

Ecuador 2009 – Birds and Spanish

With Peru

26th October – 28th November

27th October; Guayaquil, Manglares Churute and Cajas NP (inc. Llaviuqo Lake).

Flights from Bristol via Amsterdam and Bonaire all ran smoothly and after breezing through customs and immigration in Guayaquil I was out into arrivals where Boris Herrera, my guide, was waiting for me. We swiftly loaded up and negotiated our way out of Guayaquil and on our way to the Andes. Passing through the open countryside the roadsides were surprisingly birdy considering how degraded the



habitat looked and many raptors were dominated by Snail Kite although a pair of Great Black-Hawk and White-tailed Kite were also noted as were Wattled Jacana and Great-tailed Grackle however the real highlight was undoubtedly five Horned Screamer (left) perched on top of bushes with some very close to the road. Not only a lifer, these represented a new bird family for me. Boris suggested a short stop at the Manglares Churute reserve along the way as there were several new birds possible for me.

Unfortunately our arrival timed to coincide with a heavy downpour which also had the effect of encouraging multitudinous and aggressive mosquitoes onto the wing. Consequently birding proved very difficult although we did score well with an elusive Jet Antbird however the main target, Pacific Royal-Flycatcher, remained obstinately quiet. Other good birds here included Red-masked Parakeet, Ecuadorian Trogon, White-whiskered Puffbird, Scarlet-backed Woodpecker and Baird's Flycatcher.

With a lot of road to cover ahead of our main target for the day we had to move on soon and considering the savagery of the mosquitoes this was no bad thing. We made one further stop on our way to Cajas National Park on the lower western slopes of the Andes where we encountered a good bird flock roadside however our viewing was somewhat restricted by low cloud reducing visibility to just a few yards at times. In fact some misfortune with the weather was a recurring feature through the day although mercifully this was the only day affected during our time in the south. The highlights of this bird flock were undoubtedly Marble-faced Bristle-Tyrant and Saffron Siskin with Brown Inca, Plumbeous-

backed Thrush and Golden and Flame-faced Tanager (the latter of the distinctive *lunigera* race) providing good support.

We eventually came to the pass in Cajas NP well over 3,000m and dropped down a short way on the other side to a tiny, fragmented patch of *polylepis* forest where the day's main target species was to be expected. It was cold at this altitude and with no acclimatisation I was left a little breathless hurrying



around due to the lack of oxygen. We quickly found some obliging Giant Conebill (above) and then shockingly blue Tit-like Dacnis, a species with a very restricted Ecuadorian range which I had contrived to miss in Peru, before getting brief looks at Many-striped Canastero. We came upon some hummingbirds which were dominated both in numbers and size and aggression by Blue-mantled Thornbill but we also saw at least two beautiful Violet-throated Metaltail, an Ecuadorian endemic with a tiny range and the first of my six main southern Ecuador targets. Strident calls led us to tape out a *subcinereus* race Blackish Tapaculo which was a bit of a surprise but then it began to rain heavily which at this altitude was very cold and so we rushed back to the car and drove on a short way to the park headquarters to pay our fees and take lunch.



Whilst waiting for the rain to clear we added Andean Teal and Carunculated Caracara amongst others. With no sign of the rain clearing we decided to drop down to Llaviucu Lake at lower altitudes which as a plan proved successful as the weather cleared up and we enjoyed some good birding on a loop around the lake in the late afternoon. First up we had a brief look at an Undulated Antpitta before taping out the main target, Ecuadorian Rail (left), from lakeside

vegetation. Other good birds included Mountain Velvetbreast, Sapphire-vented Puffleg, Grey-breasted Mountain-Toucan, Pearled Treerunner, Tufted Tit-Tyrant, Red-crested Cotinga, Grass Wren, Black-crested Warbler, Blue-backed Conebill, Black Flowerpiercer, Rufous-chested Tanager and White-winged Brush-Finch.

After a successful day we still had quite a drive to our lodgings for the night just outside the town of Giron and it was relatively late by the time we settled down for dinner and bed.

28th October; Yunguilla, Cuenca – Loja Road and near Villcabamba.

This day proved the quietest in terms of species numbers of any during my time in Ecuador but did feature probably the rarest species encountered throughout the entire trip. We had a very early breakfast and were on the nearby Yunguilla reserve (owned by the Jocotoco Fundacion) before dawn and searching vainly for Buff-fronted Owl. The habitat was somewhat different from the previous day as we had dropped down to the base of the subtropical zone and at the end of the dry season the sparse woodland was looking very brown indeed.

Once dawn had come it didn't take long to find the main target, the critically endangered and endemic Pale-headed Brush-Finch. With the target in the bag we began to leisurely bird back towards the car adding a few good species on the way, the most surprising of which was a boreal migrant in the form of Yellow Warbler however the obliging performances of four Chestnut-crowned Antpitta and a further pair of Pale-headed Brush-Finch (right) stole the show. The supporting cast included Purple-collared Woodstar, Tawny-crowned Pygmy-Tyrant, Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher, Bran-coloured Flycatcher, Russet-crowned Warbler, Golden-rumped Euphonia and Stripe-headed Brush-Finch.



It was already hot by mid-morning and so we chose to drive slowly back through Giron finding the hoped for Long-billed Starthroat on the way before returning to our hostel to pack for the long drive to Villcabamba. Returning via Cuenca we made a few roadside stops between here and Loja although with time against us we had little chance for any thorough exploration however we did pick up a few new birds including Andean Emerald, Viridian Metaltail, Black-crested Tit-Tyrant, Cinereous Conebill, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager and Rufous-naped Brush-Finch. The highlight however was a very surprising Andean Tinamou (very scarce in Ecuador) in the middle of the road that chose to crouch down as a means of protection as we shuddered to a halt just a few metres away. Eventually commonsense prevailed and the bird walked off the road and away down the hill albeit in no great hurry.



We made good progress on the long drive and near Villcabamba we made a short detour to check some arid scrub in the late afternoon. Birding was quiet however we picked up Golden-olive Woodpecker and Grey-and-white Tyrannulet before chancing upon a beautiful Blue-crowned Motmot (left), another new bird family for me, and we finished up with Elegant Crescentchest although by this time the sand flies were taking their toll leaving us with many nasty bites that persisted for the next couple of

days. As such it was deemed a good time to head to Villcabamba for a full nights rest.

29th October; Cerro Toledo, Tapichalaca and Vallodolid.

We made our way from Villcabamba to nearby Cerro Toledo to arrive just after dawn. The main target species here were expected at the upper edge of the treeline and so we decided to head up the long drive fairly quickly despite passing through some very interesting looking habitat where birds were obviously present. Nonetheless we did stop a couple of times for a few new birds for me including flyover Golden-plumed Parakeet, Blackburnian Warbler, Lacrimose and Black-chested Mountain-Tanager and Pale-naped Brush-Finch whilst we also flushed another Undulated Antpitta from the track.

When we came to the treeline the weather was not the best with a strong wind whipping over the mountain pass and low cloud reducing visibility to just 10 – 20 metres. It was also bitterly cold and after a couple of brief efforts to go birding we decided that there was no way our target species would be active in these conditions and so we headed back down around the shoulder of the mountain to find some protection from the wind but not before finding an obliging Mouse-coloured Thistletail.

Bird activity was high once we found a sheltered spot and it was only a matter of moments before the main target, Neblina Metaltail (right), was lured in for very close views. The other top hummer here, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill followed shortly after however extensive



searching failed to yield the hoped for Masked Mountain-Tanager. Amongst the other birds at higher altitudes were Glowing and Golden-breasted Puffleg, Tyrian Metaltail, Streaked Tuftedcheek, Glossy Flowerpiercer, Golden-crowned Tanager, Hooded Mountain-Tanager, Grey-hooded Bush-Tanager and Black-headed Hemispingus.

With no sign of conditions improving higher up we chose to abandon the search for Masked Mountain-Tanager knowing there would be another chance later on the trip near Quito and so instead we slowly descended the track again stopping every time we encountered bird activity. As is so common in the Andes the birds on the lower slopes were completely different to those at the top. The highlights on the way down were numerous but an incredibly obliging and responsive Ocellated Tapaculo showing to 1m range was the number one. Boris reckoned this was his best ever view of this normally shy and skulking



yet beautiful species. I was also personally enamoured by a male Flame-throated Sunangel hovering a few inches from my face no doubt investigating the bright red spot on my cap, his ridiculously orange throat catching the light perfectly. Other new species included Speckled Hummingbird, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Green-tailed Trainbearer, Long-tailed Sylph, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker (left), White-banded Tyrannulet, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Rufous-breasted and Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant, Streak-throated

Bush-Tyrant, Rufous-tailed Tyrant, Dusky-capped Flycatcher (*atricaps* race), Rufous and Plain-tailed Wren, Capped Conebill, White-sided Flowerpiercer and Blue-capped Tanager,.

Boris identified a raptor overhead as White-rumped Hawk but I felt the combination of pale patches on the outer primaries, a pale tail with thick black subterminal band and narrow white terminal band on an overall very dark bird pointed unequivocally to Black-and-chestnut Eagle. Chased down the hill by a few rogue showers we felt that as it was midday it was time to be moving on to our next location, the Tapichalaca reserve, another Jocotoco foundation reserve and featuring the species that lends its name to the foundation. Tapichalaca itself is a small fragment of the gargantuan Podocarpus National Park but provides an easy access to point to look for many of the parks specialities.

Arriving in the mid-afternoon, Boris thought it was an ideal time to drop down to lower elevations to look for the endemic White-breasted Parakeet. We set up for a while on the roadside and enjoyed a very late packed lunch but it was hot and the only birds evident were a few Swallow-tailed Kite so we drove on a little further downhill until we picked up a decent bird flock containing Streaked Xenops, Streak-necked and Orange-banded Flycatcher, Three-striped Warbler, Silver-backed, Blue-necked, Summer and Black-faced Tanager and Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager.

We continued on further with the intention of passing through Valladolid to search for a few foothill specialists but we found the road closed for maintenance. In the town we added Sierran Elaenia, Marañon Thrush, Yellow-bellied Seedeater and Olivaceous Siskin before climbed back up the mountain to the pass for the last hour or so of daylight. Here we picked up some good new species including a pair of Paramo Seedeater however a few Rufous-capped Thornbill (right) definitely were the highlight. Other



species included Scaly-naped Amazon, Collared Inca and Masked Flowerpiercer. Unfortunately there was no sign of any of the hoped for Golden-plumed Parakeet.

We dropped down to Tapichalaca lodge at dusk just in time to see the last Chestnut-breasted Coronet on the hummingbird feeders and after dinner ventured out to look for nightbirds. We had good views of a couple of Band-winged Nightjar and heard Lyre-tailed Nightjar distantly but the hoped for Owls did not materialise with only Rufous-banded heard and very distantly.

30th October; Quebrada Honda, Tapichalaca and Valladolid.

We left Tapichalaca lodge at dawn to make the long hike to the bottom of Quebrada Honda and back and I have to confess that although we saw some great birds I did not particularly enjoy the morning. The trail was very steep and slippery and difficult to bird from. Boris' advice to bring my scope seemed very poor as there was little opportunity to use it and it became a nuisance along the trail catching in creepers and the like.

We started off well with early sightings of Chusquea Tapaculo, Barred Fruiteater and Buff-bellied Mountain-Tanager. The latter species is vocally and morphologically distinct on either side of the Andes and may well represent two species. A pair of Slate-crowned Antpitta were vocalising near the trail but proved very difficult to see remaining well hidden in the dark recesses of the undergrowth and always moving fast.

On the walk down we picked up a few bird flocks, the largest of which contained many Blue-and-black Tanager as well as Beryl-spangled Tanager, Common Bush-Tanager and Northern Mountain-Cacique. We also had good views of a quadruplet of Turquoise Jay, a pair of Rufous Spinetail and a group of demonstrative but elusive Sepia-brown Wren. Best of all was a pair of Barred Antthrush calling very close to the path and we were lucky to see one bird dash across the trail. This is one of the hardest-to-see species of a particularly difficult group and although both birds remained close as we spent an extensive period of time trying playback we had no further views.

At the bottom of the Quebrada there were a couple of open areas where we added Plain-breasted Hawk, Golden-headed Quetzal and Grass-green Tanager. The highlights though were two of our main targets; four stunning Red-hooded Tanager, a rarely recorded tanager and a single male Bicoloured Antvireo which showed very well in a tangle of vines. Unfortunately there was no sign of Chestnut-crested Cotinga, Dusky Piha, Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia and Masked Saltator which represented



our other, admittedly difficult, targets. The climb back up did not allow easy opportunities for birding but we did add Andean Toucanet near the start.

We were pretty tired by the time we returned to the lodge for lunch. The hummingbird feeders were very active and dominated by Chestnut-breasted Coronet (left) and Collared Inca with lesser numbers of Amethyst-throated and Flame-throated Sunangel, Long-tailed Sylph and White-bellied Woodstar.

After lunch we had good looks at a Black-throated Tody-Tyrant in the lodge garden before driving back down the hill towards Valladolid again.

We started off with another look at the White-breasted Parakeet nestboxes but as it was the non-breeding season no birds were present although the local guide reckoned they roosted in the boxes so we planned to return late in the afternoon. With little else to see we drove on through Valladolid to some remnant patches of forest on the other side of the valley. The habitat here was slightly different and at a significantly lower elevation we were soon picking up new birds despite the afternoon heat. These included Ash-browed Spinetail, Montane Woodcreeper, Plumbeous-crowned and White-tailed Tyrannulet, Olive-striped Flycatcher, Barred Becard, Citrine Warbler and a nice range of Tanagers including Saffron-crowned, Golden-eared (right) and Golden-naped. Perhaps the highlight was a male Cerulean Warbler, this globally threatened species visits Ecuador in small numbers in winter from its North American breeding quarters.



Well satisfied with our haul we made our way back up the mountain pausing for me to photograph a Black-faced Tanager next to the road. This turned out to be a very good move as suddenly speeding past us was a nine-strong squadron of our exquisite target, the endemic White-breasted Parakeet. Alas they

were gone before we could really enjoy them and a fruitless localised search suggested they had flown some way further on.



We continued to the area where the Parakeet nestboxes were but were now hampered by a thunder shower however we did well to pull in a fabulous pair of White-capped Tanager from a long way away with playback for very close views. This, the largest of the Tanagers, looks a bit and sounds a lot like a Jay and is a real avian oddity. Whilst Boris and I were enjoying these our local guide began calling excitedly as the Parakeets had come into roost (left). We scrambled down the slope and enjoyed the same nine performing their pre-roost ablutions in the pouring rain and

fading light before eventually they flew to one of the nestboxes and all piled in. Back at the car the White-capped Tanagers were still going berserk looking for their intruder. What an end to the afternoon!

A little late we set off from the lodge on foot back to the pass above Quebrada Honda to look for Andean Potoo at a favoured location, we were a bit late in arriving and there was no sign of the bird when we arrived however a bit of playback however got a response from some distance away. Unfortunately although the bird did come closer it remained invisible and we were forced to give up and return to the lodge for a late dinner.

31st October; Jocotoco feeders (Tapichalaca), Yangana and El Dorado – Yankuam Lodge.

We had a slightly leisurely start to the day after the exertions of the previous day but still made the short drive up the hill to the Jocotoco Antpitta feeding area just after dawn. We had a 1km walk to make over a two hour period before our appointment with the legendary Jocotoco however bird activity was relatively slow. We did however find a couple of White-throated Quail-Dove, White-capped Parrot, a very obliging Rufous Antpitta (right) in full view on the path, a



pair of *latrans* race Blackish Tapaculo, Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant and Black-capped Hemispingus.

We settled in just after 8am and the local guide began to call up the Jocotoco Antpitta. A bit of background first. Antpittas are a neotropical bird family, generally sombrely coloured but beautifully patterned, they are amongst the most sought after of neotropical birds however many species are shy and retiring preferring to remain in the dark undergrowth of forest floors and even with playback can be difficult to see. Step forward Angel Paz, a farmer from the Choco endemic bird area in northern Ecuador (and southern Colombia) who, somehow 'trained' a Giant Antpitta on his land to come to his calls and



whistles in return for worms. Subsequently Angel Paz went on to train other Antpittas and other species of birds to come to him allowing birders unique opportunities to view these otherwise difficult species. Angel went on to train people in other places to in turn train their own birds. The Jocotoco Antpitta was discovered as recently as 1997 and occupies a small niche in southern Ecuador and northern Peru. It is one of the largest and most beautiful Antpittas with a unique colour scheme and indeed the Jocotoco Fundacion was initially formed to protect this species.

Meanwhile our local guide was busy whistling and calling "Panchito" and it wasn't long before Panchito (left) appeared silently just a few feet in front of us and began to despatch the fat worms offered to him. His mate Bevi also soon appeared to join in the spellbinding half-hour performance. Unfortunately the other species of Antpitta that occasionally comes in to be fed, Chestnut-naped, did not

materialise as Panchito and Bevi had young and were very aggressive at the time.

After the show it was time to hurry back to the lodge to pack for the long drive ahead. There was time to take some more photos at the hummingbird feeders and we were surprised to see a Fawn-breasted Brilliant come in. We scheduled a bit of time to stop at the village of Yangana on the way and a few stops yielded three of the hoped for Loja Hummingbird (a recent split from *Amazilia*) but no sign of Loja Tyrannulet. Also seen in this area were a pair of Pacific Pygmy-Owl (right) and Highland Hepatic-Tanager. Also of note here was the presence of both the plain *qauesita* and white wing-patched bluer *coelestis* races of Blue-grey Tanager apparently existing sympatrically suggesting the possibility for a future split.



After Yangana we had long drive back to Loja and then onto Zamora and beyond. A quick stop for a packed lunch between Loja and Zamora proved fruitless and we were on the road again. An Amazon Kingfisher on roadside wires just beyond Zamora was the only noteworthy sighting. Once we turned off the tarmac road heading toward Yankuam we had a chance to make a few stops in the late afternoon. We were now very much in the foothills on the east side of the Andes and below 1,000m for the first time since day one and consequently new birds flowed thick and fast.

The first roadside stop yielded Glittering-throated Emerald, Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, Forest and Mottle-backed Elaenia, Common Tody-Flycatcher, a trio of Black-tailed Tityra, Black-billed Thrush, Silver-



beaked Tanager, Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch, Black-and-white and Chestnut-bellied Seedeater, Crested Oropendola and Orange-backed Troupial. A stop in the village of El Dorado brought us yet more birds including White-eyed Parakeet, Lined Antshrike, White-thighed Swallow, Thrush-like Wren, Yellow-bellied Dacnis and Palm Tanager

Just beyond the turn off to Yankuam Lodge we stopped at a stakeout for the scarce Black-billed Seed-Finch and were immediately

rewarded with a male; also here was a single White-banded Swallow. Further along the track to Yankuam we added Violaceous Jay and Swallow-Tanager. The final stretch to the lodge was conducted in darkness but this proved useful as we flushed both Pauraque and Blackish Nightjar from the track ahead of us. A quick search for nightbirds along the bank of the Nangaritza River just beyond the lodge before

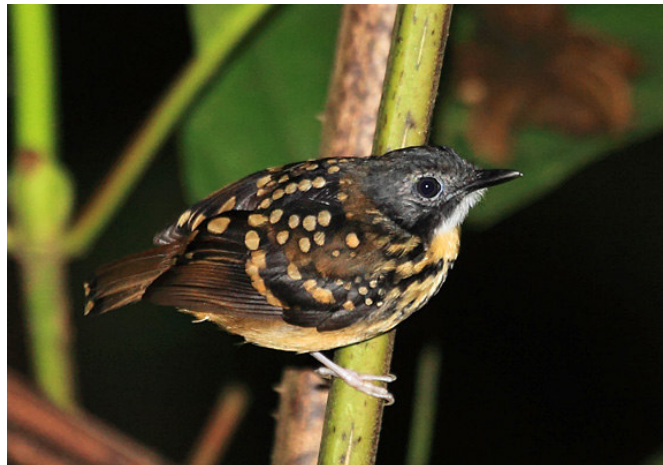
dinner yielded more Blackish Nightjar (above) however calling Common Potoo remained obstinately distant.

1st November; Yankuam Lodge, Nangaritza River and Shaime.

The day turned out to be spectacular and memorable with bird activity high throughout and a number of really special species encountered. We breakfasted in the grey light of dawn before jumping into our large motorised canoe and negotiating our way around 10km upstream along the Nangaritza River to the village of Shaime. The river passed through spectacular steep gullies replete with verdant forest, a few tricky rapids and a strong current meant the journey took around an hour. There weren't so many birding opportunities along the river but we nonetheless had a brief look at our main target on this stage of the day in the form of a Wattled Guan that flew across the river but instantly disappeared. Other birds noted included more standard riverine fare such as Black Caracara, Speckled Chachalaca, Spotted Sandpiper, Green Kingfisher, Torrent Tyrannulet, Black Phoebe, Buff-rumped Warbler and Russet-backed Oropendola. I also saw a Capybara swimming in the river before scrambling up the bank and away from danger, it became my 200th mammal species.

Once ashore it was clear that even in the village birds were numerous with Green Honeycreeper, Black-faced Dacnis, Paradise, Blue-necked and Bay-headed Tanager very obvious, Blue-headed Parrot were flying over and we found more Black-billed Seed-Finch in marshy grassed patches before pulling in a pair of Dark-breasted Spinetail with playback. We began to make our way along the rather muddy trail towards the main target species, Orange-throated Tanager. The trail was remarkably muddy and at times difficult to negotiate, especially considering it was the end of the dry season! Orange-throated Tanager was a major thorn in my conscience after spending three days unsuccessfully searching for it in Peru. Subsequently the species was found in Ecuador at Shaime and was supposedly much more reliable and easy to see here so my confidence was high.

What I hadn't expected was that we would have so many distractions that it would take all morning to get to the best area for the Tanagers. We encountered our first flock immediately after leaving the village in the first decent forest patch. It contained some very good birds including Black-and-white Tody-Flycatcher and White-browed and Spot-backed Antbird (right) and Peruvian Warbling-Antbird with Red-stained Woodpecker and Purple Honeycreeper providing a good supporting cast and we also had nice views of Pale-tailed Barbthroat.



In a small adjacent clearing we found a very confusing hummingbird which remained unidentified as well as a few Tanagers including Yellow-bellied and Green-and-gold and Yellow-green Vireo. Just across the path we could hear White-bearded Manakin calling and so we crawled into the forest for good views of a responsive male. Antbirds were calling very close by but Boris was confused by the call as it matched nothing from his Birds of Ecuador selection. Boris remained convinced that we had discovered a new species for Ecuador but the birds at the time responded to both playback of Spot-winged and Slate-coloured Antbird and the individuals I saw and photographed appeared to match Spot-winged Antbird, although maybe there was more than one species present... Also present in this patch of forest were Ornate Flycatcher and Canada Warbler.

Having already used up a couple of hours of the morning it was time to try and make some progress although this proved difficult as there were many distractions even in the more degraded areas. We added Hook-billed and Plumbeous Kite, Roadside Hawk, Grey-rumped Swift, Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Long-tailed Tyrant, Piratic Flycatcher and Scarlet Tanager. There were many Wood-Pewee species around and although Western Wood-Pewee is the default species in this area this boreal migrant can only be safely separated from its Eastern counterpart by call however Boris was able to point out occasional calling birds to clinch identification of at least a few birds.

We came to a nice fruiting tree which was very busy with Tanagers including Blue Dacnis and we also added Swainson's Thrush here. We marked it as a spot to spend some time on the return walk before hurrying on. The next distraction came in the form of a calling White-breasted Wood-Wren which remained obstinately hidden however we had plenty of compensation in the form of a Coraya Wren party, Golden-winged Tody-Flycatcher and an untickable glimpse of Black-tailed Flycatcher.

It was amazingly late morning by the time we arrived at the base of the Tanager hill and despite Boris' assurances that the birds were active all day I was a little concerned that the best of the day had passed and we had still not even looked for the number one target. At the base of the hill Boris saw a Lemon-throated Barbet and whilst I searched in vain for the bird I was rewarded with a smart Black-eared Fairy. The climb up the hill was a little steep and slippery and required concentration to negotiate and so we encountered few birds however once on top the terrain levelled out and my fears became unfounded as there in the first flock was a super stunning Orange-throated Tanager. After four years of waiting I had my bird, and what a bird, a very large Tanager with dark metallic blue upperparts and a shocking orange-red throat. The sighting meant also that I had completed my set of six main target species in the south successfully.



But there was not time to rest on our laurels yet. We soon encountered another pair of Orange-throated Tanager in a large flock that also contained Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Pygmy Antwren, Long-tailed Antbird and Golden-headed Manakin before running into a very large ant swarm. Antbirds could be heard calling and we crawled into the forest to enjoy great views of the spectacular punk White-plumed Antbird and the more understated but far rarer Hairy-crested Antbird (left). It was deemed time for lunch which we took overlooking a clearing but failed to add any other birds.

After lunch we intended to walk a little further along the trail and maybe visit the nearby Oilbird cave but we soon ran into another flock containing Plain Xenops, Long-tailed Woodcreeper, Olive-sided Flycatcher and Tawny-crowned Greenlet. The ant swarm was still present in the area and yielded Black-faced Antbird and White-flanked Antwren in the afternoon. With birds all around it proved impossible to move very far and we chose instead of walking further to instead slowly retrace our steps and in this way added Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Rufous-tailed Foliage-gleaner, Zimmer's Flatbill and Slate-coloured Grosbeak before dropping off the plateau having seen a fabulous array of species.

Although birds were undoubtedly less active through the open areas in the afternoon we still picked up Greater Yellow-headed Vulture and Blue-winged Parrotlet overhead. We walked somewhat quicker and didn't really see much more until returning to the fruiting tree where activity was still high. Once again Tanagers were dominating and we added some new ones including Turquoise and Opal-rumped, as well as Olivaceous Greenlet, White-vented and White-lored Euphonia, Greyish Saltator and another Golden-headed Manakin whilst both Scaled and Ruddy Pigeon were noted flying over.

From here it was a fairly short and uneventful walk back to Shaime to catch our canoe back to Yankuam lodge at 5:30pm. We did add a Grey-fronted Dove that shot across the trail in front of us but little else. The journey back down the Nangaritza was not productive as with the strong current with us we were travelling too fast. An amazing day with 104 species seen (by me, Boris also saw a couple of others) that included some high quality species very seldom seen.

2nd November; Yankuam, Paquisha (Cordillera del Condor) and Copalinga.

After the previous day a morning walk on the other side of the river from Yankuam Lodge through degraded forest suggested an anticlimax and at first that was how it appeared. We picked up Masked Tanager in the lodge garden before departing and a pair of Amazonian Umbrellabird immediately after landing was followed by a perched Crane Hawk and then Grey-chinned Hermit albeit briefly but there was no sign of any flocks. We did manage to pull in a Rusty-fronted Tody-Flycatcher with playback for nice views.

We walked on a bit further and suddenly we were in the midst of a large flock. The birds were quite different to the previous day as so often can be the case in the Amazon and we were immediately seeing new birds like Little Woodpecker, Orange-fronted Pluchcrown, Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Yellow-cheeked Becard and Blackpoll Warbler. A calling Trogon eventually was pinned down to a Blue-headed Trogon and amazingly on playback this bird and an Amazonian White-tailed Trogon (right) both came in for close views.



Tanagers were well represented and diligent searching yielded a couple of new ones in the form of Yellow-throated and Fulvous-crested.

Amazingly the flock continued to morph and change and new species kept passing through such that we added Golden-collared Toucanet and Smoky-brown Woodpecker whilst very pleasing for Boris especially was a Lineated Woodcreeper – a new species in Ecuador for him. We saw another brief Black-tailed Flycatcher and this time I saw just about enough features to clinch the identification. Throughout the time spent with the flock Boris had been continually pointing out the calls of Purplish Jacamar but without a recording we had little chance of finding the birds but then at the last they were calling close by and it was just a few moments before we located them. With our canoe back to the lodge due at 8:30am we had to walk away from the flock knowing there may still have been birds we were missing. Despite the fast-paced gallop down the hill we had time to pause and admire a Moriche Oriole perched on a dead palm trunk.

Back at the lodge I hastily packed to allow a bit of time in the garden especially looking at the hummingbird feeders whilst Boris settled our accounts. The feeders themselves were very disappointing with only a single Grey-breasted Sabrewing coming in briefly. A Green Hermit also briefly visited flowers

in the garden whilst a Lafresnaye's Piculet was a little more obliging. By far the best bird though was a scarce Blackish Pewee perched in the canopy of a large tree nearby.

It was just a short drive to our next birding stop at Paquisha in the Cordillera del Condor. The Cordillera del Condor is an interesting area, geographically isolated from the Central Cordillera of the Andes it has until recently received very little ornithological coverage however several new species for Ecuador have recently been discovered there including some previously thought of as Peruvian endemics such as Royal Sunangel and of course Orange-throated Tanager. Further exploration will no doubt yield even more new discoveries.

The drive up on a rough track passed through open degraded habitat but we added Olive-chested Flycatcher and White-lined Tanager nonetheless. It was late morning by the time we came to some decent forest patches but bird activity was still good in places. First we pulled in a responsive Northern White-crowned Tapaculo for good views in some dense streamside vegetation. There were many hummingbirds active in the more open areas near the top and we were especially fortunate to locate a stunning and aggressive male Napo Sabrewing and a rather more sombre but equally scarce female



Amethyst Woodstar. The latter provided a bit of an identification headache as it morphologically it appeared more like a White-bellied Woodstar and it took Boris a lot of time to convince me it had to be Amethyst Woodstar based upon range. Other more standard fare in hummingbirds included Green Violetear (left), Golden-tailed Sapphire and Bronzy Inca although the latter also represented a good record for the Cordillera del Condor.

We picked up a fine male Red-headed Barbet before encountering an active flock at the end of the track, mostly consisting of Tanagers we added a few new ones including Fawn-breasted, Orange-eared, Spotted and White-winged Tanager and Ashy-throated Bush-Tanager however the real prize was a Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, a real speciality of the area. By the middle of the day it was hot and relatively birdless so we descended once more and took a late lunch in the village of Paquisha.

We then drove back to Zamora and stopped in the town to check several flowering Inga trees, a favourite of hummingbirds. Unfortunately it was windy, dusty and noisy and I didn't particularly take pleasure in the location so we did not stay long enough to find our target bird, male Festive Coquette, however a female Little Woodstar was excellent compensation.

From Zamora it was just a short drive to our final overnight stop at Copalinga Lodge. Here we were greeted by the effusive Belgian owner, Katherine. In the car park a female Spangled Coquette was feeding in the Verbena. The unfortunate news was that the lodge grounds themselves were relatively quiet as most birds had ascended to higher levels to breed and the domineering Green Violetears were keeping more interesting hummers away from the feeders. Katherine showed us to our very comfortable cabins and I had a Green-and-gold Tanager nesting right outside mine.



On the walk back to the car park I had added Slaty-capped Shrike-Vireo and we both saw a brief Bronze-green Euphonia. Boris suggested in the last light of the day we try the entrance to the nearby Bombuscerio reserve (once more back in the Podocarpus NP) for a couple of local specialities. Time was very much against us so it was fortunate we knew the right spots to play the tapes and we soon had a fine pair of Coppery-chested Jacamar (above) and a single Black-streaked Puffbird. At dusk on the drive back to the lodge we had three obliging Blackish Nightjar in the road to round off yet another fine day's birding.

3rd November; Old Zamora Road, Copalinga and Catamayo.

With a late afternoon flight back to Quito from Loja (Catamayo) the final day in the south was to be little more than a half day although as afternoon's had often be quite quiet we were still getting the best of the day. I was quite happy to potter around Copalinga for the morning trying to get photos and looking for either of the Sicklebill species that were occasionally feeding on the Heliconias in the garden. Boris however suggested it would be far more productive in terms of new species to head up to the Old Zamora (to Loja) road and bird the fragmented forest there. It turned out to be a very good decision.

We started the morning over breakfast with a Sickle-winged Guan in the half-light before flushing three Grey-fronted Dove from the track just outside the Copalinga entrance for much improved views than those at Shaime. We added Blue-black Grassquit from the car before our first stop along the Old Zamora road which yielded the scarce Olive Finch however the birds responded very fast and briefly to playback and the views were somewhat unsatisfactory. More obliging was a White-capped Dipper on the stream here.

Our next stop yielded another large flock with an array of species including some good new ones such as Equatorial Graytail, Ecuadorian Tyrannulet, Spectacled Bristle-Tyrant and Chestnut-vented Conebill with Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Black-and-white Becard, Grey-mantled Wren and Guira Tanager lending yet

more new species to the trip total. I was also pleased to catch up with Violet-headed Hummingbird here as they were rather irregular visitors to Copalinga at the time.

With the first flock exhausted we moved further along the road checking remnant forest patches as we went and in this way added Slaty-capped Flycatcher and most pleasingly an apparently territorial Violet-fronted Brilliant. This represented another species which I had expected to see at Copalinga only to be told they had departed for higher altitudes to breed. We also added a pair of very vocal Blackish Antbird which showed well in trackside secondary scrub. Rather surprisingly we also located a pair of White-collared Peccary feeding in the thick undergrowth, their pungent odour and low grunting giving them away.

Mid-morning we found a large flock in an open area and we quickly located a shocking Vermilion



Tanager, a good indication that this flock might offer our main target and after a bit of playback Boris announced the presence of the much sought-after (at least for us) Blue-browed Tanager (left). Fortunately the flock was on the down slope side of the track and we were able to get excellent views of the birds and many photos. Golden-faced Tyrannulet was probably the highlight of the many additional species present but we also added Golden-crowned Flycatcher too.

It was getting hot now and we struggled to find birds further along the track and eventually decided to give up and head back to Copalinga. The drive back was punctuated by four distant flying White-breasted Parakeet whilst singletons of Green Jay and Magpie Tanager gave rather better views. Back at Copalinga it was really hot however a female Wire-crested Thorntail (below) was coming to Verbena in the car park. I staked out the Heliconia for an hour before lunch but unfortunately no Sicklebills came in. Over lunch a couple of Thick-billed Euphonia came in to the bananas at the feeding station but little else was moving.

After lunch I packed and we bid farewell to our host before driving back to Zamora and onto Loja and Catamayo (the location of Loja Airport) some 20 miles further beyond. We arrived at the airport with about an hour to spare and Boris suggested birding some arid scrub nearby. In this way we added a few new species to the trip list including Superciliated Wren, White-browed Gnatcatcher, Drab Seedeater, Ash-



breasted Sierra-Finch, Tumbes Sparrow and Collared Warbling-Finch but not the hoped for last ditch attempt at Loja Tyrannulet. The sand flies were out once again but a breeze kept them from becoming too horrendous. Nonetheless it seemed prudent to get to the airport with plenty of time before my flight back to Quito.

It had been a fantastically successful eight days in the south conducted at an intense pace with a lot of driving time. I had personally seen 408 species of which 147 were new, not to mention two new bird families. All six of the main targets had been seen very well and in most cases also well photographed. Numerous secondary targets had been connected with and of course there were any number of surprise additions too.

7th November; Antisana, Papallacta and Guango Lodge.

After just three days of intensive Spanish study I was already very much looking forward to a weekend break. Boris picked me up from the school at 6:30am. We were in no great hurry as we were heading up to the open Paramo near the impressive mountain of Antisana. At the altitudes we were going to bird, activity does not really get going till mid-morning.

Once we were up into the restricted zone around the mountain we began to make various roadside stops. The first was at a well-known spot for Black-tailed Trainbearer and it took no time at all to find an adult female and immature male. We continued on up the road until we reached a spot Boris knew for the localised Streak-backed Canastero however although playback got several birds calling they remained obstinately out of view, there were however many Black-winged Ground-Dove in evidence. We moved on again getting our first good looks at Carunculated Caracara before stopping at a bridge where we quickly found a nice pair of Andean Tit-Spinetail, our first female Ecuadorian Hillstar (the main target species at Antisana) and Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant.

Our next stop was on the open Paramo around an abandoned shed which sheltered at least three Ecuadorian Hillstar nests. Many birds were in evidence and we had good looks at Stout-billed Miner and our first Paramo Ground-Tyrant whilst a pair of Aplomado Falcon shot by as we left. As we progressed



we made a couple of stops to admire and photograph the impressive peaks of Ruminhua, Antisana (left) and Cotopaxi, the latter two topped with glaciers and snow, all three bathed in glorious sunshine, a rarity in these areas. We also came across another four Aplomado Falcon including two apparently recently fledged young.

Boris felt the absence of grazing sheep and cows on the Paramo might make finding

Black-faced Ibis and Andean Condor very difficult but we soon came upon a singleton of the former. It is represented here by the race *brancki* and a likely split as Ecuadorian Ibis as it is geographically isolated from Peruvian populations. Also in this area were Baird's Sandpiper and Andean Gull and we saw our first Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle nearby.



The final drive towards the base of Antisana at 4,600m saw us add Andean Lapwing and Paramo Pipit along the roadside before we came to an area of shrubs covered in bright orange flowers and here we treated to stunning views of the impossibly purple-headed male Ecuadorian Hillstar (above). With these in the bag we retraced our steps noting a couple of distant soaring Andean Condor. We made a second stop for Streak-backed Canastero and this time were a fraction more fortunate and got a couple of rather brief flight views.

We had a fairly short drive onto Papallacta where we began our exploration of the area by picking up a Tawny Antpitta on the track in front of the car. A strategic lunch stop was enlivened with White-chinned Thistletail, Paramo Tapaculo and Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, the first two brought in with playback for good views. The elfin forest was however rather quiet in the strong sunshine and so we decided to head up to the very top area around the radio masts for perhaps the number one target in the area.

Well above 4,000m again it was tough going walking over the uneven terrain looking for our quarry and it was made more unpleasant by a strong wind. Fortunately it was the start of the breeding season and



some exploratory playback yielded an immediate response and we were soon enjoying very close views of a fabulous pair of Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe (left). This had been a major priority species for me, not only because they are a stunning bird, but also because I had searched extensively in both Peru and Argentina for them without success.

Unfortunately it was very dry on the Paramao and not deemed good for the hoped for Andean Snipe so we dropped down to try for

better views of Tawny Antpitta which remained obstinately unresponsive however we did get great looks at Many-striped Canastero. In the late afternoon we decided to descend down to Guango Lodge for the night and spend the remainder of the light enjoying the amazing hummingbird feeders there.

We weren't to be disappointed with thirteen species of hummingbird recorded in just one hour. We easily saw one of the main target species here, Tourmaline Sunangel, however Gorgeted Woodstar was much more difficult. Three individuals were recorded but all made very brief visits only. Also new for me was Buff-fronted Starfrontlet and Buff-tailed Comet however the close-up



encounters with Sword-bellied Hummingbird (above) almost inevitably stole the show.

It was with some effort that we dragged ourselves the short distance down to the river to 'twitch' Torrent Duck but we were very glad we did as a trio of two females and a male put on an amazing show displaying vigorously in and out of the raging torrent at incredibly close range; a brilliant end to a brilliant day.

8th November; Guango Lodge, Papallacta and Cumbaya.

We were up early and breakfasted to return to Papallacta to search for the remaining key species there. Unfortunately all did not go to plan and when we arrived at the gated entrance we were refused entry by the security guard as apparently there had been a number of fires recently on the Paramo. We pleaded with him but the best he could offer was that we might be allowed to walk (rather than drive) up at 8:30am only!



We had little option other than to drop back down to the lodge area and see if we could find some of the few remaining target species we needed in that area. In this way we were fortunate to collect nice views of both Slaty-backed Chat-Tyrant (left) and Slaty Brush-Finch whilst we were also pleased to see a single Andean and a pair of Sickle-winged Guan and White-crested Elaenia was new for the trip.

We returned to the reserve entrance at 8:30am and the attendant in the interpretation centre had a word with the security guard and we were soon driving up to our target areas. Although at least we had been granted permission to drive up we had missed the best couple of hours of the day and when we arrived at the location of the recently discovered Crescent-faced Antpitta (recently discovered in this area that is) there was no sign of the bird despite extensive playback.

We pushed on up to highest forest and our mood soon improved as we immediately located the prime target in the form of a pair of stunning Masked Mountain-Tanager (right). They proved to be part of a flock that also contained Black-backed Bush-Tanager, another of our targets, whilst a couple of female Great Sapphirewing in the area was most welcome.



With the highest elevation species in the bag we began to drive slowly back down the hill listening for calls as we went. We found a fine Purple-backed Thornbill but generally the flocks were slow and it took some effort before we finally came up with Agile Tit-Tyrant (below). We took the decision to head back to Guango to check the hummingbird feeders for our final hummer, Mountain Avocetbill, either side of lunch.



The period before lunch failed to yield the hardest and most erratic of the areas hummers but almost immediately after lunch I had brief looks at a single bird that came in very quickly and evaporated even faster. Elated at completely all our hummer targets we bid goodbye to the splendid lodge to try Papallacta Lake. Again the flocks were slow but we did succeed in finding three White-browed Spinetail which was the main target

here.

We returned to the elfin forest high up at Papallacta where we had lunched the previous day and slowly descended back to the main Quito road along the old gravel track however we barely saw a bird the whole way and at the bottom we decided to head back to Quito early and check the suburb of Cumbaya for a few additional species. Here we picked up the hoped for Western Emerald easily but there was no sign of the apparently seasonal Brown Violetear. I was back at the school residence before dark after a pretty satisfactory weekend despite the inconveniences and lack of bird flocks on the Sunday.

13th November; Quito – San Isidro.

Boris collected me from the school at 4pm and we battled our way out of the city through heavy traffic. There were few birds to note on the journey to San Isidro, some 2.5 hours east, and we did not have time for any birding stops however a group of Band-tailed Pigeon were noted flying over. We arrived at San Isidro a bit too late to make the planned excursion up to Guacamayos Ridge for Andean Potoo and so instead looked for Owls around the lodge grounds after dinner. Several Rufous-banded Owl were calling but although we got close to one individual it remained resolutely concealed. Strangely there was no sign of the resident Black-banded Owl either.

14th November; Guacamayos, Loreto Road and San Isidro.

We had an early breakfast and arrived at the pass on the Guacamayos Ridge at dawn and began to bird down the trail. The first flock of the day contained the main target species, Greater Scythebill, but the views were a little brief and distant. We continued to encounter small bird flocks adding Tawny-bellied Hermit, Booted Racket-tail, Sulphur-bellied Tyrannulet, Variegated Bristle-Tyrant and Rufous-breasted Flycatcher however a common theme was the presence of numerous new species calling but not responding to playback. It was a rather frustrating experience and was to be often replicated throughout the weekend.



We did entice in both Grey-breasted Wood-Wren and Chestnut-breasted Wren but by 9am the flock activity was dying rapidly and we decided to return to the car and bird down the

road on the east slope of the ridge. On the way back we found a pair of Grass-green Tanager (above) nest-building and it seems that the start of the nesting season was largely responsible for the difficult birding conditions.

The situation was not much better as we continued down the road making frequent stops wherever we could hear bird activity. Fortunately a pair of White-tailed Hillstar were present in their favoured spot and lower down we added Black-billed Peppershrike, Bluish Flowerpiercer and Rufous-crested Tanager.

Such was the paucity of birds however that we soon found ourselves working along the Loreto Road in the eastern foothills. We found a nice flock at the start of the road which yielded Montane Foliage-gleaner, Olive-backed Woodcreeper and, most surprisingly, American Redstart. It was very hot along the Loreto Road and activity was fairly low. We continued with roadside Cliff Flycatcher and a further decent flock yielded Blue-naped Chlorophonia and Yellow-throated Bush-Tanager.



We finished along the Loreto Road by taking a turning onto a gravel track, it was easier to drive slowly and scan for birds here and we picked up Squirrel Cuckoo and White-breasted Wood-Wren but little else. In the late afternoon we birded back up the road towards the Guacamayos Ridge and added Black-capped Tanager and Short-billed Bush-Tanager and had great views of Sumaco Volcano (above) as the sun went down.

On the ridge we had excellent views of Rufous-bellied Nighthawk and Swallow-tailed Nightjar but the hoped for Andean Potoo remained silent; additionally a calling White-throated Screech-Owl was unresponsive to playback. We tried the road west of San Isidro for Rufescent Screech-Owl with no luck although we did spotlight a Lyre-tailed Nightjar on the roadside cutting. Back at the lodge there was once again no sign of either Black-banded or Rufous-banded Owl.

15th November; San Isidro, Bermeja and Rio Guango.

We started out on a trail from the cabins at San Isidro before dawn to ensure we were in position for Wattled Guan. We got close to a calling bird at dawn and had a few flyover silhouette views but the bird always perched out of sight. There was reasonable activity along the trail after dawn and we soon added a pair of Andean Cock-of-the-Rock and Crested Quetzal. A Long-tailed Tapaculo was seen on the side of the trail without playback and we also did well to add Tyrannine Woodcreeper and Bronze-olive Pygmy-Tyrant.

We returned back to the lodge for a late breakfast where many birds were still feeding on the unfortunate moths and other insects attracted to the lights during the night. We were too late to see some of the more unusual species which frequently hunt here but we did add Pale-edged Flycatcher and right by the lodge we had stunning views of a pair of the scarce Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia (next



page). We add to gulp down the end of breakfast in a hurry when we were told the lodge staff were going out to feed the White-bellied Antpitta. It didn't take long for the bird to come into the juicy worms offered on the path and we had fabulous views.

After breakfast we birded beyond the lodge along the continuation of the entrance track. We soon found two calling Highland Motmot and managed to manoeuvre one individual into

a position where we could see it. We then followed a steep trail up the hillside on foot and found a very large flock with an interesting suite of species including as many as four Crested Quetzal! However the only new species we could find were Pale-eyed Thrush and Subtropical Cacique. Also most welcome was a pair of soaring Barred Hawk, a local specialty, we had good views of them through gaps in the canopy with very nice light.

We continued to the top of the trail where there was a good vantage point over the forest but little bird activity. As it was late morning and getting hot again we decided to return to the lodge and watch the hummingbird feeders. There were no new species here but I was able to get a few photos including Fawn-breasted Brilliant (right) and Bronzy Inca.



We had lunch and decided to head back up to the Guacamayos Ridge. Unfortunately the cloud cloaking the ridge that had suggested cool and promising birding conditions when viewed from San Isidro turned out to be something much more sinister. We had progressed only a few yards along the trail and had stopped to admire a rare *Cecilia* (a legless amphibian around 50cm long and pale blue in colour) when the heavens opened and we were drenched in a torrential Amazonian downpour and pelted by marble-sized hailstones.

We gave the storm a little time but it showed no signs of abating and so we descended back towards San Isidro and tried the Bermeja area, we encountered a flock here containing Black-eared Hemispingus however the flock was distant and largely obscured. Additionally the weather had caught us up again and followed us as we drove back towards Quito. We bypassed a plan to bird the Baeza area as it was raining here too and we were close to Guango Lodge again just before dark when the rain finally stopped and we could bird for a few minutes along a steep trail in good forest next to the road.

We immediately found a nice Bar-bellied Woodpecker but time and light was against us and no other birds were added here. It was a high note to finish a rather mixed weekend on. I had still got 21 lifers but had heard a similar number of potential new species that all remained out of view.

20th November; Bellavista Lodge.

My former guide in Peru, Roger Ahlman, picked me up from the school at 4pm and we battled our way out of Quito and onwards on the relatively short drive to Bellavista Lodge in the Tandayapa Valley for a



two night stay. Over the weekend we would be birding the northwest slopes of the Andes on the edge of the Choco endemic bird region and it promised a lot of potential new species for me.

No birds of note were seen on the journey however after dinner we went out to the car park to spotlight a superb Common Potoo which was hunting moths attracted to the lights from a bamboo stump. A few photos were taken (left)

and after a number of failed attempts on this trip I finally had caught up with my first member of the Potoo family.

21st November; Bellavista area, Tony Nunnery's property and Milpe.

Rather surprisingly the lodge staff overslept so there was no sign of our prearranged 5:30am breakfast.

Roger and I headed up the road to start birding however the hoped for Tanager Finch was unresponsive. However we did quickly find Masked Trogon (right), the near-endemic Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan and Dusky Bush-Tanager as recompense.



We went back to the lodge for a late breakfast and had a quick look at the hummingbird feeders where new species included Gorgeted Sunangel and Purple-throated Woodstar. Another new bird family for me was the

monotypic Toucan Barbet although the views of this colourful and charismatic species were a little disappointing. Many swifts were overhead and some unfamiliar calls led us to identify a few Spot-fronted Swift, a lifer for Roger, this is a scarce but probably much overlooked and hard to identify

species. Also passing over was a brief Bat Falcon and outside the dining room a smart Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch was hopping along the path.

We went back up the hill after breakfast to try a spot where White-faced Nunbird had been seen recently but alas no sign. However we had a group of three splendid Powerful Woodpecker, which rather bizarrely contained two males, as well as Red-eyed Vireo and Metallic-green Tanager amongst others in a decent mixed flock. Also overhead were as many as forty Spot-fronted Swift.

In the late morning we drove down to just beyond the lodge to visit Tony Nunnery's property, along the way stopping to admire a trio of Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Tony purchased an area of cow pasture 11 years previously and set about reforesting the area with his wife. They live a slightly bizarre lifestyle with no electricity, no telephone and no car and are strict vegans. However their program of reforestation has been massively successful and the property teems with birds, they have recorded 391 species there in the last 11 years. The highlight is definitely the multitudinous hummingbird feeders however the

house also provides a good view for raptors and bird flocks regularly pass through the garden.



We spent a couple of hours in the late morning and added Rufous-tailed Hummingbird (left), Purple-bibbed Whitetip and Violet-tailed Sylph whilst Andean Emerald was very common amongst many others. We were also fortunate to see a female Wedge-billed Hummingbird attending flowers in the garden. This species is a cheat that pierces the base of flowers to get to the nectar and thus generally bypassing the pollination process, it is also a scarce species

that rarely visits feeders. A quick walk around the garden also yielded our first Red-faced Spinetail in a mixed flock.

After lunch we decided to descend to Milpe Reserve on the other side of Mindo. At much lower altitude it promised to yield a lot of new species for me. On the way down we added Variable Seedeater and saw a Black Agouti in the road. There were a number of busy hummingbird and fruit feeders by the visitor centre at Milpe and thus we quickly added White-whiskered Hermit, Green Thorntail, Green-crowned Woodnymph and Green-crowned Brilliant at the former and Lemon-rumped Tanager and Orange-billed Sparrow at the latter whilst the near-endemic Pale-mandibled Aracari nearby was another bonus.

We headed into the forest along the many trails but the birding was quiet and, additionally, with heavy skies it was pretty dark in the forest. The Club-winged Manakin lek was silent however we managed to locate and add Golden-winged Manakin and Choco Warbler. The undoubted highlight was a calling

Indigo-crowned Quail-Dove which we managed to entice onto the trail with playback for very good views.

In the secondary forest edge near the car park we ran into a large bird flock that contained a number of good species with the highlight being a pair of Slaty Becard whilst Guayaquil Woodpecker, Scaly-throated (right) and Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Spotted Woodcreeper and Ochre-breasted Tanager were also new. I



spent a bit of time photographing the hummers before Boris suggested driving down the road to check for more new birds in forest edge and open habitats.

We soon picked up a bird flock that contained One-coloured Becard and as we birded down the road till dusk we added Snowy Kingbird, Buffish Saltator and best of all a pair of the scarce Yellow-bellied Siskin. Eventually we ran out of daylight and made our way back to Bellavista Lodge after a very successful day.

22nd November; Paz de las Aves, Mindo Loma, Nanca Jatunmi and Bellavista.

A highlight of any west slope trip in northern Ecuador is a visit to Paz de las Aves. Angel Paz is the man famous for taming and hand-feeding Antpittas as outlined before. We arrived at his farm before dawn and rather endured our boxed breakfast before making our way down to the hide to see the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek. Amazingly we were only 10m or so inside the forest when a Moustached Antpitta (Susana we were to later find out) popped up on a fallen trunk for good views. The cock-of-the-rock lek



itself was rather small however and the birds were out of sight for most of the time.

Angel came to the hide to inform us that few birds were coming to the fruit feeders as there was a lot of natural fruit in the forest and he suggested we instead walk around the forest for bit and check a few fruiting trees for some of our targets. We soon found Slaty Spinetail, a party of giant Strong-billed Woodcreeper and then a nice pair of Black-winged Saltator. A couple of fruiting trees

were very active indeed and we added Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Ecuadorian Thrush and then two of our main targets in the form of a male Orange-breasted Fruiteater (above) and the elusive Olivaceous Piha.

With these targets in the bag it was time to go and see the Antpittas but not before we added another scarce species, Rusty-winged Barbtail, along the way. We arrived at the Giant Antpitta feeding area to find Maria, the original antpitta, and her son Cariño already present and giving spectacular photo opportunities. Angel hurried us on however and we dropped down to the valley bottom whereupon Willy the Yellow-breasted Antpitta (right) and Jose the Moustached Antpitta both came in for very close views too.



With all the Antpittas seen well we climbed out of the forest but had to stop for another couple of Giant



Antpittas (left) feeding on the path and Susana the Moustached Antpitta who of course did not want to miss out on the free food. A little less obliging but no less welcome was a Flavescent Flycatcher. At the hummingbird feeders on the forest edge we swiftly added the required Empress Brilliant and Velvet-purple Coronet before Angel's brother called us to come and see a pair of Orange-breasted Fruiteater.

After empanadas we bid farewell to Angel and drove the short distance to Mindo Loma. The hummingbird feeders here were very busy too but we had seen all the likely species and so concentrated on the fruit feeders which were alas almost devoid of visitors. Probably there was much natural fruit in the forest here too. We instead made our way into the forest and explored the bottom of a narrow quebrada. It didn't take long to find a single Hoary Puffleg. Not the most inspiring hummingbird but one of the rarer and more difficult species to see in Ecuador.

As we left the forest we found a nice mixed flock and although it was difficult to work in the poor light we were very pleased to add a couple of new and scarcer species in Pacific Tuftedcheek and Lineated Foliage-gleaner. We then drove on to Nanca Jatunmi stopping for a couple of flushed Yellow-faced Grassquit along the entrance track.

Unfortunately we found that the forest had been degraded since Roger's last visit and with steady rain too we decided to try somewhere else. On the drive out we encountered a large and active flock and added Cinnamon Becard as well as having good second looks at Toucan Barbet and White-winged Tanager.

We headed back up to Bellavista for another go at Tanager Finch and were amazed on getting out of the car to see a Spillmann's Tapaculo feeding on a bare earth bank in full view, very strange behaviour for this normally skulking species. There was no sign of Tanager Finch however an active flock yielded Striped Treehunter and Choco Brush-Finch. On the way down the hill towards Quito we stopped to look for Beautiful Jay near Tony's but instead pulled a Yellow-vented Woodpecker out of the bag.

We made a few final stops along the Nono-Lindo road looking for Beautiful Jay but with no success and failing light it was time to head back to Quito after a very successful weekend. This concluded my birding in Ecuador during which I had seen a total of 555 species with a further 39 heard only. Of those seen 241 were lifers and an incredible 72 species of hummingbird were seen and many photographed too.

27th November; Lomas de Lachay and Paraiso (Peru).

After a late night and early morning in Quito I was feeling pretty jaded on arrival in Lima. Gunnar was quite late picking me up from the airport too and by the time we made it up to Lomas de Lachay it was already after midday. Nonetheless the first valley we checked soon yielded the target species in the form of a few Greyish Miner and a single Cactus Canastero collecting food. There were few other interesting species but I did add Burrowing Owl, Groove-billed Ani and Short-tailed Field-Tyrant.



We elected to head onto Paraiso and the lagoon and beach were thronging with birds. An Elegant Tern was an immediate lifer but there was no sign of the other target Tern, Peruvian, despite an extensive search. Like other small tern species globally, it seems to be having a hard time due to beach disturbance. A few American Oystercatcher were breeding on the beach and was a surprise lifer whilst I also added White-cheeked Pintail, Great Grebe(above), Peruvian Booby, Puna Ibis, Snowy and Semipalmated Plover, Blackish Oystercatcher, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Grey-hooded and Band-tailed Gull, Royal Tern, Wren-like Rushbird and Yellowish Pipit.

We headed back to Lomas de Lachay stopping to admire Least Seedsnipe on the side of the road but it was really too late by the time we got back to the reserve. I headed to a stakeout for Raimondi's Yellow-Finch but had only a few minutes to look for the birds and consequently it was no surprise to come up with nothing. On the drive out of the reserve a Peregrine was the last new bird of the trip making a final total of 581 species seen.