



Grand Ecuador Trip Report 2023

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Day 1. Puenbo Birding Garden, Zuro Loma, Tandayapa, Sachatamia

After a heavy rain that lasted through the night we had our early breakfast and were picked up by our driver, José Gallardo to make our way to our first birding stop high in the western Andes. As we drove to the north of Quito we spotted a Peregrine Falcon perched on one cell phone tower and just a bit further down the road we saw a pair of American Kestrels on another tower. When we reached Zuro Loma we were greeted by Darío who has been maintaining a bird feeding station and as we walked down to the observation site we were quickly overwhelmed by the number of hummingbirds buzzing around! Tyrian Metaltail, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Collared Inca, Sapphire-vented Puffleg, Violet-tailed Sylph and Black-tailed Trainbearer were back-and-forth at the feeders and to top-off the hummingbird spectacle we also saw the species with the longest bill as well as the species with the shortest bill, the **Sword-billed Hummingbird** and Purple-backed Thornbill.



Sword-billed Hummingbird

Along with the hummingbirds there were Glossy, White-sided and Masked Flowerpiercers and at the fruit feeders we saw Blue-capped Tanager, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager, Gray-browed Brushfinch and **Andean Guan**. We took a short walk down a trail and caught glimpses of Blackish Tapaculo and fantastic views of White-browed Spinetail, then we were treated to our first antpitta feeding experience. Darío carefully placed some chopped earthworms on a mossy branch and told us to focus our binoculars at that spot and after a couple minutes of whistling the correct song an **Equatorial Antpitta** came out of hiding and gave us phenomenal views.



Andean Guan © Ernesto Carman



Equatorial Antpitta © Ernesto Carman

Before we left we also saw Red-crested Cotinga, Hooded Siskin and **Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager**. From here we drove downhill making our way to our lunch spot at the Tandayapa Birding Lodge and just before arriving we spotted a pair of Torrent Ducks swimming down the fast flowing river! It began raining during lunch which was perfect timing to also watch the feeders where we saw a few new hummers including Purple-throated Woodstar, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Lesser Violetear, Purple-bibbed Whitetip and White-booted Rackettail. On the fruit feeders we saw Flame-rumped Tanager, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Rufous Motmot and **White-throated Quail-Dove**.





White-throated Quail-Dove

After lunch we made our way to Mindo where Sachatamia Lodge is located, we checked in and did a little more feeder watching. Here we saw Ecuadorian Thrush, Orange-bellied Euphonia, White-tipped Dove, Scrub Blackbird, **Golden Tanager**, Palm Tanager and Blue-gray Tanager.



Golden Tanager

Day 2. Sachatamia, Bellavista Road and Mindo

Before breakfast we gathered to watch the feeders and they soon became very active with Blue-winged and Black-chinned Mountain-Tanagers, Black-capped, Golden, Silver-throated, Golden-naped, Blue-gray and Palm Tanagers, Thick-billed and Orange-bellied Euphonias, Red-headed Barbet and White-lined Tanager. Meanwhile on the ground several Central American Agoutis were feasting on the piles of corn tossed on the ground. At the hummingbird feeders we added Velvet-purple Coronet, Brown Violetear and White-bellied Woodstar.



Black-chinned Mountain Tanager © Ernesto Carman



Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager © Ernesto Carman

After breakfast we drove a short distance to bird along the Bellavista road and though activity was fairly low we still saw several very interesting species including Montane Woodcreeper, Beryl-spangled Tanager, Toucan Barbet, Sharpe's Wren, Gorgeted Sunangel, Pearled Treerunner, Pacific Tuftedcheek and Spectacled Redstart. The botany along this road was absolutely fascinating as well with many interesting flowers including several very showy orchids. We returned to Sachatamia for lunch and a little rest before heading back out to bird at a lower elevation around the town of Mindo. Just along the roadside we spotted birds such as Masked Water-Tyrant, Spotted and Solitary Sandpiper, Broad-billed Motmot, Green-fronted Lancebill flycatching over a stream, Choco Toucan and a Choco Tyrannulet feeding from the fruits of a mistletoe.



Toucan Barbet



Orchid, Sobralia

Day 3. Paz de las Aves and Milpe

Today we left the lodge before sunrise to visit the world renowned Paz de Las Aves Refuge which became famous thanks to the owner, Angel Paz, who began feeding several species of antpittas, thus making it possible for birdwatchers to see these otherwise near-impossible species. Our first target was the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock which we waited for patiently at a hide built near a lek where several males display and it was only a matter of minutes before they arrived making their loud, raucous call. Even in the dim light the deep red of the birds showed very well through the forest.



Andean Cock-of-the-rock © Ernesto Carman

Next off we visited another little patch of forest where we started off by seeing a Lyre-tailed Nightjar on its day roost and then watched Angel feed María the Giant Antpitta. Using this same strategy we also saw Yellow-breasted Antpitta, Russet-crowned Antpitta and Rufous-breasted Antthrush. After a traditional breakfast we saw Scaled and Orange-breasted Fruiteaters as well as the usual customers at the fruit feeders including very good views of Toucan Barbet and Flame-faced Tanager.



Giant Antpitta



Lyre-tailed Nightjar



Flame-faced Tanager © Ernesto Carman



Orange-breasted Fruiteater

After lunch we visited the Milpe Bird Sanctuary at a slightly lower elevation where we watched the hummingbird feeders and birded the roadside for the rest of the afternoon. At the feeders we saw Crowned Woodnymph, Green-crowned Brilliant and Green Thorntail and in the surrounding trees a mixed species flock was working through the treetops including Streaked Xenops, Yellow-throated Chlorospingus, Tropical Parula, Blackburnian Warbler, Choco Warbler, Green Honeycreeper, Buff-rumped Warbler, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Ornate Flycatcher and Guira Tanager. Along the roadside further down we found a fruiting fig tree with at least a dozen Swallow Tanagers, Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner, Roadside Hawk, Bay-headed Tanager, Cinnamon Becard and Red-billed Parrots. We returned to Sachatamia in time to see the Rufous-bellied Nighthawk fly over the parking lot.



Crowned Woodnymph

Day 4. Sachatamia, Balcón Tumpiki, Papallacta Pass and Guango Lodge.

Before breakfast we walked into the hide set in the forest at Sachatamia where they keep a light on during the night to attract insects which subsequently attract birds in the morning, and they also hang fruit out at this hide. We had fantastic views of Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Mountain Wren, Three-striped Warbler, Strong-billed and Spotted Woodcreeper, Lineated Foliage-Gleaner, Chestnut-capped Brushfinch and, most impressive of all, an immature male Long-wattled Umbrellabird!



Long-wattled Umbrellabird

After our own breakfast we packed-up the van and headed out, but we soon made a stop at another feeding station called Balcón Tumpiki where we patiently waited for the local stars, the Plate-billed Mountain-Toucans.



Photographing Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan © Ernesto Carman



Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan

After this great sighting we began making our way back through Quito and over to the eastern

Andes heading to the Papallacta Pass. As we drove up to the pass we spotted several large birds soaring over the rocky cliffs and after pulling over on the roadside for better inspection we confirmed they were two massive Andean Condors sharing the air currents with Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle. We made one more stop at a pond just before reaching Guango Lodge and saw Neotropic Cormorant, Yellow-billed Pintail, Andean Teal and Blue-winged Teal. After checking in at Guango we did some more feeder watching and added Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Long-tailed Sylph, Tourmaline Sunangel, White-bellied Woodstar, Green Jay, Turquoise Jay and Mountain Cacique.



Long-tailed Sylph

Day 5. Guango Lodge and Papallacta Pass

After a productive pre breakfast walk with Buff-tailed Coronet, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Hooded Mountain-tanager and Blue-and-black Tanager, we drove back up to the high mountain pass of Papallacta and the weather could not have been better with clear blue skies and the snow-covered Antisana volcano towering high above us. Some of the above-timberline specialties we saw were Chestnut-winged and Stout-billed Cinclodes, Andean Tit-Spinetail, Many-striped Canastero, Ecuadorian Hillstar, Variable Hawk, Carunculated Caracara, Plain-capped Ground-Tyrant, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Plumbeous Sierra-Finch and Tawny Antpitta. After a delicious lunch back at Guango we went out for a afternoon stroll birding around the lodge and it turned out to be very productive when we followed a mixed species flock for over half an hour. Here we saw Streaked Tuftedcheek, Capped and Blue-backed Conebills, Black-capped and Black-eared Chlorospingus, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Gray-hooded Bush-Tanager, Spectacled Redstart, Rufous-breasted Flycatcher and Slaty Brushfinch.



Cinnamon Flycatcher © Ernesto Carman



Birding in Papallacta © Ernesto Carman

Day 6. Guango Lodge, La Brisa and Cabañas San Isidro

Early in the morning we walked down to the Papallacta river and found two of the mountain stream specialists, White-capped Dipper and Torrent Tyrannulet, as well as Mountain Trogon and Chestnut-bellied Chat-Tyrant. After breakfast and before leaving we went in search of one of the stars of

Guango, the Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan, which we were successful at finding and after some time we all had fantastic scope views. We began our drive down the eastern face of the east Andes and made a brief stop at a feeding station called La Brisa where we added even more hummingbirds to our list including Bronzy Inca, Geoffrey's Daggerbill, Speckled Hummingbird, Peruvian Rackettail, Violet-fronted Brilliant, Green-backed Hillstar and the minute Gorgeted Woodstar. Apart from hummingbirds we also had Ruddy Pigeon, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Barred Becard and Andean Motmot. From here we worked our way to Cabañas San Isidro and just before we turned off the main road we spotted a large raptor circling low overhead, a Black-and-chestnut Eagle! After lunch we went birding along the road past our lodge and saw White-tailed Tyrannulet, Ecuadorian Tyrannulet, Slate-throated Redstart, Olivaceous Siskin, Beryl-spangled and Saffron-crowned Tanagers and two similar-looking thrushes singing constantly, Glossy-black Thrush and Pale-eyed Thrush. As dusk began setting in we patiently waited along the roadside for one of our nocturnal targets here, the Andean Potoo, of which we got fantastic scope views. During dinner we had our second nocturnal target, the resident pair of Black-banded Owls that come in close to the dining room to catch insects attracted to the moth light.



Peruvian Rackettail

Day 7. Cabañas San Isidro, Wayra Reserve, Wild Sumaco

We started off our day with coffee and birding from the balcony watching all the birds that come in to eat the insects attracted to the moth light, including Canada Warbler, Black-billed Peppershrike, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Pale-edged Flycatcher, Smoke-colored Pewee, Marble-faced Bristle-Tyrant, Scarlet-rumped Caciques, Green Jays and Masked Trogons. Just before breakfast we took a short walk to see the resident White-bellied Antpitta which seemed to be waiting for its daily portion of earthworms! After breakfast we birded the entrance road again and added White-collared and Chestnut-collared Swift, Rusty-crowned Tody-Flycatcher, Andean Solitaire, Black-crested Warbler and Russet-crowned Warbler. After lunch we continued working our way down the eastern slope of the Andes and making a quick stop at Wayra Reserve where the owner, Graciela, took us to see a male Spangled Coquette in full breeding plumage! From here it was pretty much a straight drive to Wild Sumaco, except for a brief stop along the roadside to see Cliff Flycatchers. We checked in in

time to enjoy the sun setting behind the Andes, with Antisana volcano in the foreground.



Antisana Volcano

Day 8. Wild Sumaco and vicinity

Today we spent the day birding around the lodge and the entrance road and during the morning, with the impressive Sumaco volcano in the background, we saw Russet-backed and Crested Oropendola, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Scaled, Ruddy and Plumbeous Pigeons, Chestnut-bellied Seedeater, Yellow-tufted and Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Chestnut-fronted Macaw, Military Macaw, Black-billed Thrush and Bluish-gray Saltator. We also visited a forest feeding station behind the Wild Sumaco Research Station and had Green Hermit, Wire-crested Thorntail, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Greenish Puffleg, Napo Sabrewing and Many-spotted Hummingbird.



Chestnut-fronted Macaw © Ernesto Carman



Golden-tailed Sapphire



Wire-crested Thorntail

A bit further down the trail our guide Byron took us to a stake-out where he knew where a Foothills Screech-owl was roosting and also along this trail we had Rufous-tailed Foliage-Gleaner and spectacular views of Fiery-throated Fruiteater. We made another stop further down the road before lunch and among the many species we found were Squirrel Cuckoo, Yellow-breasted Antwren, Montane and Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Western Wood-pewee, Large-headed Flatbill, Rufous-naped and Olivaceous Greenlets, Blue-necked and Golden-eared Tanagers and Black-faced Dacnis.



Fiery-throated Fruiteater © Ernesto Carman



Blue-necked Tanager © Ernesto Carman

After lunch we birded the lower section of the entrance road and hit a hot spot where we had Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Magpie Tanager, Yellow-browed Sparrow, Black Caracara, Short-crested Flycatcher, Maroon-tailed Parakeet, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Silver-beaked and Spotted Tanager, Speckled Chachalaca, Glittering-throated Emerald, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Turquoise Tanager and Violaceous Jays. As the sun began to dip lower we headed to a special spot where Byron has habituated another extremely hard to see species, a Blackish Rail, which showed itself extremely well! After a successful day we had dinner and off to bed it was.



Silver-beaked Tanager

Day 9. Wild Sumaco

Today we woke up to rain, but this did not stall our birding. As soon as we got a break in the weather we went for a walk down the entrance road and had better views of birds we saw the previous day, as well as Rufous-throated Sapphire, Green-backed Trogon, Chestnut-eared and Many-banded Aracari, Yellow-throated and White-throated Toucans, Blue-headed and Scaly-naped Parrots, Golden-faced Tyrannulet, Olive-chested Flycatcher, Scarlet Tanagers and Purple Honeycreepers, all of this before the rain picked-up again and it was time for lunch. After lunch the sun began to shine and we went birding down another trail and saw Western Fireeye, Blue-rumped Manakin, Deep-blue Flowerpiercer, Ecuadorian Piedtail and then we reached another hide where we had a chance at seeing one more earthworm loving antpitta, the Plain-backed. It was only about a five minute wait until the antpitta came out of hiding twice to grab a bite to eat before disappearing back into the dark underbrush. We spent the rest of the afternoon birding the edge of the forest and saw Green, Purple and Golden-collared Honeycreepers, Andean Cock-of-the Rock, Channel-billed Toucan, Green-and-gold Tanager and Blue Dacnis. After dinner we walked out into the parking lot and had stunning views of the massive Band-bellied Owl!



Blue-rumped Manakin

Day 10. Wild Sumaco and Sani Lodge

After a slightly earlier breakfast we packed the van and headed out, continuing our descent towards the town of Coca in the Amazon basin. Here bid farewell to José and were met by the Sani Lodge staff and we boarded a covered motorized canoe to continue our journey. To reach Sani we first went down the Napo River for about two and a half hours then we transferred to a hand paddled canoe for another forty-five minutes through the rain forest before we reached our lodge on the edge of a forest lagoon.



Canoe to Sani Lodge



Sani Lodge

After being greeted with a welcome drink and snacks we settled into our cabins and met again later that afternoon for our first amazonian birding. Right away we saw one of the most iconic species of the region, the primitive Hoatzin! We also saw Greater Ani, Black-capped Donacobius, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Striated Heron, Capped Heron, Black-fronted Nunbird, Scarlet-crowned Barbet, Fork-tailed Palm-Swift, Social, Gray-capped and Short-crested Flycatcher, Greater and Lesser

Kiskadee, Red-capped Cardinal, Masked Crimson Tanager, Cobalt-winged Parakeets and Red-bellied Macaws, all of these without moving away from the main gardens!



Red-capped Cardinal



Masked Crimson Tanager

Day 11. Sani

We ate breakfast early and then got in the canoe to paddle across the lagoon at sunrise and spend our morning in the top of the massive kapok tree which towers over the forest and provides a unique view we don't often get. After climbing up the 202 steps to the platform we immediately began seeing a whole new set of birds including Flame-crested, Opal-rumped, Opal-crowned, Masked, Paradise, Green-and-gold, Palm and Silver-beaked Tanagers, Spix's Guan, Golden-bellied, Orange-bellied and Rufous-bellied Euphonia, Red-eyed and Yellow-green Vireo, Slender-footed Tyrannulet, Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher, Gray-crowned and Yellow-margined Flycatcher, Yellow-browed Tody-Flycatcher, Black-tailed Tityra, Crane Hawk, Slate-colored Hawk, Double-toothed Kite and White-necked Puffbird, Gilded and Lemon-throated Barbet, Golden-collared Toucanet, Spangled Cotinga, Bare-necked Fruitcrow and White-browed Purpletuff.



Slender-footed Tyrannulet



White-necked Puffbird

Being 35 meters up in the canopy does not only give us an opportunity of seeing more species, but also seeing these species incredibly well! When we went back down the tower we took a short walk around a trail and had fantastic views of two species of incredibly colorful manakins, Wire-tailed and Golden-headed. We canoed back to the lodge for lunch and a siesta before gathering again for birding from the grounds where we saw the usual suspects, but also had Ringed Kingfisher, Limpkin, Orange-winged Parrot, Chestnut-bellied Seedfinch and all of this topped off with a male Plum-throated Cotinga!



Paradise Tanager



Gilded Barbet © Ernesto Carman



Golden-collared Toucanet

Day 12. Sani, Napo River and Sani Isla Community

Today we were going to be visiting several sites away from Sani Lodge along the Napo River. Just

for starters we spotted an Amazonian Umbrellabird displaying in an emergent tree alongside the river. We then headed to a special site where we were to wait for macaws to come down to feed from the wood of a dead trunk which they do to help neutralize the toxins present in the seeds that compose the majority of their diet. After a few minutes the stars began to make an appearance with Blue-and-yellow, Chestnut-fronted and Red-bellied Macaws. We also saw Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-pewee, Orange-backed Troupial, Buff-throated Woodcreeper, and White-eared Jacamars.



White-eared Jacamar

We then visited one of the more famous clay-licks in the area, but although the birds were perched in the trees above us, they did not come down to the clay lick. Despite this we did get good scope views of the Scarlet Macaws before heading back out to our canoe. On route to our next stop, lunch, we spotted Ladder-tailed Nightjar roosting in the vegetation on one of the many river islands and a pair of Brown Jacamars along the riverbank. Today's lunch was going to be different and special, as we were going to eat a traditional Qichwa lunch prepared by a group of local women of the Sani community. After lunch we had a tour of the collection of medicinal plants kept by the community and we got fantastic views of a Pygmy Marmoset which was feeding from the sap of a particular tree. We made our way back towards the lodge, but before we got there we took a look at a couple more stake-outs, a pair of Crested Owls and a Great Potoo!



Crested Owl © Ernesto Carman

Day 13. Sani

After breakfast we went for a walk on one of the trails surrounding the lodge and spent the morning exploring the forest. Here we had fantastic views of species such as Spot-backed Antbird, Plumbeous Antbird, Cinereous Antshrike, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Scale-breasted and Chestnut Woodpecker, Great Jacamar, Wedge-billed, Plain-brown and Elegant Woodcreepers, Dwarf Tyrant Manakin, Brown Nunlet, Lanceolated Monklet and the ridiculously cute Collared Puffbird! After lunch we took a very pleasant canoe ride along the edges of the lagoon and had fantastic birding as well. Some of the highlights were four species of kingfisher including American Pygmy and Green-and-rufous, Cinnamon Attila, close-up views of White-throated Toucan, Green-backed Trogon and Rufescent Tiger-Heron, as well as the endemic Cocha Antshrike! Meanwhile, parrots and macaws were flying overhead in the sunset light. After dinner we took a short night walk and found some cool tarantulas and frogs, including the Monkey Tree Frog.



Birding from canoe



Cream-colored Woodpecker

Day 14. Sani, Coca and Puembo Birding Garden

Early this morning we had breakfast and loaded the canoe one last time to work our way back out to Coca to catch our flight back to Quito. After the short flight we were picked-up by Kelly and we reached Puembo Birding Gardens again in time for lunch. After lunch we took a short walk through

the neighborhood and had great views of American Kestrel, Andean Siskin, Vermilion Flycatcher, Black-and-white Seedeater, Yellow-bellied Seedeater, Saffron Finch, Eared Dove, Sparkling Violetear and Black-tailed Trainbearer.



Sparkling Violetear



Our group 2023