Eagle-Eye Tours



Grand Ecuador Trip Report 2025

Link: Grand Ecuador Trip Report 2025

The Grand Ecuador tour offers an amazing variety of habitats and species as we cover different elevations on both slopes of the majestic Andes, from the open páramo above 4000m to the lowland Amazonian rainforest. During this 2025 tour we had the opportunity to see the hummingbird with the longest bill and one of the shortest, the largest and smallest raptors, and an unbelievable assortment of colors with tanagers, toucans and cotingas. And of course we cannot forget the spectacle of the antpitta feeding which Ecuadorians started and have perfected. This tour was particularly productive with mammals: A baby Mountain Tapir, an Andean Bear feeding from the chupalla bromeliads, Western Pygmy-Marmoset, Red Howler Monkey, Brown-headed Capuchin, Common Squirrel Monkey, Poeppig's Woolly Monkey, Red-bellied Tití Monkey, Central American and Black Agouti and Capybara. We also saw Giant Monkey Frog, Golden Tegu and a Green Anaconda.

Puembo Birding Gardens

We met in the later afternoon as the rain stopped and went for a short walk along the roads through the farms surrounding the hotel and spotted our first Ecuadorian birds including **Croaking Ground-Dove**, Great Thrush, Saffron Finch, Scrub Tanager, Blue-and-yellow Tanager, Hooded Siskin, Vermilion Flycatcher and a male Black-tailed Trainbearer.



Black-tailed Trainbearer © Ernesto Carman

Zuro Loma, Tandayapa Birding Lodge and Sachatamia Lodge



Zuro Loma © Ernesto Carman

Today we were going to work our way to the western slopes of the Andes so we had an early breakfast and were met by our driver, José Gallardo, and began our way to our first destination on the west side of the Guagua Pichincha volcano, **Zuro Loma Birding**. We arrived at the bird feeding station and it was only a matter of minutes before we saw our first antpitta of the trip, the uniformly colored **Equatorial Antpitta**! We then waited for a few minutes as Darío, the owner of Zuro Loma,

carefully placed some earthworms and whistled to a **Chestnut-naped Antpitta** and soon this large antpitta emerged from the dark undergrowth and gave us phenomenal views. The assortment of hummingbirds at this site was incredible with Mountain Velvetbreast, **Sapphire-vented Pufflegs**, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Sparkling Violetear, **Collared Inca**, **White-bellied Woodstar**, Tyrian Metaltail as well as two extremes, the world's longest billed and one of the shortest billed: **Sword-billed Hummingbird and Purple-backed Thornbill**! Not only hummingbirds were busy at the nectar feeders as several species of flowerpiercers including Masked, Glossy and Black were taking advantage of the plentiful resource. At the fruit feeders we saw an assortment of very colorful birds such as Yellow-breasted and Gray-browed Brushfinch, Blue-capped Tanager and **Hooded** and **Scarlet-bellied Mountain** Tanagers.



Birding Sachatamia © Ernesto Carman



Chestnut-naped Antpitta © Ernesto Carman



Equatorial Antpitta © Ernesto Carman



Collared Inca © Ernesto Carman



Sword-billed Hummingbird © Ernesto Carman



Purple-backed Thornbill © Ernesto Carman



Blue-capped Tanager © Paz Angulo



Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager © Ernesto Carman



Birding Zuro Loma © Ernesto Carman

As we left Zuro Loma and began descending the steep mountains covered in dense Andean montane forest the rain began and accompanied us through lunch at Tandayapa Birding Lodge. Here the feeders were very busy with a whole new assortment of hummingbirds including Purple-bibbed Whitetip, White-booted Rackettail, Buff-tailed Coronet, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Brown Inca, Purple-throated Woodstar, White-necked Jacobin and Violet-tailed Sylph. As we ate our lunch we watched

the fruit feeders and saw Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Orange-bellied Euphonia, Rufous Motmot, Golden, Orange-crowned, Black-capped and Flame-rumped Tanagers. After lunch we made our way down to the Mindo area and Sachatamia Lodge which would be our home for the next three nights.



Buff-tailed Coronet © Paz Angulo

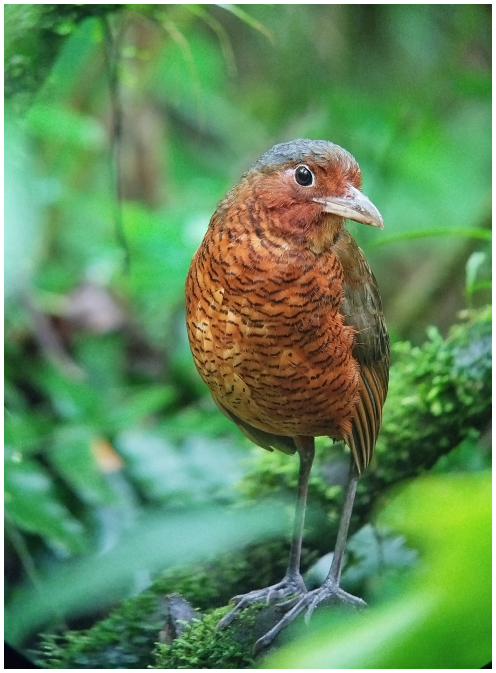
Paz de las aves

Before dawn we were up and ready to go to one of the most famous birding spectacles in Ecuador, Refugio Paz de las Aves where Angel Paz transformed his and his family's life by learning how to entice some of the most secretive birds out of their dense habitat for birdwatchers to see and photograph, leading to important conservation initiatives in the region. Before we got on the bus for the short drive we spotted a pair of Black-and-white Owls in the trees above the parking lot which frequent the lamps to catch the insects attracted to the lights. We drove in the dark for about twenty minutes and were greeted on the roadside by Esteban, a nephew of Angel Paz. Here we walked in the dim twilight down a narrow path, listening to loud and rather strange calls coming from the forest ahead of us until we reached a hide and were instructed to quietly observe the trees in front of us. Very quickly we began seeing shadows fluttering through the trees, squawking raucously and allowing us to catch glimpses of the astounding Andean Cock-of-the Rock. As the light improved we got better and better views of the scarlet, black and gray males displaying at their lek, attempting to attract females. After some time the males disappeared into the surrounding forest and we made our way out and along the road we spotted a pair of roosting Short-tailed Nighthawks, Ornate Flycatcher, Choco Brushfinch, Lineated Woodpecker and to top it off, a male Golden-headed Quetzal!



Golden-headed Quetzal © Ernesto Carman

We made another stop along the road and entered a narrow trail descending into a dense forest and at the end we met Rodrigo Paz, Angel's brother. We were instructed to stand quietly and focus our optics on the mossy branch where **Rodrigo** had previously placed pieces of earthworms and he began calling in a soft and rather caring voice: "*María María, venga María!*". After several minutes of enticing, María, a **Giant Antpitta**, emerged from the dense undergrowth and allowed everyone to see her very well! María was just the first of several special surprises the Paz family had in store for us as we also met Willemina, the **Yellow-breasted Antpitta**; Shakira and Piqué, the pair of **Ochre-breasted Antpittas**; and Pepito the **Rufous-breasted Antthrush**. We also saw our usual assortment of hummingbirds from this elevation as well as Flame-faced Tanager, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager and **Toucan Barbet**. After a successful morning birding with Angel Paz and his family we returned to Sachatamia for lunch and a siesta, but later that afternoon we went for a walk on the grounds and found many new species including Montane Woodcreeper, Dusky Chlorospingus, **Beryl-spangled Tanager**, White-winged Tanager, Choco Toucan and Short-tailed Hawk. Just before dinner we waited in the parking lot to see Rufous-bellied Nighthawk and we caught glimpses of it as it flew over the hotel.



Giant Antpitta © Ernesto Carman



Yellow-breasted Antpitta © Ernesto Carman



Choco Toucan © Ernesto Carman

Sachatamia, Milpe, FruttiTour and Guaycapi Lodge

We started our day with a nice cup of coffee and at dawn walked a short distance to the moth light, a setup within the forest where they leave a light on to attract insects at night and in turn this attracts birds in the morning. As we sat in the twilight, the first attendees to the smorgasbord began to arrive with the robin-sized Strong-billed Woodcreepers taking first picks from the sheet and Three-striped Warblers and Slate-throated Redstarts picking the smaller moths closer to the ground. More and more birds kept arriving, including Masked Trogon, **Rufous Motmot**, **Ornate** and Golden-bellied Flycatchers, **Lineated Foliage-gleaner**, Spotted Barbtail, Striped Treehunter, Mountain and Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch and Golden Tanagers. After this fascinating show we went for our own breakfast, but birding did not stop as we spotted a pair of **Golden-headed Quetzal** perched just outside the restaurant windows! After breakfast we worked our way downhill to the Milpe Bird Sanctuary where we saw Green Thorntail, Crowned Woodnymph and Green-crowned Brilliant at the feeders and in a flock moving overhead we saw Choco Toucan, Rufous-throated, Bay-headed and Guira Tanager, Scaly-throated Foliage-Gleaner and a flock of colorful male and female Swallow Tanagers.



Masked Trogon © Ernesto Carman



Ornate Flycatcher © Ernesto Carman

We continued down to the town of Pedro Vicente where we visited a site called Frutti Tour where Marcelo began feeding birds as an economic alternative prompted by the 2019 pandemic. Here we enjoyed a cold drink while we watched Black-cheeked, **Lineated** and Golden-olive Woodpecker, Buff-throated Saltator, White-lined Tanager and several new hummingbirds including White-whiskered and Rufous-bellied Hermit, Violet-bellied and **Purple-chested Hummingbird**, Black-throated

Mango and the star of this site, the Long-billed Starthroat. We returned to Sachatamia for lunch and after a siesta we drove a short distance to **Guaycapi Lodge** which is a new enterprise set on a ridge with an amazing view and a great feeder setup and as soon as we arrived we began getting spectacular views of the many hummingbirds including the spectacular **Empress Brilliant**, views from above of Swallow-tailed Kite and Speckle-faced Parrots, as well as many tanagers at the fruit feeder such as Orange-naped, Flame-faced, Golden, Silver-Throated, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, White-winged Brushfinch and Sickle-winged Guan. However, our true reason to be here was the **Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan** which posed in front of us for as many photos as we wanted! Truly pleased we returned to Sachatamia for our last night in the Mindo area.



Birding at Guaycapi Lodge © Paz Angulo



Empress Brilliant © Paz Angulo



Flame-faced Tanager © Paz Angulo

Sachatamia, Quito, Papallacta Pass and Guango Lodge



Papallacta landscape

After caffeination we walked over to the moth light and had the usual participants with additional Slaty-capped Flycatcher and Andean Solitaire and before breakfast we had a little review of the hummingbirds at the feeders with the most common being Brown Violetear, Violet-tailed Sylph, White-booted Rackettail, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Andean Emerald, Buff-tailed and Velvet-purple Coronet. After breakfast we loaded the bus and began driving back up towards Quito where we made a brief stop at the **old horse racetrack** and saw American Kestrel, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Golden Grosbeak, Rusty Flowerpiercer and Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch. Our next stop was a must at the Mitad del Mundo (Center of the World) monument where we added Tropical Mockingbird and Harris's Hawk. A strong thunderstorm began forming as we crossed the city, but as we began to climb up to the high Papallacta Pass we actually got above the weather and it was beautiful. We made a stop along the roadside to scan the cliffs for Andean Condor and it was only a matter of seconds when José yelled out "Hurry! There's the bear!". Sure enough, sitting on the hillside in front of us was an adult **Spectacled Bear** feeding from the *chupalla* bromeliads (*Puya sp.*). We could not have asked for better views as the bear minded its own business and continued feeding, giving us the best views ever! We eventually had to continue our way and made it over the 4000m pass, enjoying the spectacular Andean scenery, making one more stop at Lake Papallacta from the roadside and saw Yellow-billed Pintail, Andean Teal and Southern Lapwing. We reached Guango Lodge in the later afternoon and settled in for the night.



Andean (Spectacled) Bear © Ernesto Carman

Guango Lodge, Papallacta Antenna Road and Cayambe-Coca National Park

After our morning caffeination we visited Guango's moth light and birds were already present including Mountain Cacique, **Russet-crowned Warbler**, **Violaceous Jay** and Gray-browed Brushfinch. At the hummingbird feeders we saw a few new species including Long-tailed Sylph, Tourmaline Sunangel, **Chestnut-breasted Coronet** and White-bellied Woodstar.



Tourmaline Sunangel © Ernesto Carman

After breakfast we met Sandra Morocho, our local guide, and drove up to the top of the mountain again and despite the rain at the lodge, we once again were above the weather as we headed above timberline at 4,200m above sea level. Our first lifers began to show when a Variable Hawk flew below us carrying a rabbit, perching in a bush and allowing fantastic scope views. We also saw both **Chestnut-winged** and Stout-billed Cinclodes, Grass Wren, Brown-backed and Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant, Many-striped Canastero, White-chinned Thistletail and quick glimpses of a Blue-mantled Thornbill. Taking advantage of the good weather we drove to the highest point to look for one of our main targets, the Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe and as we began walking along the narrow trail through the tundra-like vegetation a security guard began calling us back. At first we thought we were being called back for security reasons, but it turns out he has been feeding the seedsnipes right behind the parking lot and one was there now! Sure enough we had fantastic views of the **Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe** not once, but twice as we drove back down we spotted another feeding near the road as the mist began rolling in. Satisfied with our views we drove back down the road to a spot where there were abundant *chuquiragua* flowers (*Chuquiraga jussieui*), the perfect spot to sit and wait for the **Ecuadorian Hillstar**. As we waited for this impressive hummingbird to make an appearance at the flowers we spotted a **Tawny Antpitta** atop a bush on the hillside, a rather unusual sight for an antpitta! A few minutes later the Hillstar made its appearance, moving from one *chuquiragua* flower to the next and allowing for all of us to get good views and some photos. It could not have gone better at Papallacta, so we happily returned to the lodge for lunch and a siesta before going out for another bit of birding in the highlands. We drove to the Coca-Cayambe National Park and the bird activity was very low, but the scenery was fantastic and at one point the clouds raised enough to expose the glacier-covered giant of Antisana Volcano.



Ecuadorian Hillstar © Ernesto Carman



Tawny Antpitta © Ernesto Carman



Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe © Ernesto Carman

Guango Lodge, El Quetzal Protected Forest and Cabañas San Isidro

After coffee we went to the moth light again to escape the rain and saw the usual visitors plus a Pale-naped Brushfinch. As the rain let-up a bit we walked down to the edge of the Papallacta River to look for Torrent Duck and sure enough, a little way down stream we found a pair of these delightful

ducks swimming in the rapids and climbing onto boulders every now and then. After breakfast we walked up a trail on the other side of the highway where the lodge staff have been feeding a very special bird, the **Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan**. As we arrived at the hide, the colorful toucan was already at the feeder, its brilliantly colored bill showing well even in the light rain. We also saw Great Thrush and Andean Guan before going back down to the river to catch the rest of the group up on **Torrent Duck** and we sure did get better views! After lunch we packed up the van and began working our way down the mountain. We made a stop at El Quetzal Bosque Protegido where Pedro and Andrea greeted us to their bird feeding stations where we saw several **Gorgeted Woodstars**, Green-backed Hillstar, Peruvian Rackettail, Violet-fronted Brilliant and Bronzy Inca among an assortment of hummingbirds we had previously seen. We also saw Pale-edged Flycatcher**, Scarlet-rumped Cacique** and Green Jay, as well as a lovely snack and hot beverage which felt perfect with the constant rain. We continued our short drive to Cabañas San Isidro and just a few minutes after turning down the gravel road to the lodge we stopped to admire a **baby Mountain Tapir** crossing the road, probably following her mother which was not far ahead! With this amazing welcoming we settled in at our new home for the next two nights, but the birding was not over because during dinner we were interrupted by the resident pair of **Black-banded Owls** calmly sitting just off the deck!



Green-backed Hillstar © Ernesto Carman



Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan © Ernesto Carman



Andean Guan © Ernesto Carman



Torrent Duck © Ernesto Carman

Cabañas San Isidro

We gathered at the restaurant early for some coffee and birding from the restaurant deck where the moth sheet was just below and the birds were already arriving and the show was amazing as **Green Jays** and **Mountain Trogons** were perching a few meters from us on the surrounding branches. Other species from the deck included Cinnamon Flycatcher, **Marble-faced Bristle-Tyrant**, Common Chlorospingus, Scarlet-rumped Caciques, Smoke-colored Pewee, **Black-eared Hemispingus**, Black-billed Peppershrike and two Neotropical migrants preparing for spring migration, Blackburnian Warbler and Canada Warbler. Before we sat down for breakfast we walked a short distance and waited for the resident **White-bellied Antpitta** come for its earthworm breakfast and sure enough, after a few minutes out of the dense bamboo thicket it came, grabbed some worms and hopped away again. After breakfast we went birding along the entrance road and between intermittent showers we spotted Sulphur-bellied Tyrannulet, Beryl-spangled Tanager, Saffron-crowned Tanager, Bluish Flowerpiercer, Andean Solitaire, Southern Lapwing and a pair of Torrent Ducks along the Cosanga River. After lunch and a siesta we walked back out along the entrance to the lodge as the sun began shining through the clouds and the bird activity began hopping as a mixed species flock worked through the forest giving us great views of Pearled Treerunner, **Montane Woodcreeper**, Olive-backed Woodcreeper, Black-eared Hemispingus, several tanagers and the tiny Rusty-crowned Tody-Tyrant.



Birding at San Isidro © Ernesto Carman



Cinnamon Flycatcher © Ernesto Carman

Cabañas San Isidro, Narupayaku, Owl, Wild Sumaco

We gathered again on the deck for coffee and birds as the rain continued. After breakfast we packed the bus and began working our way down the eastern slope of the Andes and as we descended the weather began improving and we made a stop at the Narupayaku private reserve to look for some

new hummingbirds at the vervaine hedges. One of the first birds we spotted was a White-capped Dipper feeding on invertebrates and working its way up the vertical wall of the waterfall. We also spotted Violaceous Jay, Yellow-browed Sparrow, Violet-headed Hummingbird and a female **Spangled Coquette**! After lunch we drove a bit further and pulled over on the roadside near a cliff face and had fantastic views of several Cliff Flycatchers perching on the wires on the roadside. We made one more stop at Pachakuti gardens where the owner, Rita, was waiting for us. We followed her down a short path to a clump of gigantic bamboo and roosting above us was a pair of **Band-bellied Owls**! After getting our fill of views and photos we made our way to Wild Sumaco Lodge where we would spend the next three nights.



View from Wild Sumaco

Wild Sumaco Lodge

We gathered for our usual morning caffeination, met our local guide Manuel and waited at the first moth light station where we saw **Collared Trogon**, Black-faced Antbird and Plain Antvireo, then we went to the second moth light which is set further in the forest. Here we had Black-billed Treehunter, Western Fireeye, Yellow-throated Spadebill, **Black-streaked Puffbird** and the tiny **Chestnut-crowned Gnateater**. After breakfast we walked across the road and in a small tree was a nesting pair of **Fiery-throated Fruiteater**, the female laying flat in the nest, perfectly camouflaged and the male perching next to her, standing guard and giving us a full-frontal view of his fiery throat.



Fiery-throated Fruiteater © Ernesto Carman



Black-streaked Puffbird © Ernesto Carman

We spent some time on an observation deck overlooking the forest and began spotting new birds left and right including scope views of Yellow-throated and Channel-billed Toucans and Military Macaw, and at closer range we saw Spotted, Blue-necked, Silver-beaked and Paradise Tanagers, Red-headed Barbet, Golden-faced Tyrannulet, Rusty-winged Antwren, Olivaceous Greenlet, Western Wood-Pewee and **Lemon-browed Flycatcher**. We spent the rest of the morning birding the entrance road where

we spotted more mixed flocks including Magpie Tanager and Social Flycatchers and White-thighed Swallows on the wires. After lunch we walked down the Antpitta Trail and spotted a Blue-rumped Manakin on our way down to the antpitta feeding station and only a couple minutes after we arrived, we had great views of **Plain-backed Antpitta** and **Ochre-breasted Antpitta**. While watching the antpittas a large mixed flock began forming overhead and we saw Russet Antshrike, Yellow-throated Chlorospingus, Orange-eared Tanager, Ornate Flycatcher, Squirrel Cuckoo and Green Manakin. Back on the road we drove a few minutes towards the village of Pacto Sumaco where we stood on the roadside looking down into a small marshy area where Manuel had placed some earthworms on a mossy rock and began repeating a low whistle. After a couple minutes we spotted our target, a **Blackish Rail** which walked out of the grasses into the small area devoid of weeds to eat the worms and gave us fantastic views of a very difficult bird to see! When we turned around we we stood in awe as the clouds lifted and exposed the massive, conical Sumaco Volcano!

Wild Sumaco

Today we started by repeating our morning routine of coffee and moth light/bird frenzy and had better views of **Western Fireeye**, Plain Antvireo and Black-faced Antbird as well as some new birds including Montane Foliage-Gleaner, Blackish Antbird and Coppery-chested Jacamar. After breakfast we headed out again but were distracted just outside the main building by a number of birds moving in the canopy of a nearby tree where half a dozen Paradise Tanagers, Golden Tanagers, Blue-necked Tanagers, Green-and-gold Tanagers, Golden Collared Honeycreeper and Black-faced Dacnis were gathered preening, but all of a sudden all the birds, including the many hummingbirds at the feeders, disappeared and a small raptor came to perch just above our heads, an adult **Tiny Hawk**!



Tiny Hawk © Ernesto Carman

After indulging in killer views of this scarce raptor and watching a troop of Black-mantle Tamarin Monkeys work their way through the canopy we returned to the deck on the other side of the road and saw Plumbeous Kite, Buff-fronted Foliage-Gleaner and Scarlet Tanager as well as better views of Spotted Tanager, Silver-beaked Tanager and Red-headed Barbet. As the activity died down here we decided to drive down the entrance road and descend a little in elevation and although it was quiet

at the beginning we very soon encountered our largest mixed species flock so far. These large mixed species flocks can be difficult to keep track of as the birds forage in the foliage, but we had luck seeing a number of species including Long-tailed Tyrant, Gray-mantled Wren, Lafresnaye's Piculet, Streaked Xenops, Buff-throated Tody-Tyrant, Bar-winged Piprites, Yellow-tufted and **Little Woodpecker**, White-shouldered Tanager, Ecuadorian Tyrannulet and Rusty-winged Antwren; a fantastic phenomenon everyone should experience in the tropics! We returned to the lodge for lunch and a siesta and mid-afternoon we met again on the main deck to get our hummingbirds straightened out, so one by one as different species visited the hummingbird feeders, we observed their field marks and made sure we had all seen them: Golden-tailed Sapphire, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Peruvian Rackettail, Many-spotted Hummingbird, **Wire-crested Thorntail**, Black-throated Brilliant, Napo Sabrewing and **Gould's Jewelfront** all showed very well. We also enjoyed the troop of Black-mantled Tamarins feeding from the trees in front of us. After the crash-course on Wild Sumaco hummingbirds we wandered over to the lodge's own coffee farm and learned all the ins and outs of coffee growing and how agricultural methods can affect the birds we so much love. Just before dinner, in the dimming light and with a beer in hand, we spotted a Sickle-winged Guan feeding in the Cecropia trees just off the balcony.



Black-mantled Tamarin © Ernesto Carman



Wire-crested Thorntail © Ernesto Carman



Napo Sabrewing © Ernesto Carman



Peruvian Rackettail © Ernesto Carman

Wild Sumaco, Coca and Sani Lodge

Today was the day we were going to drastically change habitats, moving from the middle elevations of the eastern slope of the Andes down to the lowland Amazonian forest so after breakfast we packed the bus and made our way down, and shortly after leaving the lodge we had to stop to enjoy three perched **Chestnut-fronted Macaws**, giving us a raucous farewell from Wild Sumaco. José dropped us off at the dock in El Coca on the edge of the gigantic Napo River where we were met by the staff of Sani Lodge. From here we took a comfortable motorized canoe down the Napo River for about 80 kilometers. At this point we disembarked and got into a smaller, hand-paddled canoe which our local guides powered and took us the rest of the way along a slow-moving stream which opens up into a lagoon and Sani Lodge. After getting settled in our rooms we watched birds from the bar and spotted our first Hoatzins with their primitive hairdo. We also had **Red-capped Cardinal**, **Masked Crimson Tanager**, Sunbittern, White-winged Swallow, Lesser and Greater Kiskadee, **Violaceous Jay**, Yellow-rumped Cacique and **Black-fronted Nunbird**.



Canoeing to Sani Lodge © Ernesto Carman



Black-fronted Nunbird © Ernesto Carman



Chestnut-fronted Macaw © Ernesto Carman



Hoatzin © Ernesto Carman

Sani Lodge, Canopy Tower

Being in the Amazonian lowlands it is always a good idea to get an early start so we had breakfast and got in the canoes before dawn and worked our way to the far side of the lagoon and as we

silently floated along the water we spotted several Ladder-tailed Nightjars and heard the dawn chorus awakening. After a short walk through the forest we reached the giant Kapok tree with a platform 36m above the ground where we would have the amazing opportunity to experience the life above the canopy and maybe spot some of the rare birds that live here and rarely descend to the lower levels of the forest. As soon as we reached the ample canopy platform we began seeing new birds left and right such as Golden-bellied and Rufous-bellied Euphonia, Slender-footed Tyrannulet and Yellow-browed Tody-Flycatcher, **White-browed Purpletuft** and Black-tailed Tityra, Gilded and Lemon-throated Barbet, Opal-rumped Tanager, Spangled Cotinga and even a **Bare-necked Fruitcrow** foraging in the foliage around us as Mealy Amazons and Blue-and-yellow Macaws were flying at eye-level over the forest canopy!



Bare-necked Fruitcrow © Ernesto Carman

We also saw various raptors including Plumbeous Kite, Crane Hawk, Bat Falcon, Black Caracara, Gray-headed Kite, Double-toothed Kite and Swallow-tailed Kite, but the most exciting moment occurred when Cirilo, one of our local guides, spotted a large raptor on a distant treetop and after a brief scope view it was clearly the Holy Grail of the Amazon: **HARPY EAGLE**! Despite the distance it was a very clear view perching atop a tree, with its powerful talons and double pointed crest. We watched it to our heart's delight until it flew about fifteen minutes later and we even refound it a little closer to us, allowing for even more views. In fact it was still perching there when we had to make our way back to lunch. We also spotted Harpy Eagle food on our way back to the lodge and at the lodge as well, Red Howler Monkey, Poepigg's Woolly Monkey, Brown Cappuchin Monkey and Common Squirrel Monkeys feeding from the bananas outside the lodge. After lunch we gathered at the bar/observation deck and the skies began getting ominously dark so we waited for the rain to pass. As we waited we spotted White-throated Toucan and a male Plum-throated Cotinga which provided great views in the scope as well as the elegant **Capped Heron**, Black-capped Donacobius, Little Cuckoo, a seemingly nonending stream of Greater Anis, a Sunbittern slowly foraging along the edge of the water and three Red-throated Caracaras moving through with the orange sunset in the background.



Sunset at Sani Lodge © Ernesto Carman

Sani Lodge, Napo River

This morning we were heading out to explore the Napo River and some of its islands and although it was raining during our early breakfast, the rain stopped as soon as we got in the canoe and a marvelous rainbow seemed like a good omen for our day. Our first stop was at a river island where we saw Chestnut-eared Aracari, many Russet-backed and Crested Oropendolas and Yellow-rumped Caciques and one of our targets for this stop, Amazonian Umbrellabird, which we saw two flying across the Napo river with steady, powerful flaps and one remained perched for several minutes where we were able to get good views. We then worked our way down-stream and made a stop on a sandbar and saw a pair of **Roseate Spoonbills**, several Oriole Blackbirds and perched on top of a small tree was a Horned Screamer which was certainly a lifer for all! Our next stop was in the village of Pañacocha where we walkled through the streets and to the fields surrounding the village and saw Southern Lapwing, Cattle Tyrant, Brown-chested Martin, Red-breasted Meadowlark, Wing-barred Seedeater, Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Orange-backed Troupial, White-eared Jacamar, Yellow-bellied Dacnis, Turquoise Tanager and Eastern Wood-Pewee. After a brief rain we began working our way back to the lodge and on our walk to the canoe we saw Little Woodpecker, Olive-faced Flatbill, Yellow-green Vireo, Cream-colored Woodpecker and Purple-throated Fruitcrow, and on our canoe ride we got the best views ever of the elegant **Capped Heron**. After lunch and a siesta we went for a canoe ride through the amazing flooded forests and though it was rather quiet – not atypical for the time of day – we did see Green Kingfisher, Long-billed Woodcreeper, glimpses of Cocha Antshrike and the usual greeting party at the lodge's dock, the Hoatzins and Black-capped Donacobius.



Birding Sani © Ernesto Carman



Capped Heron © Ernesto Carman



Birding Napo River sandbar © Ernesto Carman

Sani Lodge, Yasuní National Park

Once again we had breakfast as the Ferruginous Pygmy-owl and Tropical Screech-Owl gave their last calls for the night and the dawn chorus began with the Sunbittern giving its lone, mournful whistle. We took the canoe out from the lodge and boarded the larger motorized canoe on the Napo River and once again made a stop to catch the rest of the group up on Umbrellabird and after a little wait we spotted one in the upper levels of a giant fig tree and saw another fly across the river. While we waited we also had fantastic views of Orange-winged Parrot and a male **Hook-billed Kite** which posed very nicely in the open for everyone to enjoy. Our next stop was on the south bank of the river where there is a famous embankment where various species of parrots come to feed on the clay, a site known as a clay-lick. Parrots feed on a wide variety of seeds from plants and trees which contain variable amounts of toxins and they ingest this special clay to neutralize these toxins, a sort of parrot-version of Alka-seltzer. We watched as the parrots warily gathered in the trees above the cliff as if inspecting their surroundings for predators, but soon, once the first individuals descended, the rest ensued and an amazing frenzy of greens, yellows and blues ensued. A total of **five species** were present at this clay-lick: Mealy Amazon, Yellow-crowned Amazon, Blue-headed Parrot, Dusky-headed Parakeet and White-eyed Parakeet. As we watched the dozens of parrots the sky grew darker by the minute, in typical rainforest fashion as a wall of rain moved towards us and fortunately we had a covered boat so we did not have to worry about the rain, though this did hinder the rest of our activities for the morning. None-the-less we spotted a family of **Drab Water-Tyrants** catching insects just over the water and a **Ladder-tailed Nightjar** perched on a dry branch on the river's edge. The rain stopped as quickly as it had come and the sun began to shine so we made a stop in the town center of Sani Isla where we saw Piratic Flycatcher, Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, Yellow-headed Caracara, White-banded Swallow and the smallest monkey in the world, the **Western Pygmy-Marmoset**. We returned to the lodge, spotting a White-chinned Jacamar on the way and after lunch and siesta we walked the trails behind the lodge and it was as quiet as expected, but we did get great views of the small Common Scale-backed Antbird.



Western Pygmy Marmoset © Ernesto Carman

Sani Lodge, Antisana National Park and Tambo Condor

Unfortunately it was time to leave Sani Lodge so we had our usual pre-dawn breakfast and made our way back up the Napo River to El Coca where we caught our short flight up to Quito where our good friend José picked us up to take us on our last birding adventure of the tour. We made our first stop at Tambo Condor restaurant for a delicious traditional meal including the creamy soup called *locro de papa* and in the deep canyon in front we spotted an adult male **Andean Condor** soaring at eye-level with its three meter wing span! We also had fantastic scope views after it perched on the cliffs in front of us. After lunch we climbed up to 4000m and the scenery could not have been more impressive as the peak of **Antisana volcano** came into view and provided an amazing background as we watched Andean Condors soaring in the foreground and on the open páramo we found a flock of Andean Ibis foraging among a herd of White-tailed Deer, **Andean Gulls** mobbing the **Carunculated Caracaras** and an old adobe hut inhabited by Chestnut-winged and Stout-billed Cinclodes, Plumbeous Sierra Finch and **Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant**. We returned to Tambo Condor for our last bit of birding and at the feeders we saw several new hummingbirds including **Shining Sunbeam** with its rainbow rump, Great Sapphirewing with its very long and blue wings and our very last lifer, the majestic **Giant Hummingbird**! Tired but happy we made our way to Puembo Birding Garden for our last night and after dinner we said our farewells and hasta pronto!



Birding Antisana © Ernesto Carman



Our group at Paz de las Aves

Grand Ecuador species list (Mar 31 - Apr 16, 2025)