANGEMENTS:** Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees.

**Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.**

**LUGGAGE:** Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

**TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS:** The **tour fee** is **\$7150** for one person in double occupancy from Quito. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 17, all meals from breakfast on Day 2 through dinner on Day 17 (or if you're overnighing in Quito, breakfast on Day 18), the flights within Ecuador (Quito/Loja and Cuenca/Quito), all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Ecuador, airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is **\$775**. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact us at [fieldguides.com/contact-us/](https://fieldguides.com/contact-us/). Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of \$700** per person, or see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or **by April 30, 2023. We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.**

Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

**SMOKING:** Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.



**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

**TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE:** We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs within 90 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 90 to 179 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive information from us regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/> and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

**Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii.** We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (<https://www.insuremytrip.com/>) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses.

Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

NCP 7/2020

7/22NC; peg; 3/23NC