

## **ECUADOR: ANDES TOUR, MARCH 4-14, 2020**

We arrived in Quito and transferred to the San Jose de Puembo Quito Hotel for our first night.

### **March 5**

Following an early breakfast, we headed out to the Yanacocha Reserve. The Yanacocha Reserve is around 2,950 acres and the habitat is quite varied, consisting of Montane Evergreen and Polylepis Forest as well as stunted Paramo. The elevation is between 10,500 to 12,150 feet. We spent all morning birding along the main track inside the reserve, which leads to several hummingbird feeders positioned along the trail. Sword-billed Hummingbird, Shining Sunbeam, Sapphire-vented Puffleg and the large Great Sapphirewing were added to our beginning list. We also checked out a nearby fruit feeder which attracted several new species including: Andean Guan, Scarlet-bellied & Black-chested Mountain-Tanagers as well as Yellow-breasted Brushfinches. Following a full morning of birding we had a delicious lunch at a small restaurant near the park entrance. Following lunch we continued down the old Nono-Mindo Road to Bella Vista Lodge. While in route, we saw a White-capped Dipper feeding along the mountain stream.

**Notable birds seen at Yanacocha – Andean Guan, Purple-backed Thornbill, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Great Sapphirewing, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Sapphire-vented Puffleg, Tyrian Metaltail, Rufous Spinetail, Smoky Bush-Tyrant, Glossy Flowerpiercers, Scarlet-bellied & Black- chested Mountain-Tanagers, Gray-browed & Yellow-breasted Brushfinches**



**SHINING SUNBEAM  
LifeBird Tours, LLC**



**BLACK-CHESTED MOUNTAIN-TANAGER**

### **March 6**

We began the day by checking the lights in the car park area. Numerous moths and various other insects are attracted to the lights, which in turn brought in some nice birds. Masked Trogons, Strong-billed Woodcreeper and Turquoise Jay had all figured out this easy buffet breakfast. More common species such as; Golden-crowned Flycatcher, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager and Russet-crowned Warbler were also quite easy to see around the lights.



**MALE AND FEMALE MASKED TROGONS**

After breakfast, we visited some productive feeders in the Quinde Luna Cloudforest Reserve. The hummingbirds seen included: Brown and Lesser Violetears, Speckled Hummingbird, Violet-tailed Sylph, Collared Inca, Buff-tailed and Velvet-purple Coronets, Booted Racket-tail, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Fawn-breasted and Empress Brilliants, Purple-throated Woodstar and Andean Emerald.



**VIOLET-TAILED SYLPH**



The rest of the afternoon and the next morning was spent exploring the stunning Bella Vista Cloud-Forest Reserve. This private cloud-forest reserve was started in 1991 and was originally 135 acres in size. It has now grown to 1,730 acres and its owners are proud conservationists, which means that this area should be protected for many years to come. The birdwatching within the cloud-forest is awesome to say the least. In this location, as with many other areas in Ecuador, mixed flocks are the name of the game. We were fortunate to encounter several productive mixed species flocks on our outings there. Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Green-and-Black Fruiteater, White-faced Nunbird and the shy and rare Tanager Finch were several of our highlights.



**GREEN-AND-BLACK FRUIT-EATER**

## **March 7**

After some final birding on our last morning in the Bella Vista area, we said goodbye to the friendly hotel staff and made our way down the forested Tandayapa Valley. On our way we met up with a local birder who took us to a day roosting Common Potoo and Lyre-tailed Nightjar. We also had a fantastic visit to the Alambi Hummingbird Gallery where we were delighted by views of an astonishing variety of hummingbirds as well as Chestnut-capped and White-winged Brushfinches seen in the scrub near the feeders.



**BOOTED RACKET-TAIL**



**PURPLE-THROATED WOODSTAR**

As the sunlight began to fade late in the afternoon, we headed to the comfortable Schemata Lodge for a 4-night stay.

### **March 8**

After an early start, we drove for about an hour and a half to an area called Mashpi in the Pacific foothills.

Mashpi is an interesting area of agricultural land with several scattered large patches of lush forest. The elevation range is between 2,450 to 5,580 feet and this location is quite biologically diverse. This foothill habitat is home to many species of Choco endemics, which are species that are exclusively shared with neighboring Colombia. Here, we found very active feeder stations, which brought in lots of localized birds including a spectacular group of tanagers: Glistening-green, Golden-naped, Golden-faced, Moss-backed & Rufous-throated Tanagers. Also we had wonderful close encounters with Toucan Barbet, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Golden-collared Honeycreeper, Black-winged Saltator. After easily picking up numerous lifers on the feeders, we once again went back to working the mixed feeding flocks along the roadside where we were happy to see both male and female Orange-breasted Fruiteaters, the stunning Slaty-capped Shrike-Vireo and the Choco endemic Blue-tailed Trogon.



**GLISTENING-GREEN TANAGER**





**RUFOUS-THROATED TANAGER**



**FLAME-FACED TANAGER**



**GOLDEN-NAPED TANAGER**



**MOSS-BACKED TANAGER**





### **CRIMSON-RUMPED TOUCANET**

**March 9**

We visited the Rio Silanche Reserve near the town of Pedro Vicente Maldonado with plans to bird from a medium sized canopy tower. On our way to the tower we were surprised to see two rare Rufous-fronted Wood-quail cross the trail. The tower provided us with a nice vantage point for excellent views of many canopy species such as Black-striped Woodcreeper, Scarlet-browed & Gray-and-gold Tanagers and Black-faced Dacnis. We also had good looks at Orange-fronted Barbet, Bronze-winged Parrot and Choco Toucan. We saw both Purple-chested and Blue-chested Hummingbirds in the same tree. After a boxed lunch, we did some more road side birding and were happy to see the rare Scarlet-backed woodpecker. We made our way to Rancho Suamox where we were delighted to see another rare species the very secretive Brown Wood-Rail! We rewarded ourselves with homemade delicious ice cream while watching active hummingbird feeders buzzing with White-necked Jacobin, White-whiskered Hermit, Green-breasted Mango and Green Thorntail. We also saw a Long-billed Starfrontlet in a nearby tree.



**GREEN-BREASTED MANGO**



**BROWN WOOD-RAIL**

**LifeBird Tours, LLC**

**March 10**

After an early breakfast, we drove to the Angel Paz Reserve, arriving just before daylight. Angel Paz or “Peace Angel” in English is the name of the proprietor and guide who joined us on our morning walk. We began with a walk down into a dark ravine to watch the spectacular Andean Cock-of-the-Rock display. We watched several handsome male birds displaying in hopes of luring in a female. After this amazing performance, we joined Angel Paz for more birding on his property. Angel Paz was the first person to train the very secretive set of birds called antpittas to pose for birders and photographers. Antpittas are normally very difficult to see, let alone photograph. On our visit we were able to see Angel feed the Ochre-breasted and Yellow-breasted Antpittas. The Giant, Moustached and Chestnut-crowned varieties were unfortunately no shows. We also had excellent views of the rare Dark-backed Wood-Quail and a beautiful Golden-headed Quetzal!

After an exciting morning of birding we visited a nearby bird feeder station while enjoying some tasty local food. Here we had amazingly close encounters with Toucan Barbets as well as multitudes of tanagers and hummingbirds.



**ANDEAN COCK-OF-THE-ROCK**





**DARK-BACKED WOOD-QUAIL**



**OCHRE-BELLIED ANTPITTA**



### **TOUCAN BARBET**

This afternoon's target was the bizarre Oilbird. After driving to a remote area in the foothills, we arrived at a small farm where a local guide assisted us to the site. Oilbirds are related to nightjars and are the only flying nocturnal fruit eating birds on earth. They mainly feed on the fruits of oil palms and tropical laurels. They are overall rufous in color with scattered small white spots, especially on the wings. They use echolocation accompanied by specialized eyesight in order to search for fruit at night. The name oilbird is derived from the way indigenous peoples would boil down the chicks to get oil out of them. They are now protected in many areas and the population has stabilized. We were able to observe several of these interesting birds at a close distance as they roosted on a cliff-face in a dark ravine.



## **OILBIRD**

### **March 11**

We began the morning with a sunrise session at the Sachatamia lodge bug light and we were not disappointed. We sat behind a photo blind and watched close up Strong-billed, Spotted and Plain-brown Woodcreepers, Scaly-throated and Lineated Foliage-gleaners, Spotted Barbtail, Slaty-capped, Golden-crowned and Oranate Flycatchers, Smoke-colored Pewee and Three-striped Warbler all munch on moths for breakfast. After we had our breakfast we headed out to the nearby Milpe Reserve where we watched the display of the impressive Club-winged Manakin. The Milpe Reserve had productive hummingbird & banana feeders and well. After a great morning of birding, we returned to Sachatamia for our lunch and then said goodbye to the Sachatamia Lodge and began making our way back towards Quito to cross over the Andes to the Eastern slope.

### **Rio Silanche and Milpe Reserves –**

Since 2001, a non-profit organization called Mindo Cloud-Forest Foundation has been protecting the Rio Silanche and Milpe Reserves from further deforestation. This organization has been doing fantastic conservation work within the much destroyed sector of northwest Ecuador.

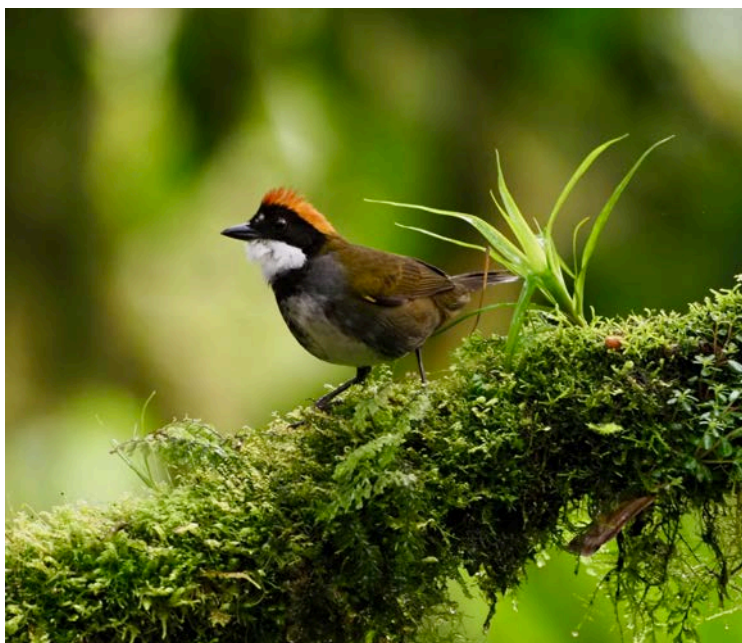
Rio Silanche is a protected area of around 250 acres of Choco Lowland Rainforest. The elevation is around 1,000 feet and there is a very nice trail system within the reserve. An observation tower is also available for visitors to use and it is roughly 50 feet tall.

The Milpe Reserve is also around 250 acres in size and is at an elevation of around 3,600 feet. The habitat in this reserve is referred to as Choco-Andean Foothill Rainforest. The management here runs a nice feeder system for hummingbirds and banana feeders for various colorful tanagers. Club-winged Manakin can usually be found on several of the many trails within this protected area.





**STRONG-BILLED WOODCREEPER**



**CHESTNUT-CAPPED BRUSHFINCH**



**ORNATE FLYCATCHER**



**SMOKE-COLORED PEWEE**



**CLUB-WINGED MANAKIN**



**BERYL-SPANGLED TANAGER**



## **March 12**

The morning began with visiting the high elevation Antisana Volcano Conservation Area. Our first stop was at a restaurant that is located along a highland canyon and happens to be the best place in Ecuador to see the spectacular Andean Condor. The name of the restaurant is “Tambo Condor” and we were able to view an Andean Condor soaring above the massive ravine. Also we saw Giant Hummingbird, Shining Sunbeam, Black-tailed Trainbearer and Black Flowerpiercers on the hummingbird feeders located on the patio.

After the restaurant stop we began to ascend further to an altitude of over 13,000 feet, where we explored the Paramo grasslands and a picturesque highland lagoon. We were happy to see several specialized birds. Black-faced Ibis and Ecuadorian Hillstar are both highly sought-after species that we had good looks at. The colorful Carrunculated Caracara was seen at close range along the road at the higher elevation. We returned for a wonderful lunch at the Tambo Condor restaurant. After lunch we continued to the Papallacata Pass, which was our first time on the eastern slope of the Andes.

We explored the Papallacta Pass area for the rest of the afternoon and we were rewarded with looks at the rare Spectacled Bear!

For the next 2 nights we stayed at the Papallacta Thermals Lodge which is famous for its natural hot springs. Slipping into one of the many natural hot springs in front of our rooms was a great way to finish off the day!

Antisana Volcano & Antisana Ecological Reserve –

Located in the northern Andes and about 30 miles from Quito, Antisana is the 4th largest volcano in the country of Ecuador. It reaches a staggering height of around 18,700 feet.

The Antisana Ecological Reserve, however, is at a much lower elevation than the huge peaks of Antisana itself. This reserve, created in 1993, is between 12,200 to 13,300 feet and is almost 300,000 acres in size. The Andean Montane Scrub, Paramo Grasslands and steep gorges are home to the magnificent Andean Condor. This massive new world vulture has an impressive wingspan of 10 feet, and it is estimated that about 30 individuals call the Antisana area home. This reserve is also a stronghold for the striking Black-faced Ibis.



**ANTASANA VOLCANO**



**CARUNCULATED CARACARA**

## March 13

Before breakfast we drove about 6 miles to the entrance of the Cayambe-Coca Reserve and found some early morning mixed feeding flocks. Viridian Metaltail, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Pale-naped Brushfinch, the rare Masked Mountain-Tanager and the secretive Crescent-faced Antpitta were some of the highlighted morning species.

After returning to the lodge for an excellent buffet breakfast, we visited another great birding site, the Guango Lodge. The Guango Lodge is a small, privately owned hotel and reserve on the eastern slope in Ecuador. At 8,850 feet it is located close to the town of Papallacta. In total, the reserve is about 450 acres and the habitat is humid temperate forest.

Hummingbirds were quite prevalent at the many feeders. We observed Tourmaline Sunangel, Long-tailed Slyph, Collared Inca, Buff-tailed and Chestnut-breasted Coronets, and White-bellied Woodstar. We also were excited to find a roosting Andean Potoo and a pair of Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucans while birding the trails that lead to the large Papallacta River. We had a few nice mixed feeding flocks on the trails and added several new species such as Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant, Blue-backed and Capped Conebills and Gray-hooded Bush Tanager. After lunch we added Red-crested Cotinga, Tufted Tit-Tyrant, Rufous Antpitta, Lacrimose and Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanagers to our growing list! Later, we returned to the lodge for supper and another dip in the hot springs before getting some much needed rest.



**EARLY MORNING BIRDING THE CAYAMBE-COCA RESERVE**





## **ANDEAN POTOO**

### **March 14**

We had an early morning adventure unto the high elevation of the Papallacta area in search of the beautiful Rufous-bellied Sneysnipe. It was a blustery morning with wind and rain however our local guide managed to spot two of these amazing birds feeding along the mountainside.

After another great breakfast we packed up and headed towards San Isidro. The short, yet beautiful drive lead us through some spectacular scenery, with gushing waterfalls and beautiful forest patches in view for most of the way. We made several birding stops at various elevations on the eastern slope and picked up new species such as Southern Emerald Toucanet, Crested Quetzal, Ash-browed Spinetail, Montane-foilage-gleaner, Red-breasted Meadowlark, Green Jay, Golden-faced Tyrannulet, Saffron-crowned Tanager and Olivaceous Siskin.



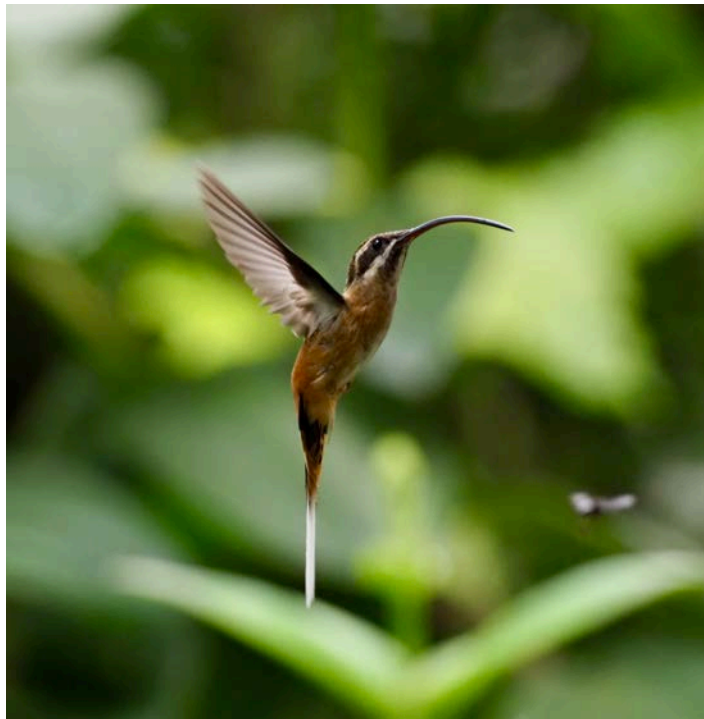
**RUFOUS-BELLIED SNEEDSNIPE**



**PAPALLACTAL THERMALS LODGE**

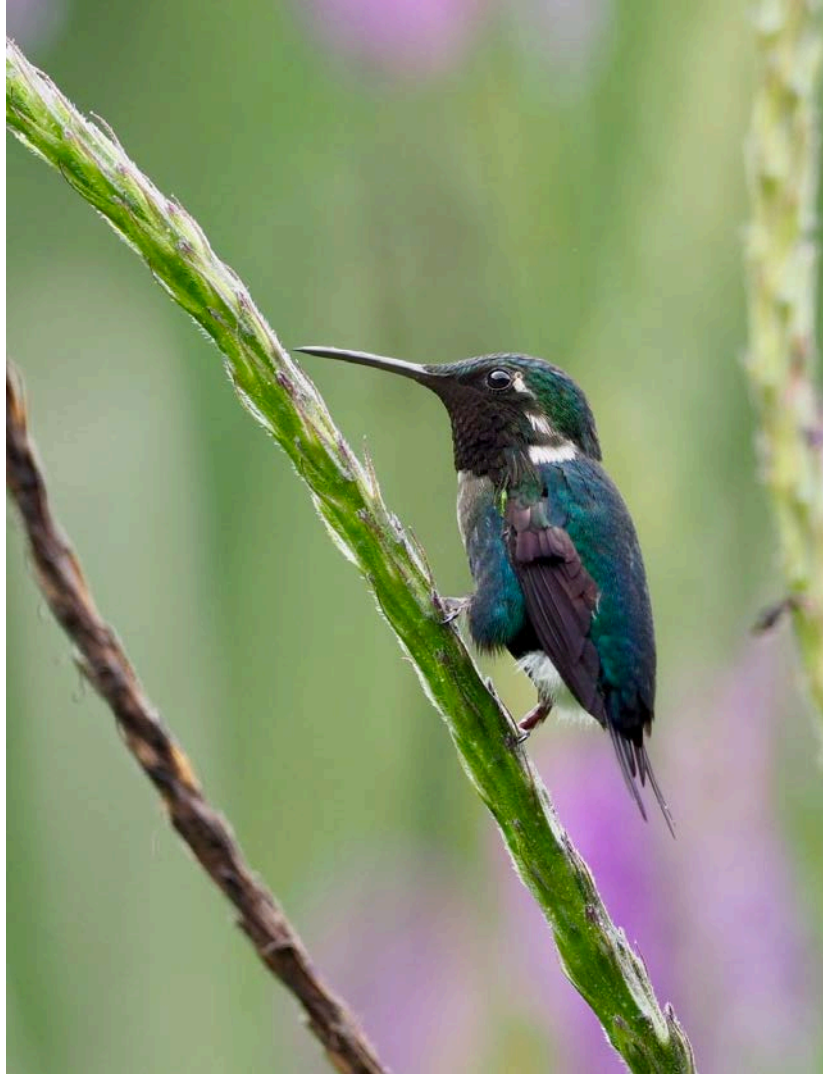


**SOUTHERN EMERALD TOUCANET**



**TAWNY BELLIED HERMIT**





**GORGETED WOODSTAR**

We stopped for box lunches at La Brisa and watched active hummingbird feeders adding Bronzy Inca, Green-backed Hillstar, Violet-fronted Brilliant and Gorgeted Woodstar to our extensive hummingbird list.

Late in the afternoon while we were enjoying watching a family of Torrent Ducks swimming in the rapids of a large river we received a distressing phone call from our local ground agent. We were told that the airports of Ecuador were closing all international travel in 48 hours and going on lockdown due to the Covid19/Corona virus pandemic. We knew that we may not be able to leave the country for an indefinite amount of time if we did not try to get flights out in the next 48 hours. We therefore, had to cancel the plans for the next 4 days of birding and head quickly back to Quito where we all thankfully were able to find flights home before the airport was shutdown.

Despite this premature and hectic departure from Ecuador, the tour was very successful and we were able to see 370 species of birds including 81 species of hummingbirds! We had a wonderful group of 8 fun birders and 2 excellent bird guides, Steven Easley and Jorge Luna, all of which made the tour so successful! Thank you for checking out this trip report, all photos were taken during the tour by me, Sherry Lane.



**TORRENT DUCK FAMILY**

