

## **Ecuador- "*A Country for Birdwatchers*"**

**[Tico Tours™](#)**

### **Familiarization Tour**

**[In association with Ecuador Nature Expeditions](#)**

**April 21-30, 2006**

**Leader: Mike Boatwright**

This tour stayed at Hotel Café Cultura, Maquipucuna Lodge, and Napo Wildlife Center. Other locations visited included Antisana Reserve, Yanacocha Reserve, Sachatamia Lodge, Papallacta Pass, Guagno Lodge, and Cabañas San Isidro.

Total bird species encountered = 316 (26 heard only)

[Composite Bird List](#) follows this trip report.

**INTRODUCTION:** The smallest country in the rugged Andean highlands, Ecuador has an array of vibrant indigenous cultures, well-preserved colonial architecture, otherworldly volcanic landscapes and dense rainforest. And all that in a nation no bigger than the US state of Nevada. Ecuador is one of the premiere destinations for birding in the world, with about **1,535 known bird species** in the continental area plus 38 more endemic to the Galapagos Islands. Geographic good fortune has blessed Ecuador with a wide variety of faunal zones, including some of the richest on this planet, each with its characteristic birds. Ecuador's Amazonian faunal zone alone has more than 600 species of birds, and several other Ecuadorian zones are nearly as rich.

Although a great deal of time was devoted to birding, the primary purpose of this trip was to familiarize myself with locations, accommodations, logistics, personnel, etc. Accordingly, many locations were visited during times when bird activity was at it's lowest. As a result, the total bird species encountered is believed to be roughly 70% of that which would be encountered during a normal birding tour. The bird list also includes a large number of "heard only" species. This is primarily a result of the aggressive agenda not always allowing for the extra time needed to locate and observe some species.

#### **Day 1:**

I departed Reagan International Airport in Washington, DC and flew to Miami, Florida. From Miami, I continued on to Mariscal Sucre International Airport in Quito, Ecuador. After clearing immigration and customs, I was met by Cris Viteri of [Ecuador Nature Expeditions](#) who transported me to Café Cultura.

Café Cultura is a delightful mix of English tradition and contemporary trend. An inner city retreat, with an out-going personality and inspirational food. Some sixty years ago, the hotel was home to one of Quito's oldest families, after which it became the French Cultural Centre. The building was carefully restored over a period of four years, with special detail given to maintaining the unique characteristics of the original interior.

## Day 2:

I arose well before dawn tingling with anticipation of exploration and the great birding, which lay ahead. Even before the sun rose, I could hear *Great Thrush* and *Eared Dove* outside my room. After first light, I headed into the gardens surrounding the hotel and immediately caught up with several *Eared Doves*. A pair of *Great Thrush* was seen in a large tree across the street and several of the resident *Sparkling Violet-ear* showed well in the early morning light. Other birds seen around Café Cultura included *Rock Pigeon*, *Rufous-collared Sparrow*, and *House Sparrow*.

After a wonderful breakfast, Cris Viteri and Juan Fernando Duran of [Ecuador Nature Expeditions](#) picked me up. We set off for Antisana Ecological Reserve. Volcan Antisana is the 4<sup>th</sup> highest volcano in Ecuador at 5758m (17274 ft.). Nearly fifty percent of the *Andean Condors* that live in Ecuador have chosen Antisana Ecological Reserve as their home. This reserve is privately owned and regulated, but its goal is the preservation of the native flora and fauna of the Andean paramo. Between 3600 & 4800 meters (10,800 – 14,400 feet), we entered paramo habitat in which the plant and animal life are both highly adapted to the extreme conditions which are the norm here. Due to the high winds that regularly sweep this habitat, nothing taller than the grass and low lying succulents are found in the open. Even hardy, high altitude shrubs are found only in crevices and streambeds hidden from the wind. Plants in this habitat are pollinated by beetles or by birds, as the winds are too strong for flying insects. We saw rolling meadows, occasional ravines with taller vegetation, and a meadow/marsh of pillow moss bordering a highland lake. The pillow moss is so named because it forms unbroken hump-like pillows of vegetation that may cover acres of land.

Just below the edge of the paramo, we stopped to look for condors, which can often be seen on the rocky cliffs here. We would not be disappointed as a spectacular *Andean Condor* appeared above one of the ridges and gracefully soared over our heads, crossed the road and sailed over the adjacent cliffs before disappearing over the next ridge.

Upon reaching the windswept paramo, we began to encounter birds typical of this habitat. Both *Stout-billed and Bar-winged Cinclodes*, *Plumbeous Sierra-finch*, *Paramo Ground-tyrant*, *Brown-bellied Swallow*, and *Black-winged Ground-dove* all showed well. We also saw several dozen *Andean Gulls* along with several *Andean Lapwings* and a couple of *Variable Hawks*. A female *Blue-mantled Thornbill* made a brief appearance and *Carrunculated Caracara* were numerous. At Mica Lake, we quickly picked-up *Andean Coot*, *Andean (Speckled) Teal*, and *Silvery Grebe*. Upon reaching the fishing

boat launch area here, we were told of a Silvery Grebe nesting site just a short hike away. Cris and I made the short hike along the shoreline and soon encountered 20-25 **Silvery Grebes** surrounding a single floating nest on which a female sat. Several other nests appeared to be under construction here. At one point, the female slipped off of the nest and into the water exposing a single white egg in the nest. Wow, a rare opportunity to not only observe this species at close range but to also see the nest and egg, it just doesn't get much better!

Thoroughly satiated with our visit to the high paramo, we headed south for a very late lunch at Restaurante La Matilda. Here we enjoyed a great meal while watching the hummingbird feeders located on the porch. We had close looks at **Sparkling Violet-ear**, **Green Violet-ear**, and others. At one point, Juan Fernando had a quick glimpse of a **Sword-billed Hummingbird** but we would not see it again here. Afterwards, we returned to Quito and made a quick tour of the historical areas before returning to Café Cultura for the night.

### Day 3:

I arose very early this morning as my guide Andrés de la Torre was to pick me up at 5:45 AM for a visit to Yanacocha Reserve followed by an overnight stay at Maquipucuna Lodge. Andrés is one of the most experienced guides in Ecuador and has a background in Biology. Andrés is a trilingual naturalist guide who speaks English, French and Spanish fluently. He has a tremendous enthusiasm, excellent knowledge of Ecuadorian history and good knowledge in birdwatching.

We traveled to the northwest of Quito and arrived at the Yanacocha Reserve around 7:15 AM. The Jocotoco Foundation has established the new Yanacocha reserve on the slopes of Volcan Pichincha, just an hour outside of Quito. At a mean elevation of 3800 meters (11,300 ft), the reserve protects a large area (960 ha) of Polylepis woodland on the slopes of Volcan Pichincha. Much of this woodland has been removed for charcoal production and for agriculture. The reserve is home to the **Black-breasted Puffleg** (*Eriocnemis nigrivestis*). As far as anyone is aware, the reserve contains the entire world range of this very rare hummingbird. The area is also an important source of water for the city of Quito. The Yanacocha reserve was purchased using funds provided by the Jocotoco Foundation and with contributions from a number of individuals and agencies from Ecuador, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada.

As we drove along the entrance road, a beautiful male **Southern Yellow Grosbeak** appeared in the road and was soon joined by a female. We also saw **Chestnut-capped Brush-finch**, **Great Thrush**, **Black Flowerpiercer**, **Sparkling Violet-ear**, and **Eared Dove** along the way. Upon reaching the parking area, we geared up and started the hike along the road and trail (this area is also known as the "Inca Ditch").

**Buff-winged Starfrontlet**, **Rufous Wren**, **Black Flowerpiercer**, **Glossy Flowerpiercer**, and **Scarlet-bellied Mountain-tanagers** entertained us along the road. At the entrance to

the trail, we had great looks at a ***Smoky Bush-tyrant*** perched in a dead snag. Along the trail we caught up with many new birds including the gorgeous ***Shinning Sunbeam***, ***Purple-backed Thornbill***, ***Masked Flowerpiercer***, ***Cinereous Conebill***, ***Blue-backed Conebill***, ***Spectacled Whitestart***, ***Barred Fruiteater***, ***Hooded Mountain-Tanager***, ***Turquoise Jay***, and we not only heard but had brief but good looks at ***Blackish (Unicolored) Tapaculo!***

At the overlook near the end of the trail, the feeders produced close-up and prolonged views of such beauties as the magnificent ***Great Sapphirewing***, ***Sapphire-vented Puffleg***, ***Golden-breasted Puffleg***, ***Tyrian Metaltail***, the uncommon and local ***Rainbow-bearded Thornbill***, and the absurd looking ***Sword-billed Hummingbird***. ***Glossy***, ***Masked***, and ***Black Flowerpiercers***, and ***Golden-crowned Tanagers*** also put in appearances here. Despite our best vigilance, we would not be lucky enough today to see the rare Black-breasted Puffleg. On the hike back to the parking area, we had nice looks at a ***Streaked Tuftedcheek*** and a ***Crimson-mantled Woodpecker***.

After a nice picnic lunch, Andrés and I embarked on the long journey to Maquipucuna in the western slope foothills. The trip would take nearly 3 hours and would carry us through temperate, sub-tropical, and foothill zones along the way. On the way out of Yanacocha, I spotted several ***Andean Lapwings*** in the pasture.

On the road in to Maquipucuna, several new species were added to our list including ***Pacific Hornero***, ***Olive-crowned Yellowthroat***, ***Black Vulture***, ***Blue and White Swallow***, ***Southern Rough-winged Swallow***, and ***Tropical Kingbird***.

Once we arrived at Maquipucuna Lodge, members of the staff helped us with our luggage and showed us to our rooms. The Maquipucuna Reserve is a 6,000-hectare privately owned and managed nature reserve, surrounded by 14,000 hectares of "protected forest." Eighty percent of Maquipucuna consists of steeply sloped, undisturbed cloud forest. Covering four different life zones ranging from 1,000 to 2,800 meters above sea level, the reserve houses a tremendous diversity of flora and fauna. In fact, it is located within the Choco-Andean Corridor, one of the planet's top five "biodiversity hotspots."

The lodge is staffed with guides and service personnel mainly from the local communities and provides comfortable accommodations for up to 30 people in five separate bedrooms and shared bathrooms, 3 suites with private bathrooms, and a family cabin with private bathrooms. All bathrooms offer hot showers. The lodge also has a magnificent porch where you can relax to the sounds of the forest and watch the constant activity at the numerous hummingbird feeders.

From the lodge's porch, we observed several species of hummingbirds visiting the nearby feeders. ***Rufous-tailed Hummingbird***, ***Green-crowned Brilliant***, ***White-necked Jacobin***, ***White-whiskered Hermit***, and ***Green-crowned Woodnymph*** were all common here. We also took a short hike across the river and through the nearby pastures. On this hike we connected with many new birds including ***Red-faced Spinetail***, ***Spotted Woodcreeper***,

*White-banded Tyrannulet, Scale-crested Pygmy-tyrant, Black Phoebe, Social Flycatcher, Brown-capped Vireo, Blackburnian Warbler, Bananaquit, Blue-gray Tanager, Fawn-breasted Tanager, Silver-throated Tanager, Orange-bellied Euphonia, and Buff-throated Saltator.* From a bluff overlooking the raging river, we also saw *Smoke-colored Pewee* and *White-capped Dipper*.

We returned to the lodge to freshen up before dinner. Just before dusk, I was amazed to see the huge *Rufous-bellied Nighthawk* as it passed high overhead. After dark, we enjoyed a wonderfully prepared dinner and afterwards, I spent some relaxing on the porch and admiring the myriad insects attracted to the lights.

#### **Day 4:**

We awoke early this morning and enjoyed a hot cup of coffee and a sweetroll before heading out along the main trail towards the research station. Around the lodge we found *Southern House Wren, Lemon-rumped Tanager, Rufous Motmot, Orange-billed Sparrow,* and *Golden-crowned Flycatcher.* In the more brushy area along the trail, we saw *Slaty Spinetail, Western Slaty Ant-shrike, Ruddy Pigeon, Black-capped Becard, Whiskered Wren,* and *Tropical Parula.* In the open forest, we spotted *Squirrel Cuckoo, Band-tailed Pigeon, Slate-colored Grosbeak, Black-billed Peppershrike, Stripe-throated Hermit, Scaly-crested Pygmy-tyrant, Golden-olive Woodpecker,* and *Plain Brown Woodcreeper.* We also had close looks at a pair of *Masked Trogon* (the male minus its tail) and more distant but great looks at *Choco Toucan.* The star of the morning however was the *Andean Cock-of-the Rock,* which flew across the trail and posed for a minute or so in clear view! Other species seen or heard on this morning hike included *Southern Nightingale Wren, Gray-breasted Wood-wren, White-winged Tanager,* and *Golden Tanager.*

After a hearty breakfast, we packed up our stuff and loaded back into the jeep for the ride to Sachatamia Lodge near Mindo. Along the road leading back to the main highway, we added a few new birds. We saw *Buff-rumped Warbler, Blue-black Grassquit, Yellow-faced Grassquit, Dull-colored Grassquit, Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Subtropical Casique,* and *Smooth-billed Ani.*

We arrived at Sachatamia Lodge near Mindo around noon. Upon exiting the jeep, we immediately started seeing birds representative of this area. *Blue-winged Tanagers* were seen in the trees, and the feeders held a huge variety of hummingbirds. *Brown Inca, Purple-throated Woodstar, Brown Violetear, Velvet-purple Coronet,* the very cute *Booted Racket-tail,* the endemic *Empress Brilliant, Purple-tailed Sylph, Andean Emerald, Speckled Hummingbird, Fawn-breasted Brilliant,* and *Purple-bibbed Whitetip* all showed well here.

We placed our lunch order and then headed down one of the trails behind the lodge. Although it was early afternoon, we managed to hear or see several new birds including *Palm Tanager, Golden Tanager, Orange-billed Sparrow, Andean Solitaire, Choco*

***Tapaculo*, and *Golden-headed Quetzal*.**

Returning to the lodge, we enjoyed a gourmet lunch while watching the hummingbirds and a beautiful male ***Masked Trogon*** (this one complete with tail). After lunch, we toured this beautiful lodge which includes a swimming pool, Jacuzzi, big-screen TV and many other amenities. The lodge is encompassed by a private reserve composed of subtropical cloud and rainforest at 1700 meters (5200 feet) adjacent to the protected Mindo-Nambillo Forest preserve.

We returned to Quito via Mitad de Mundo (Middle of the Earth) where one can straddle the Equator and stand in both the northern and southern hemispheres at the same time.

**Day 5:**

Today, William (Willy) Perez one of Ecuador's best bird guides would pick me up at 5:45 AM for a day trip to Papallacta Pass, Guagno Lodge, and Cabañas San Isidro. On the road to Papallacta, we made a brief side trip in the arid area below the pass. Here Willie started pointing out some great birds. Both ***Green-tailed*** and ***Black-tailed Trainbearers*** gave the opportunity for a nice comparison of these beautiful hummingbirds. We also saw several ***Tufted Tit-tyrants***, ***Black-billed Shrike-tyrant***, ***American Kestrel***, ***Black-crested Warbler***, ***Shinning Sunbeam***, ***Crimson-mantled Woodpecker***, ***Blue and Yellow Tanager***, ***Plain-colored Seedeater***, and two ***Red-crested Cotinga***.

We continued towards the Papallacta Pass along a side road where we soon entered the paramo. Here we started to pick-up birds typical of these high elevation moorlands. ***White-chinned Thistletail***, ***Many-striped Canestero***, ***Montane Woodcreeper***, ***Tawny Antpitta***, ***Brown-backed Chat-tyrant***, ***Grass (Sedge) Wren***, and ***Pale-napped Brush-finch*** were seen well. Perched on a rock near the road we had close-up looks at a young ***Variable Hawk*** and high above the ridge, a spectacular soaring ***Black-chested Buzzard-eagle*** gave us a thrilling look.

Onward we climbed towards our ultimate destination, the antenna complex at 14,800 feet. Here on the inhospitable, wind-swept summit lay our hoped for prize the rare and local ***Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe***. Willy told me that he had encountered this bird here on roughly 50% of his visits. So we had a 50/50 chance and we wished for a healthy dose of luck to be with us today! As we neared the summit, the weather turned from bad to horrible. The fog was so thick that it was difficult to see more than a few feet from our vehicle, the wind was howling and precipitation varied between rain and sleet with occasional snowflakes. Our best attempts at locating the target bird from the vehicle proved futile under these conditions. We did see a few ***Plumbeous Sierra-finch*** and a couple of ***Paramo Ground-tyrants***. We parked near the antenna complex and Willy said we should try walking around in hopes of flushing one of these secretive and cryptic birds. I was certainly game since I had come all this way with this species on the top of my most wanted list. As I began to don my fleece, parka, gloves, and stocking cap, Willy blurted out "Mike, it right here, in front of the vehicle!" I quickly spun around to see a single

gorgeous *Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe* just a few feet in front of our truck. Wow! A healthy dose of luck was indeed on our side today! We managed to continue to have close looks, as the bird was somewhat "trapped between us and the 3-sided fence surrounding the antenna I got a couple of photos but the fog would ensure poor quality. But we saw the bird and that was what really mattered. Satisfied with our great fortune, we headed for more hospitable ground.

We continued down to the main highway and proceeded on our way to our next destination Guagno Lodge. Along the way, we made a brief stop to look for birds in the nice stand of *Polylepis* forest just below the pass. Here we caught up with some of the species known to inhabit these forests. A pair of *Bar-bellied Woodpeckers* put on a nice show, as did several *White-throated Tyrannulets*. A couple of *Black-backed Bush-tanager* showed well. We had nice looks a *Giant Conebill* and heard several others.

Another stop on a hill over looking the river torrents produced a pair of *Torrent Ducks* seen well perched on the rocks before they slipped into the water and quickly disappeared in the rapids. Next stop was Guagno Lodge. Here we spent some time watching the hummingbird feeders where we saw the beautiful and numerous *Tourmaline Sunangel*, *Glowing Puffleg*, *Long-tailed Sylph*, *White-bellied Woodstar*, *Chestnut-breasted Coronet*, and *Collared Inca*. In a ravine behind the lodge, we found a nice mixed feeding flock, which produced *Capped Conebill*, *Blue-backed Conebill*, *Gray-headed Bush-tanager*, and *Mountain Wren*. After a strong cup of coffee and some crackers, we continued towards San Isidro.

We made a brief stop for a nice light lunch at La Gina café in Baeza. Afterwards, we made a roadside stop where a walk along a dirt road provided good looks at some new birds including *Hooded Siskin*, *Olivaceous Siskin*, the stunning *Flame-faced Tanager*, *Inca (Green) Jay*, and *Black-capped Tanager*.

At San Isidro Lodge, we made a quick tour of the facilities then headed to the hummingbird feeders near the entrance to the forest trail. Here we saw *Long-tailed Sylph*, *Chestnut-breasted Coronet*, *Bronzy Inca*, and *Collared Inca*. We also had great looks at a female *Gorgeted Woodstar* and a male *White-tipped Hillstar* both new birds for Willy at this location! Nearby, we saw *Mountain Wren*, *Black-eared Hemispingus*, *Bluish Flowerpiercer*, and *Saffron-crowned Tanager*. On a short hike down the forest trail, we heard *Glossy-black Thrush*, *Masked Trogon*, *Long-tailed Antbird*, and *Unicolored (Blackish) Tapaculo*.

Due to the lateness of the hour, we decided to forego our plans of visiting Huacomayos Ridge and instead birded the road beyond San Isidro Lodge towards the research station there. Along the road we found several *Highland Motmot*, *Marbled-faced Bristle-tyrant*, *Azara's Spinetail*, *Pearled Treerunner*, *Torrent Tyrannulet*, *Varigated Bristle-tyrant*, *Rufous-breasted Flycatcher*, *Cinnamon Flycatcher*, *Inca Jay*, *Turquoise Jay*, *Rufous-headed Pygmy-tyrant*, *Sulphur-bellied Tyrannulet*, *Common Bush-tanager*, and *Sub-tropical Casique*.



Not wanting to drive through the pass in the dark, we left San Isidro in the late afternoon and headed back towards Quito. A stop at near Papallacta Lake produced a flock of 14 *Yellow-billed Pintail* and several *Masked Crimson Tanager*.

### Day 6:

After 5 days in the Andes, I would shift gears today and head to the lush, dense rainforest of Ecuadorian Amazonia. After breakfast, I spent some time in the gardens around Café Cultura where I saw the usual suspects *Eared Dove*, *Sparkling Violetear*, *Great Thrush*, and *Rufous-collared Sparrow*. I also had nice looks at a *Long-tailed Sylph* working the magnolia blossoms.

Cris Viteri of [Ecuador Nature Expeditions](#) picked me up at Café Cultura at 9:30 AM for the 15-minute ride to the Quito International Airport. At the domestic terminal here, representatives of Napo Wildlife Center greeted us. The representatives ensured everything went smoothly. After taking my checked luggage, they checked my bags for me and secured my ticket and boarding pass for the flight to Coca while I waited in the passenger lounge.

The flight to Coca aboard an 80-passenger jet would take just 40-minutes. To make this journey by car would take nearly 6 hours. Upon arriving at the airport in Coca, my bilingual naturalist guide for the next three days, David, greeted me. David's wife, brother, and mother would also accompany us on this part of the tour. After getting our baggage, we loaded into several vehicles for the 5-min ride to the Rio Napo boat launch area just outside of Coca. Here we would board a covered motorized canoe for a 2 and ½ hour trip down the Rio Napo. While waiting to board the canoe, we spotted several *White-banded Swallows* and a *Gray-breasted Martin*.

The canoe trip down the Napo was a wonderful experience as we kept an eye out for birds, enjoyed the riverside scenery and had a nice boxed lunch. David also gave us great narratives about the exploration and exploitation that has occurred along the Napo. Birds seen along the way included *White-winged Swallow*, *American Swallow-tailed Kite*, *Slender-billed Kite*, *Black Caracara*, *Greater Yellow-headed Vulture*, *Cocoi Heron*, *Laughing Falcon*, *Pied Plover*, *Snowy Egret*, *Great Egret*, and the spectacular *Oriole Blackbird*.

After over two hours on the Rio Napo, we came to the entrance to the blackwater creek where we would meet our native guides Gorge and Carlitos and switch to dugout canoes for a fascinating journey up the Anangu Creek to the Napo Wildlife Center. At the canoe landing, *Russet-backed Oropendola*, *Crested Oropendola*, *Scarlet-crowned Barbet*, *Yellow-rumped Casique*, and *Lesser Kiskadee* all showed well. As we paddled slowly up the creek, a *Black-fronted Nunbird* and several *Many-banded Aracari* were seen well. During our 2-hour journey on the Anangu Creek we would have the opportunity to see lots of birds and other wildlife including a family of Giant Otter that put on a show which impressed even our guides. Birds seen included *White-chinned Jacamar*, the bizarre and



noisy *Hoatzin*, *Giant Cowbird*, *Greater Ani*, *Rufescent Tiger-heron*, *Amazon*, *Ringed*, and *Rufous and Green Kingfishers*, *Snail Kite*, *Bat Falcon*, *Plumbeous Pigeon*, *Speckled Chachalaca*, *Red-bellied Macaw*, *Crimson-crested Woodpecker*, and *Cinnamon Attila*. We would also be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of an *Undulated Tinamou* and would have very good looks at the huge *Giant Potoo* on its day roost. As we entered the lagoon on which Napo Wildlife Center lodge is built, we would encounter *Neo-tropical Palm Swift*, *Black-capped Donacobius*, *Masked Crimson Tanager*, *Silver-beaked Tanager*, *Blue-gray Tanager*, and *Palm Tanager*.

Disembarking at the lodge dock, we enjoyed a checking into our beautiful cabanas, washed up a bit and headed to the open-air dinning room for a well-deserved meal. *Tropical Screech-owl* and *Ferruginous Pygmy-owls* called around us as we ate. Mid-way through our meal, one of the guides found an Anaconda outside of cabana #5 (which just happened to be my cabana). We all jumped up from the table and, flashlights in hand, headed along the path to cabana #5. When we got there, we had great looks the 12 foot long 2 and ½ inch diameter snake before it slithered into the lagoon! Talked about live entertainment, WOW!!

After dinner, I sat on the porch of my cabana and while keeping a watchful eye for anacondas, listened to the sounds of the night. *Paraque*, *Limpkin*, *Spectacled Owl*, *Tropical Screech-owl*, and *Great Potoo* were all heard well.

### **Day 7:**

We arose early this morning with hopes of taking the dugout back down the creek to the boat landing where we would transfer to the motorized canoe for a short ride to the nearby parrot clay licks. Unfortunately, luck was not on our side this morning. We awoke to a light rain, which would mean a delayed start, and if the rain continued as forecast, we would not likely see the parrots and parakeets today. So we had breakfast and watched the skies for any signs of clearing. The rain would continue and would become heavier as the morning progressed. Not to be deterred, we donned our raingear, climbed into the dugout, and headed across the lagoon towards the creek. Near the entrance to the creek, we had nice looks at *Purple Gallinule*, *Snail Kite*, *Fork-tailed Flycatcher*, *Boat-billed Flycatcher*, and *Green Kingfisher*.

Going down the creek, we had nice looks at *White-eared Jacamar*. We also saw several troops of Squirrel Monkeys along the way. Once we made it to the motorized canoe, the rain showers had turned to torrential downpours and any hope we had of seeing parrots was quickly vanishing. We made our way to the clay lick landing, disembarked, and made the short hike down the trail to the observation blind. We spent nearly two hours here silently and patiently waiting for the rain to let up and for the parrots to appear. Neither would happen today. We headed back to the canoe and cruised up the Rio Napo towards a second clay lick area located deeper in the forest.

As the rain continued to come down hard, we decided to take the opportunity to walk one

of the area river islands in hopes of flushing *Sand-colored Nighthawk* (one of the birds on my most wanted list). Once we started walking the island, it didn't take long to flush the nighthawk. We flushed at least two of these beauties as well as several other nighthawks we couldn't immediately identify. We also found *Yellow-browed Sparrow*, *Chestnut-bellied Seedeater*, *Oriole Blackbird*, *Collared Plover*, *Pied Plover*, *Spotted Sandpiper*, the uncommon *Lesson's Seedeater*, *Lesser Hornero*, *Tropical Kingbird*, *Yellow-headed Caracara*, and *Drab Water-tyrant*.

Our luck would be no better at the forest clay lick as the rain continued. Along the trail through the forest, we had nice looks at *Great-billed Hermits* on their lek and Gorge (with David interpreting) gave us many lessons about the plants used by the local people.

After a nice boxed lunch enjoyed at the dugout landing shelter, we went to visit the local Shaman. On the trail to the Shaman's house, we found *Gray-fronted Doves*, *Violaceous Jay*, *Gilded Barbet*, *Southern Nightingale-wren*, and *Solitary Casique*. We also saw the world's smallest primate, the adorable Pygmy Marmoset. The visit to the Shaman's house provided a great cultural experience.

Of course the rain would cease in the afternoon after ruining any chance of parrots in the morning. At least we would have nice birding conditions on our way back to the lodge. Along the way we would see or hear *Plumbeous Kite*, *Cobalt-winged Parakeet*, *Black-headed Parrot*, *Piping Guan*, *Squirrel Cuckoo*, *Yellow-tufted Woodpecker*, *Anhinga*, *Chestnut Woodpecker*, *Wedge-billed Woodcreeper*, *Long-billed Woodcreeper*, *Magpie Tanager*, *Silvered Antbird*, and *White-throated Toucan*. Near the lodge we heard the rare and local but very elusive *Zigzag Heron* but could not get a look at the bird.

After another wonderfully prepared gourmet dinner, we took a night hike along one of the trails near the lodge. We heard *Tropical Screech-owl* and had nice looks at a *Tawny-bellied Screech-owl*. Lots of insects were found and we got an up-close look at the huge nest of a colony of social spiders. A Marsh Rat was also seen well.

### Day 8:

We again rose well before dawn and after a hearty breakfast, we again boarded the dugout for a short paddle across the lagoon. We disembarked and made a 45-minute hike through the forest to the 120-foot tall canopy tower. On the hike in, we had great looks at a *Wing-banded Antbird* and heard *Amazonian Violaceous Trogon*, *Rusty-belted Tapaculo*, *Marbled Wood-quail*, and *White-breasted Wood-wren*. We also found Squirrel Monkeys, White-fronted Capuchin, and the signature primate of Napo Wildlife Center the Golden-mantled Tamarin.

Once we arrived at the tower, we took a short bathroom break then tackled the 208 steps leading straight up to the platform high above the forest canopy. The birding from the platform was superb! During the course of the morning, we would encounter *Lettered Aracari*, *Chestnut-fronted Macaw*, *White-eyed Parakeet*, *Dusky-headed Parakeet*,

*White-fronted Nunbird, Cream-colored Woodpecker, Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, Plum-throated Cotinga*, not one but 3 *White-browed Purple-tuft*, *White-necked Puffbird*, *Purple-throated Fruitcrow*, *Yellow-browed Tody-flycatcher*, *Short-crested Flycatcher*, *Dusky-capped Flycatcher*, *Rufous-bellied Euphonia*, and *Paradise Tanager*. Raptors were also plentiful with *Double-toothed Kite*, *American Swallow-tailed Kite*, *Greater Yellow-headed Vulture*, *Roadside Hawk*, *Slate-colored Hawk*, and a large kettle of **Plumbeous Kites** all being seen well. We also heard *Ornate Hawk-eagle* and had fantastic scope views of an adult **King Vulture**! The only mammals seen from the tower were Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth and Golden-mantled Tamarin.

We headed back to the lodge for a refreshing glass of fruit juice followed by a nice lunch. After lunch, we had some time on our own. While some of the others went for a swim, I spent some time up in the 50-foot tall observation tower adjacent to the dining area. From here, I had nice views of *Laughing Falcon*, *Plumbeous Pigeon*, *Greater Yellow-headed Vulture*, *Black Caracara*, *Violaceous Jay*, Blue-gray Tanager, *Gray-rumped Swift*, *Neo-tropical Palm-swift*, and *Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift*.

In the late afternoon, we once again boarded the dugout and traveled to one of the other nearby creeks. Along the way we saw *Red-capped Cardinal*, *Cream-colored Woodpecker*, *Chestnut-fronted Macaw*, *Blue-crowned Motmot*, *Ringed Woodpecker*, and *Brown-chested Martin*. At the head of the creek, we climbed out of the dugout and took a trail through the terra firma forest. Along this trail we found *White-crowned Manakin*, *Great Jacamar*, *Spangled Cotinga*, *Great Tinamou*, and *Thrush-like Antpitta*. Near the end of the trail, Gorge, David, and I left the trail and headed through the flooded forest to look for the *Blue-crowned Manakin* lek known to be there. Suddenly, Gorge motioned for me to come quickly. When I got to the spot where Gorge stood, we had great looks at a totally unexpected *Gray-winged Trumpeter*! We also could hear several other trumpeters nearby. We could not locate the manakins but hey with our great fortune of seeing the trumpeter, we certainly would not complain.

Back to the dugout, we headed back to the lagoon for an early evening dugout tour around the lagoon. As fisherman's bats buzzed us, we found several *Paraque* and heard *Tropical Screech-owl*. We also had very close looks at Black Caimans of varying sizes. Back at the dining hall, one of the guides Roberto and I chased down the *Ferruginous Screech-owl* which had been calling close-by every night and got great looks at the bird in the flashlight beam.

## Day 9:

Today, we arise in time to have breakfast while we watched the gorgeous sunrise. With clear skies predicted all morning, we would have another shot at the clay lick on our way back to Coca. After breakfast, we loaded our baggage and climbed into the dugouts and bid farewell to our gracious hosts at Napo Wildlife Center. In addition to the usual birds, this morning the creek would also produce *Sunbittern* (heard only), *Blue and Yellow Macaw*, *Limpkin*, and *Coray Wren*(heard only).

At the clay lick, good weather and good luck were on our side. We had barely arrived at the blind when the show began. Over the next hour, we would see huge flocks of parrots and parakeets. *Blue-headed Parrot*, *Yellow-crowned Parrot*, *Mealy Parrot*, *Dusky-headed Parakeet*, and *White-eyed Parakeet* all showed well. The sight and sound of the birds fighting over the best clay was truly astonishing and a definite highlight of the trip. We also saw a *Fork-tailed Woodnymph* working the flowers near the blind.

As we headed up the Rio Napo towards Coca in the motorized canoe we observed several new species including *Swallow-wing*, and *Yellow-billed Tern*. We also saw a magnificent adult *King Vulture* sail right over the canoe. We arrived at Coca just before lunchtime and loaded into the waiting vehicles for the short ride to the airport. Once again the representatives for Napo Wildlife Center took care of everything for our 40-min flight back to Quito.

At the Quito airport, Cris Viteri and Juan Fernando Duran of [Ecuador Nature Expeditions](#) meet me and transported me back to Café Cultura. I checked into my room and had a well-deserved and much needed nap before meeting Cris and Juan Fernando for dinner. Cris and Juan Fernando took me to a fantastic restaurant high on a hill over-looking the beautiful city of Quito. We enjoyed a wonderful farewell dinner while we gazed upon the city lights. Afterwards, they took me back to Café Cultura where I packed my bags and turned in for a good night's sleep.

### **Day 10:**

Today I returned to the home via Miami and Dulles International Airports. Memories of the beautiful and intriguing country of Ecuador filled my mind and I dreamed of the day I would return.

©Copyright 2005 Tico Tours™